



# OKANAGAN SIMILKAMEEN STEWARDSHIP NEWS

JANUARY 2019

## Restoring Habitat for Wildlife

### A record-breaking fall

This past fall, OSS smashed records, restoring more habitat for Okanagan and Similkameen wildlife in one season than we ever have before! Through 6 projects, OSS staff, Wildlife Habitat Stewards and almost 200 volunteers planted over 3,260 trees and shrubs along nearly 2 kilometres of riparian shorelines in Kelowna, Lumby, Summerland, Penticton, and Keremeos.

Planting a buffer of native plants next to a shoreline helps stabilize streambanks, reduce erosion, and helps to filter pollutants and bacteria from runoff before it enters our water sources. Native plants also provide food, hiding places, and nesting areas for animals.

While it can be tempting to "tidy" your shoreline, often the best thing you can do is leave it alone! Dead standing trees, tangled bushes and fallen logs are important habitats for wildlife and will protect shorelines from erosion.

If you think you would like help restoring natural areas on your property or in your community, please contact us at [info@osstewardship.ca](mailto:info@osstewardship.ca) or 250-770-1467.

**3260**  
**native trees**  
**and shrubs**  
**planted**



**1930 m of**  
**shoreline**  
**restored**

**190**  
**volunteers**



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# Okanagan Crush Pad Floodplain Restoration

Restoring an endangered ecosystem



This year, OSS teamed up with Steve Lornie and Christine Coletta from the Okanagan Crush Pad to plant over 1,800 native trees and shrubs on a floodplain of Eneas Creek in Summerland's Garnet Valley. This is the biggest planting OSS has ever done at one time and adds to the 1,300 plants planted in 2016.

When Steve and Christine purchased their property in the Garnet Valley seven years ago, their vision was to convert it to an organic vineyard while altering the natural terrain as little as possible. The result is a unique design with large natural corridors for wildlife in between sections of vineyard.

With the vineyard underway, they turned their attention to a section of their property along Eneas Creek. Originally a riparian floodplain, the land was previously used for hay but had been unused for years.

"It was a constant struggle, battling invasive weeds," says Christine. "You would be doing so much in terms of artificial farming to make this a hay field. We really felt the only way to 'tame' this area would be to apply a lot of chemicals and herbicides and it just stood against everything that we were doing on the rest of the property, it didn't make sense. We contacted OSS to see what could be done."

The vision is to re-establish a red-osier dogwood and water-birch riparian forest, which is an endangered ecosystem in the Okanagan. Interestingly, spring flooding in the past 2 years naturally made a small ephemeral (seasonally flooded) wetland on the site. These wetlands were once common in the Okanagan and are important to local amphibians, but most have been filled for development and agriculture.

Having 1,800 plants come over several days was a good challenge, but with the help of dedicated and hard-working volunteers we got the job done. Planting is just the beginning, however. Over the next few years OSS will continue to manage the site to remove invasive species and ensure the plants survive.



# The Next Generation of Stewards

The future is bright!

With funding from Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation's Go Grant, kindergarten students from Giant's Head Elementary in Summerland were able to join us on a beautiful sunny day at the Okanagan Crush Pad restoration project as stewards-for-a-day!

Over 60 students from four kindergarten classes, and 25 parent and teacher volunteers got to experience the field trip, which was an excellent teaching tool for this next generation of stewards. Some of the children even returned on our community planting day later in the week, recruiting their parents and other family members to help out as well.

There were three stations at the field trip:

At the first station, stewardship technician Savannah taught the students how wetlands work like sponges to filter out pollutants from our water sources and hold water to prevent flooding. Then they explored the floodplain to learn about different habitat features used by birds and wildlife. Finally, they got to plant a tree and helped make a dent in the huge number of native trees and shrubs on site.



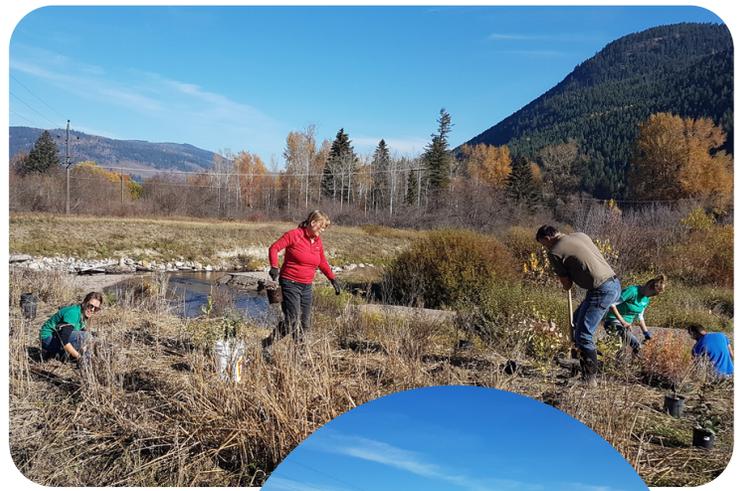
# Freedom Flight Park

## Building on a Farm-Riparian Interface Project

The Freedom Flight Park in Lumby is a hub of activity. Recreational para-gliders and hang gliders soar over runways mowed between working hayfields, while a variety of wildlife scurry around the old-growth riparian forest on Bessette Creek in the back of the property.

In 2017 and 2018, high water levels dramatically eroded the banks of the creek, forcing owner Randy Rauck to have them re-engineered to stop so much soil from washing away each spring. Riprap (very large rocks) and large logs were used for stability and will also eventually allow for native plants to grow around them as the project continues. In the fall, volunteers along with OSS and Flight Park Staff replanted the built-up banks with a variety of shrubs and trees to stabilise the soil, prevent invasive species from taking over, shade the creek and provide habitat for wildlife.

In addition to creating new habitat, this newly planting will also serve as an important buffer between the working hay field and the riparian ecosystem.



# Arion Therapeutic Farm

## Flood protection and bank stabilization

Heather Henderson developed Arion Therapeutic Farm with a vision of demonstrating a truly sustainable farm community with social impact. Arion is a peaceful farm sanctuary for people and animals in the heart of Kelowna's mission neighbourhood.

Initially, the riparian area had been grazed by the goats and llamas on the farm. Planting without fencing would have resulted in feeding the livestock, so our partnership began with livestock exclusion fencing. In order to ensure that the goats and llamas had access to water, the fence was constructed with a nose-in. After the area was fenced, it was time to plant.

A dozen volunteers helped to plant native trees and shrubs bordering the creek on the farm. These plants will provide habitat for birds and wildlife in years to come!

# Grist Mill and Gardens

## Conserving Keremeos' Natural Heritage

A piece of Keremeos history got a green boost this fall, when volunteers and OSS staff planted over 315 native trees, shrubs, and wildflowers at the Old Grist Mill. The project will improve the riparian forest along the creek and helped re-vegetate a newly engineered flood mitigation channel.

"We take the stewardship of this place pretty seriously already, I mean it's a historic place, it's a place that's really special to the region and the community," says general manager Chris Mathieson, "Adding a natural component to that is pretty important when so much [habitat] is being lost in the area."

The improved habitat is part of the endangered red-osier dogwood/water-birch riparian forest ecosystem. Over 90% of this ecosystem has been lost in the Okanagan and Similkameen. The enhancement will benefit several species-at-risk in the area, including the Western Screech-Owl, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Columbia Sculpin.



**80%** of Okanagan wildlife species rely on riparian areas or prefer them to other habitats.



# Penticton Creek

## Restoring a section of degraded creek in the heart of Penticton

In partnership with the City of Penticton and TD Tree Days, OSS assisted with planting the second stage of the city's Penticton Creek Restoration project.

In the weeks leading up to the planting day, the crumbling concrete flume containing the creek was replaced with riprap (large rocks that will support the banks) and smooth river rock to provide flood protection as well as improve fish habitat. The new rocks were arranged to create pools and riffles, alternately oxygenating water and slowing its flow. This phase of the overall restoration project restored 80 additional metres of Penticton Creek, adding to the 83 metres that was completed in 2015.

On the planting day, OSS staff and volunteers assisted City of Penticton workers and TD Tree Day volunteers to plant nearly 250 native trees and shrubs in less than an hour! These plants will eventually grow to shade the creek and provide habitat as well as stabilising the creek bed further with their root systems.

# Spotlight on Bighorn Sheep

Not out of the woods, yet.

California Bighorn Sheep were once widely found throughout the dry grasslands and rugged terrain of the Southern Interior. Unfortunately, only small herds of wild sheep still remain within this historic range. In addition to overall habitat loss, many of their traditional migration corridors are now blocked by fencelines and roadways.

Bighorn Sheep are at high risk of diseases carried by domestic sheep and goats. In 1999-2000, over 70% of the South Okanagan Bighorn Sheep population died from pneumonia likely transmitted by domestics, who are largely immune to this disease. Domestic sheep and goats pose a direct disease transmission risk and any wild sheep who come in contact with a domestic sheep could become very sick and pass that illness on to the rest of the herd. The only ways to keep wild sheep safe from this threat is to not raise domestic sheep or goats where their wild cousins are present. Double fencing at least 2 metres apart can also be effective in keeping wild sheep safe from domestics.

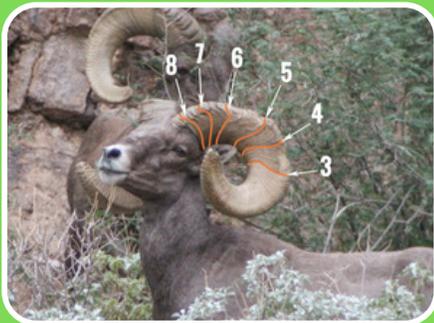
## You can help!

- Retain areas of natural habitat on your property, including ponds, springs and rugged areas.
- Drive slowly when sheep and other wildlife are near roadways.
- Manage invasive plants on your property as some can be toxic to sheep.
- Be extremely cautious around sheep - rams can be aggressive during rutting season and ewes are highly protective of their lambs in spring.
- Keep pets under control to prevent the harassment of sheep and wildlife.
- Work with your neighbours to retain natural movement corridors on your property. Avoid using fencing that doesn't allow the sheep to move through from their summer to their winter ranges.
- Tread lightly when enjoying nature. Stay on established roads and trails.



## The Bottom Line

The only way to keep wild sheep safe is to not raise domestic sheep or goats where their wild cousins are present, or to keep domestic sheep and goats separate from wild sheep with double fencing at least 2m apart.



*You can tell the age of a Bighorn ram by counting the "annuli", or large ridges, on their horns. Each ridge is one year in the ram's life. A Bighorn ram can live for 9-12 years and a ewe for about 10-14 years.*

## Bighorn Fun Facts!

When competing for mates, Bighorn rams will butt heads at speeds of up to 50 km/h! How do they avoid serious brain damage?

In addition to flexible horns and skulls that can absorb a lot of impact, rams are also able to slow down the flow of blood from their head back into their body. This makes the large blood vessels in the brain expand to hold that extra blood, which makes the brain fit more tightly in the skull. This tighter fit means that, when the rams' heads collide, their brains shake around in the skull a lot less. Less movement and shaking means less trauma to the brain, so no brain damage!

For weekly fun facts about local wildlife, follow us on Facebook!

# Are you a steward yet?

Come join the club!

Wildlife Habitat Stewards are voluntary caretakers of natural areas on their owned and managed properties. They drive stewardship, conservation and enhancement on their properties and receive technical support, partnership and recognition for their efforts.

OSS partners with almost 100 Wildlife Habitat Stewards to care for over 5,000 acres of natural areas throughout the Okanagan and Similkameen valleys. Stewards maintain their agricultural, tourism, and other land use practices on their properties while adopting best management practices for wildlife.

While some stewards are working on projects, some are helping spread the word by displaying the sign on their stewarded property and supporting the movement.

There are many great reasons to become a Wildlife Habitat Steward:

- Support a local grassroots organisation and local conservation efforts
- Access technical knowledge and support for habitat management efforts
- Potentially get assistance with suitable projects
- Get help with establishing management plans and implementing best practices for wildlife
- Join a community of like-minded landowners passionate about conserving wildlife habitat on their properties
- Help raise the profile of conservation in your neighbourhood and your community
- Receive a gatepost sign to show off to your neighbors!

“ The people I work with in the program are very, very helpful, obliging, informative, and supportive.

- Local Wildlife Habitat Steward



*Wildlife Habitat Stewards, from the top: Jaswinder Kailay (Osoyoos), Lisa Stewart (Kelowna), Kim Brind'Amour & Steve Venables (Cawston), Wayne & Wendy Radies (Vernon), Bruce Brownstein & Linda Sheehy (Oliver)*

If you have habitat on your property and are interested in becoming a Wildlife Habitat Steward, please contact us and we can arrange an on-site visit from one of our biologists to discuss the program with you and have a look at your property.

E: [info@osstewardship.ca](mailto:info@osstewardship.ca)  
Ph: 250-770-1467

# What's up in Winter?

## Overwintering Animals

We can hide in our warm houses when it gets chilly, but how do our local species deal with the cold? While some critters fly south, many stay local and have some cool ways of surviving winter months.

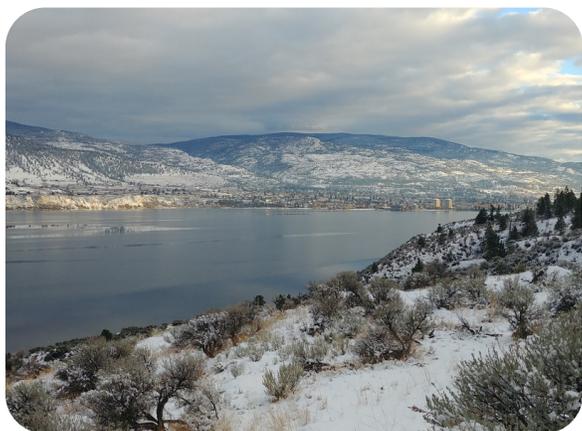
Chorus frogs will freeze nearly solid! They increase the sugars in their blood to extremely high levels which acts as antifreeze and protects vital organs.

The Common Poorwill is one of the few birds in the world that hibernates. It can go into a deep torpor for months in cold weather or when deprived of food.

Snakes venture into underground dens to hibernate all winter. Many snake species, including rattlesnakes, return to the exact same den every year for their entire life!

Solitary bee species like mason and carpenter bees spend the winter as pupae in cells made by the queen. They emerge in the spring as adults.

Turtles will settle at the bottom of a pond and go into deep hibernation, getting oxygen from the water by absorbing it through the skin of their cloaca (yes, that's their butt).



For more information, please contact OSS at:

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# Become a Member

Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship membership supports grassroots conservation, stewardship and enhancement efforts in the Okanagan and Similkameen.

OSS supports and engages the landowners and local communities in the care of important wildlife habitats.

NAME

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MAILING ADDRESS

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EMAIL ADDRESS

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    \$10     MEMBERSHIP FEE

+            ADDITIONAL DONATION AMOUNT (TAX RECEIPTS PROVIDED FOR DONATIONS).

=            TOTAL ENCLOSED

TO PAY BY CREDIT CARD, PLEASE DO SO ONLINE AT:  
[www.osstewardship.ca/membership](http://www.osstewardship.ca/membership).

Annual membership is for June 1, 2018 to May 31, 2019.  
Membership fees are not prorated

Partners in stewardship and conservation:



SOUTH OKANAGAN  
CONSERVATION FUND

Canada 