

# StreamTalk

The newsletter for stewards of salmonids and their habitat • Volume 22 • Number 1 • Spring 2015

## Salmon in the back yard

### Why children and stream stewards love the coho salmon

Many of us have personal stories about how we came to know the various salmon. For coho, it might be from fishing on summer vacation, or lore passed from old to young by the campfire. It might have been called a coho, a cohoe, blueback, K'áx'əθ (in the Sto'lo language), hooknose, or northern. By any name, the coho is truly the people's salmon.

Since it spawns in the smallest of streams, the coho is often the first salmon spotted by children as they begin to explore their world in back yards, local parks, greenways, or camp sites around B.C. Young coho spend one to two years rearing in the smallest streams, growing to the right size to successfully migrate to the ocean as smolts in the spring. For this reason, many children first see these small fry during summer forays around neighbourhood creeks. Linking the large salmon of the ocean and these small fry at their feet allows young minds to begin to understand the interconnections in the natural world, concepts that evolve into the meaning and importance of ecology to our lives.

Since the beginning of the Salmonid Enhancement Program (SEP) in 1977, coho have been the backbone of volunteer, stewardship, and streamkeeper efforts to enhance salmon and restore fish habitat. The red fish of the small streams provide



SEP volunteer Vance Reach and community advisor Maurice Coulter-Boisvert with a brood stock coho from the Port Coquitlam and District Hunting and Fishing Club Hatchery. Photo: PCDHFC.

the ties that bind SEP and the volunteer community together for common purpose.

Among the people inspired to work for coho are Henry Gouwenberg and his father, dairy farmers along Hicks Creek, just east of Agassiz, B.C. Farmers have an intimate knowledge of their land and how the seasons and passing years bring changes. The Gouwenbergs loved to watch the coho return to the little creek on their farm but were troubled that the run was slowly shrinking. They reached out to the Salmonid Enhancement Program and a scheme was hatched to increase spawning habitat for the coho, which liked to lay their eggs in the patches of gravel at the base of mountain-fed springs flowing into Hicks Creek. Years of keen observation combined with clever design to create the Hicks Creek spawning ponds, fed by the springs in the pastures along the stream. Each year, 200 to 500 coho return to spawn in this habitat and Hicks Creek remains one of the many small yet vibrant salmon creeks in the Lower Fraser Valley.

On little coho streams across B.C., similar efforts are repeated. The Tlell Watershed Society (Haida Gwaii), Stoney Creek Environment Committee (Burnaby), Salmon River Watershed Roundtable (Salmon Arm), Toboggan Creek Enhancement Society (Smithers), Little River Enhancement Society (Comox), Langley Environmental Partners Society, and the Tofino Salmon Enhancement Society are just a few of the many groups that toil year after year to sustain coho for the future.

Recently, funding programs have been initiated to assist coho salmon around the province. New money from the Government of Canada for habitat restoration to strengthen recreational fisheries (Recreational Fisheries Conservation Partnerships Program) has reinvigorated the restoration of coho habitat in many watersheds across B.C. The government of B.C. also supports a number of programs (such as the Habitat Conservation Trust Fund) that are designed to improve fish

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# Warming to our wetland

One of the great things about an inland body of water – just ask a real estate agent – is that practically everyone warms to it. It was with some trepidation that the Prince George Naturalists Club embarked on a multi-year project to enhance the city's Hudson's Bay Wetland, but we could have relaxed. It's been remarkable how people have given their support, donating huge amounts of time and effort to the project.

By the end of 2014, more than a thousand volunteer hours had already been committed. A healthy urban wetland needs keepers, and a special wetlandkeepers course delivered an enthusiastic group of 18 trainees. A request to clean up the wetland area brought out 20 volunteers, collecting a huge skip load of garbage. Invasive weed species appeared to be a potential problem, and another request for volunteers saw a dozen people hard at work, removing smothering weeds from banks.

But perhaps the most impressive example of people power came when

it was time to build an interpretive observation platform, giving views of a salmonid channel. The money had been raised, the plans had been drawn up, and all approvals received – but construction requires special skills. No problem, as it turned out. A volunteer team of experienced builders appeared magically and got the work done in record time.

So far, the first season of direct activity has seen \$43,000 raised, installation of a large information kiosk, construction of the first observation deck, completion of the first part of the trail, and creation of three signs about the wetland and its fauna. There's still a long way to go: when finished, there'll be 2.4 kilometres of circular trail, boardwalks, a new footbridge, and a number of interpretive features. By then the



Some of our many volunteers gathered at the Hudson's Bay Wetland Project's information kiosk. Photo: Anne Hogan.

wetland's future will be assured: the habitat not just permanently protected but steadily restored and enhanced. The efforts of all the volunteers will have created a showcase environment for northern fish, plant, and animal life.

Details of the project can be found at [hbwetland.wordpress.com](http://hbwetland.wordpress.com).

*Clive Keen*

*...from page 1*

habitat in small streams and, therefore, benefit coho salmon. The BC Hydro Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program has funded several projects, including those that created new floodplain habitat and provided coho salmon with critical refuge during their first winter. The Pacific Salmon Foundation's long-time support of community salmon programs has been strengthened recently through increased sources of funding that will benefit the stewards' favourite fish.

The Salmonid Enhancement Program, with support from these and other funding sources, and through its many partnerships with government agencies, First Nations, industry, community groups, and individuals, has played an active role in thousands of salmon enhancement and habitat restoration projects that

benefit coho salmon. Improving poorly designed culverts to aid fish passage, creating new wetlands and ponds, placing large wood and logs in streams, planting and protecting sensitive riparian habitats, releasing newly hatched coho fry into restored habitat, rearing smolts in community hatcheries to supplement fisheries in streams damaged by human impacts – all have been major activities of SEP and the volunteer community since the inception of the program.

As SEP begins its next 35-year journey, new initiatives are evolving that are designed to improve conditions for coho salmon in B.C. SEP will be looking for opportunities to collaborate with the Pacific Salmon Foundation to increase research related to coho salmon survival and growth in the Strait of Georgia, with the ultimate goal of invigorating the treasured summer fisheries within

the Strait of Georgia. Ecological principles first learned by those wet and wondrous children on the stream banks during summers long ago are guiding SEP to develop tools and guidelines to ensure the optimum number of enhanced coho fry and smolts are released into streams so that the stock benefits and thrives.

All in all, the love affair with coho salmon has stood the test of time over almost four decades of work by SEP and its partners. Our challenge is to ensure that the red, hooknose salmon of our backyards, the blueback along the kelp slashing the trolled bucktail fly, the Thanksgiving runs of ocean-bright coho into the river fisheries, and the small fry and the small child meeting for the first time on the edge of a summer creek will endure and thrive.

*Matt Foy, DFO*



# A vision come true

Strolling alongside the Charters River, a tributary of Sooke River on Vancouver Island, back in 2001, our group of salmon conservation enthusiasts was looking for a location that could be a showcase for learning about Pacific salmon and its habitat.

Here in this lush rainforest, beneath the green canopy spreading overhead and the ferns and bear-grubbed windfalls at their feet, the group shared a vision: this seemed the perfect place. Surrounded by western redcedar, Douglas fir, western hemlock and grand fir, with a sprinkling of maple and alder and a carpet of ferns, mosses, and foliage, with the sound of the water trickling along the pebbles of the river, they felt enveloped by the tranquil beauty of the scene.

On the north side of the Charters River, the Juan de Fuca Salmon Restoration Society established, with the support of Western Forest Products, Pacific Salmon Foundation, DFO, the T'Sou-ke Nation, the Capital

Regional District, many corporate supporters, and much hard work, an interpretive centre milled from local timber, complete with a demonstration hatchery.

It was their dream for the south side of the river – to expand the existing small side channel to create a major increase in salmon habitat for spawning and overwintering – that spurred everyone on. By 2013, through an impressive amount of assistance from all the loyal supporters, the side channel had been created and deemed a huge success.

Volunteer work is a tradition among those who truly care about sustaining a flourishing stock of Pacific wild salmon. Here too, that tradition was maintained, and once the habitat was created, the trail system came next,



Photo: Joan O'Donnell.

one that would enable visitors to view the salmon and other wildlife. Pathways were carefully routed to minimize disruption to the ecosystem while allowing access to observe the natural cycles taking place in the pools.

Finally, it was time for the interpretive signs along the trails, beautifully illustrated guides to help walkers identify the fish, the flora and fauna, and the fun of the Charters vision!

*Elida Peers, Juan de Fuca Salmon Restoration Society*

## Watching over a healthy sport fishery

Many of us are looking forward to the 2015 fishing season. Last year's healthy salmon returns provide high hopes for this year too. While few get out angling at this time of year, there is much activity preparing for the coming season. The Sport Fishing Institute of BC (SFI) staff and volunteers, B.C. Wildlife Federation, and Sport Fishing Advisory Board (SFAB) representatives dedicate many hours of hard work to ensure good fishing opportunities for the spring, summer, and fall.

In January and February the Pacific Salmon Commission meets. Our Commissioners and their American counterparts work out the rules for international interceptions in the coming season. Thanks to the work done in recent years, these discussions will be largely amicable and productive.

Meanwhile, the SFAB pulls together the work of local committees and recommendations from the regional tables, and then the main board passes

resolutions that become formal advice from our sector to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans. The process is both effective and important. It is how key issues like halibut possession and retention are resolved to ensure that we all enjoy a long fishing season.

For its part, the SFI works with DFO on various catch monitoring activities, including guide log books and development of an app to provide regulations and other useful sport fishing facts in a mobile electronic format.

Although there is considerable overlap in the membership of the SFAB and SFI, the two bodies play different and important roles. The SFAB is government's advisory body while the SFI is the industry's advocacy group.

The SFI's efforts to promote increased training and certification among tidal angling guides is having an impact. Nearly a third of active guides

in coastal B.C. have been through the Certified Tidal Angling Guide (CTAG) program. Established and aspiring guides enroll in the program to improve their marketability and professional accreditation, and also to take advantage of the program's benefits. As well as being paid to become certified through a training credit issued by the Province, CTAG guides receive annual discounts on commercial vessel liability insurance. Sport fishing businesses find that the program gives them a promotional advantage and the industry as a whole benefits from being increasingly seen as professional and well managed.

We are looking forward to a great season on the water and will continue to meet, discuss, and encourage decisions that create the best opportunities for sport fishing.

*Owen Bird, Sport Fishing Institute of BC*



# To preserve or pollute

At a workshop I attended, we were asked for the one word that came to mind when we thought of water. On the “cloud” that formed on the screen, the word LIFE was the largest by far. The participants in the room, given seconds to capture the word that best described water, chose the word LIFE more than any other sentiment. So why do we treat our waters so poorly?

As many of you know, I like water. I like to drink it, swim in it, put fish in it, watch it, monitor it, observe people interact with it. You name it: if it's near water, I like it. I also like to travel, and take this love of water with me. We spend much of our vacation time walking river edges and beaches, going rafting, snorkelling, wading, and just watching how the locals interact with their rivers. Tours take people to the pristine sites to enjoy nature but what of the rest of the landscape? On a recent trip to Bali we took a scuba tour to the island of Menjangan in Bali National Park. For the moment this island is set aside as a conservation reserve (though mega-hotels have been trying to get ahold of the island). As I waited for my turn to go with the divemaster, I swam near the water surface, getting used to the gear and the odd sensation of breathing underwater.

There isn't much to look at right at the spot where boats drop off guests since the water is shallow and flippers are long. Instinctively, I reached out and grabbed the piece of plastic drifting past and tucked it under my strap, then another, and another. Here we were, a half-hour boat ride from the island of Bali, on a small island, in a National Park, and I found myself swimming in a sea of garbage.

The dive was spectacular and the live coral allowed for the survival of a huge diversity of fish of every colour; I saw an octopus, lobsters, a stonefish, and a shark.

As we travelled back to Seririt we all talked of the wonderful sea life – and the garbage. Our driver commented that there was garbage in the ocean as it was rainy season. Almost as one voice our group said, “there's garbage in the ocean because people throw their garbage into the streams and ravines where it is carried to the ocean during heavy rainfalls.” Later that day, as we stood on a bridge watching the river, we were shown first-hand how the garbage gets to the river. People on foot and scooters made a brief stop on the bridge to toss over their plastic bags of garbage, while debris from an old building was carried to the river in a



tarp between two poles. The pile of debris extended from the riverbed to the top of the concrete embankment.

Bali produces around 20,000 cubic metres of garbage every day, 75 per cent of which is not collected by any service, much of it is due to the tourism industry. This island is not alone in its garbage woes. Last year in Mexico we travelled for hours on a rutted road to get to a little town called Mahahual, where we were greeted by a seawall of garbage.

Many, many thanks to all of you who work on policy for the protection of our waterways, our environment, and our LIFE. Policy without action is without value. It is British Columbians working on writing effective policy, enacting and embracing the policy, and monitoring to ensure the effectiveness of the outcomes that keeps B.C. green. We have had a number of very effective campaigns that have shifted our “norm”. Give a Hoot, Don't Pollute; Take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints; Go Green; and many more. But it is citizens like yourself, who turn these words into action, that have indeed made B.C. a land of hope, a land that holds promise for our environment. Every day is Rivers Day for streamkeepers across our province. Everyday contributions from individuals are making the difference: becoming informed; providing input into policy, bylaws, and planning processes; by monitoring; and caring for and enhancing the quality of our local waterways.

YOU are making the difference! YOU are amazing! YOU are the reason we have a caring population! YOU believe water is LIFE and you work to protect LIFE.

Zo Ann Morten



Photo: Pat Morten

Mahahual, Mexico: *“The peninsula happens to sit along the path of regional currents that act like an aquatic conveyor, carrying a steady stream of plastic garbage from the Caribbean and Central and South America. Much of the flotsam washes ashore in and around Mahahual.”* – Los Angeles Times

Varanasi, India: *“The authorities are even choosing sacred river beds near Varuna and Asi rivers as sacrificial lambs to solve the city's long pending problem of garbage disposal.”* – Times of India

British Columbia: *“B.C. is proud to be a leader in sustainable environmental management – with air and water quality that ranks among the highest in the world. Effective waste management procedures and solutions contribute a great deal to preserving our environment.”* – Government of British Columbia



# It takes a village to restore a stream

If you were walking along West Vancouver's Ambleside shoreline in 2007, you would have come across a storm outfall called Lawson Creek. Few salmon called it home then. Yet the District of West Vancouver was able to completely redesign and enhance the estuary, in collaboration with volunteers and donors. Today it is a viable and active salmon stream.

Building on this success, WVSS sought funds to undertake another major estuary restoration at the McDonald Creek outfall at the foot of 19th Street. The McDonald estuary was a braided stream outfall with no defined channel; salmon access was limited to high water. Between tides, salmon were subjected to severe predation by seals and otters. The goal of the new project was to enhance salmon access by raising the beach, lengthening the outfall, creating a sequence of stepped pools, and naturalizing the shoreline.

The project drew on the West Vancouver Shoreline Protection Plan's essential components: collaboration and opportunity. In collaboration with regulatory agencies, West Vancouver has the unique ability to directly control its waterfront through an agreement with the provincial government. Community volunteer groups such as the West Vancouver Shoreline Protection Society and WV Streamkeepers committed a

solid base of research and public support. These were significant alignments when seeking and receiving funds from government, corporate, and community funders.

Any work on the shoreline in West Vancouver is always done under the watchful eye of the public. People walk the seawalk rain or shine. To take advantage of this direct communications link to our stakeholders, signs were installed, hand flyers delivered to adjacent residents, and on-site staff were given updates on the project to keep passersby informed.

Collaborations with the private sector provided the materials and skills necessary to realize this project in a remarkably cost-effective manner. British Pacific Properties, the largest land developer in the municipality, provided a key ingredient for shoreline work: tons and tons of rock. Having an abundant supply of ideal material and the ability to control the shoreline provides West Vancouver with unique tools to naturalize its shoreline.



Photos: District of West Vancouver (top) and Balanced Environmental.

It is true, it does take a village – three levels of government, an array of companies, an unimaginable number of volunteer hours, some 200 truckloads of boulders, professional consultants, and public support – to come together to produce a model example of habitat restoration.

The District of West Vancouver and the West Vancouver Streamkeepers gratefully acknowledge the generous support of the Government of Canada, Department of Fisheries and Oceans; Pacific Salmon Foundation; TD Friends of the Environment; West Vancouver Community Foundation; the Coho Society of the North Shore; CN Rail; Fortis Gas; Seaspan Marine; British Pacific Properties; Balanced Environmental; and Headwater Management.

*Dave Youngson, Project Coordinator*



## Workshop 2015 is ready to swim up!

Onward and upward! Registration forms are available NOW for the SEP Community Workshop, May 15-17 in Port Alberni. Visit the [workshop website](#) to download the form and register early for your favourite events!



# Spawning salmon move right in

A major habitat restoration project was recently implemented in the Lower Cheakamus River by the Squamish River Watershed Society (SRWS). With careful planning, close partner support, plenty of heavy equipment, and many hours of labour, more than 8,000 square metres of prime salmon rearing and spawning habitat were created. The benefits were observed almost immediately, with large numbers of chum using the area just weeks after the work was completed.

The project was a joint effort between the SRWS, DFO, Squamish Nation, School District 44, and BC Hydro. The work was funded by the Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program (FWCP), together with the federal Recreational Fisheries Conservation Partnerships Program and the Pacific Salmon Foundation (Squamish Salmon Recovery Fund).

“First, a large culvert was installed through a major dyke that runs alongside the Cheakamus River that enabled us to re-water the adjacent

floodplain within the Dave Marshall Salmon Reserve,” says Edith Tobe, SRWS’s executive director. “This in itself was a major undertaking and the resulting fish habitat created would still be just plans on paper had it not been for DFO, Squamish Nation, and the combined effort of all involved.”

Habitat restoration followed, including excavating water courses, placing large woody debris and boulders, adding gravel, and re-vegetating riparian areas with native plants. “The partnership successfully restored more than 1.2 linear kilometres of habitat,” said FWCP manager Trevor Oussoren. “This type of hands-on restoration work is exactly the type of project we like to support.”

Targeted salmon species are coho, chinook, pink, and chum. Bears, bald eagles, great blue herons, and belted kingfishers also benefit from increased salmon production. The floodplain had rich fish habitat before the Daisy Lake Dam was built in the 1950s.

A final survey of the work should



A year earlier this area was dry forested land but by the fall of 2014 it had been turned into prime salmon spawning habitat. Photo: Edith Tobe.

be completed in March 2015 but the SRWS is not ready to hang up its waders. “We plan on using the same connector through the dyke to re-water Evans Creek tributary to the west to create even more fish habitat,” added Tobe. “We have great partners in place, and we are excited about the potential for restoring lots more fish habitat in the future.”

*Angus Glass, BC Hydro Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program*

## Salmon Site-ings

### [Alternatives Journal](#)

AJ, or *Alternatives Journal*, is a national environmental magazine, as well as a not-for-profit organization and registered Canadian charity engaged in environmental education and community-building activities.

It publishes on paper and online. The link above will take you to an article about Wayne Salewski, a B.C. environmental activist who has been named a 2014 Earth Day Hometown Hero.

### [Green Shores for Youth](#)

As climate change and human activity affect our shorelines, we will need scientists, planners, and engineers that understand shoreline systems. Green Shores

for Youth, or GSY, is a program of the Stewardship Centre for BC to encourage youth action, education, and training for shoreline sustainability. The website offers ideas, workshops, and information about groups and activities.

### [West Vancouver Nature House Society](#)

West Vancouver Nature House Society’s new website is full of information on their proposed Navy Jack Nature House project.

### [False Creek Herring Rescue](#)

*StreamTalk* readers are familiar with the Squamish Streamkeepers’ success at covering toxic creosote pilings with fabric to protect herring spawn.

This video by Ian Wood of the UBC School of Journalism documents their newest initiative to do the same in Vancouver’s False Creek.

### [Bowen Island Projects](#)

Volunteers of the Bowen Island Fish and Wildlife Club completed two salmon habitat rehabilitation projects last year, with funding from the Pacific Salmon Foundation and technical support from DFO. Visit their website to see a five-minute video that highlights the work completed and points out the importance of supporting volunteer salmon enhancement efforts.

They have also posted detailed PDF booklets for each project: click here to view the [Explosives Creek-Tunstall Beach Habitat Rehabilitation Project](#) and the [Carter Pond Sediment Removal Project](#).



## Lost saltmarsh restored

The Comox Valley Project Watershed Society has been doing restoration work in the K'ómoks Estuary in recent years in an area south of Courtenay. Known as the “Royston Wrecks”, for decades this was a major log dump, with a mile-long wharf, log booms, and a line of ship hulks sunk to form a breakwater. All this caused great damage to the ecosystem.

After several years of transplanting intertidal and subtidal eelgrass, Project Watershed began a major restoration of the foreshore saltmarshes last fall. Saltmarshes are coastal wetlands that are flooded and drained by tidal water. Common in estuaries, they provide food, refuge, or nursery habitat for many species. Saltmarshes also protect shorelines from erosion by buffering wave action and trapping sediments. They reduce flooding by slowing and absorbing rainwater, and they protect water quality by filtering runoff. Intertidal saltmarshes absorb large quantities of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store it, countering some of the effects of global warming.

Restoring both the eelgrass and saltmarsh habitats creates connectivity between the subtidal, intertidal, and foreshore zones in the estuary. These habitats form part of the “salmon highway”, providing foraging and refuge areas for salmon as they migrate to the ocean as juveniles, and then again when they return to spawn. Re-establishing habitat connectivity is important in restoration design because human alteration of the landscape has fragmented so much habitat.

This was the first time our organization was involved in a saltmarsh restoration and the first time, we believe, that the “barrier island technique” was used on the west coast of Canada for saltmarsh restoration. Usually a saltmarsh bench design is used: nutrient fill is added to existing foreshore saltmarshes

and then planted in order to increase the amount of habitat. Our technique was to create three islands in a line parallel to the existing saltmarsh, each consisting of armoured planting berms with channels in between. This created lots of edge habitat, thereby increasing the amount available to salmonids and adding habitat complexity from the many drainage channels around the islands. This design also protects the existing foreshore from erosion due to wave action and storm surges. Our barrier islands should reduce the erosion threatening the Royston Seaside Trail, a popular walk.

The project created 500 square metres of eulittoral (foreshore) marsh platforms, or planting berms. Earth-moving equipment added nutrient fill to the foreshore and re-contoured it to create the berms. Each had to be built at the correct elevation and slope to achieve the proper tidal flooding characteristics for the desired type of vegetation. A survey conducted the year before determined that we had lower marsh communities dominated by *Salicornia virginica* and upper/middle marsh species that included *Distichlis spicata*, *Carex lynghyei*, and *Grindelia integrifolia*. We got our elevation criteria by referencing nearby saltmarshes.

The berms were armoured with large natural boulders to protect them from the prevailing wind and wave action, as well as from tide and storm surges. A detailed hydrological survey identified the wave forces, tidal influences, and patterns of sediment recruitment and erosion at the site. A hydrological engineer reviewed our concept plans and provided design details.

The old breakwater disrupted the normal pattern of sediment delivery



Completed saltmarsh berms. Photo: Jennifer Sutherst.

along the shoreline, starving the site of sediment and causing the erosion of existing saltmarsh. Again, correct slope and boulders of specific size stabilize the new berms and help retain our nutrient fill. As well, the way in which the islands were constructed should ensure long-term recruitment of sediment through natural processes.

The berms have successfully withstood the winter storms. This spring they will be planted by experienced volunteers and local school children with over 4,000 saltmarsh plants. A mix of native species will be planted, emphasizing those that have stabilizing root systems and create dense cover. These include species such as *Distichlis spicata* var. *spicata*, *Triglochin maritimum*, *Salicornia virginica* and *Carex lynghyei*.

Saltmarsh restoration is an evolving practice that aims to preserve the integrity of coastal processes while maintaining and enhancing habitat diversity and function on a local scale. This pilot project has been structured to allow for learning opportunities; the experience gained will assist in developing a wider plan for the K'ómoks estuary and, hopefully, for other sites along the B.C. coast.

Jennifer Sutherst, Comox Valley Project Watershed Society



# Giving back with a grateful act

I am a social artist and my living bond with Nature directs my personal, artistic, and professional life. My creative method is to communicate with Nature through meditation and a spontaneous form of chanting I call “sound weaving”. In the spring of 2012, I was directed to shift my focus from Elder Trees and Forests to Water, and by July of that year I had set out on my first Water pilgrimage through northern B.C., Yukon, and southeastern Alaska. From the Water bodies I sat with, I received teachings, water chants, and the instructions to begin offering community Water ceremonies.

My second pilgrimage happened the following summer to the Athabasca River and the tar sands in Alberta. On this journey I was given the question: How do we bring the sacred back to our relationship with Water and Oil? The answer I heard inside me was, Start with gratitude.

And that’s when it hit me – the enormity of the gift Water had been giving me! Without asking anything in return, Water had provided for every aspect of my life for 50 years and I had not once said “thank you” directly to Water and meant it with all my heart.

I felt deeply ashamed by my lack of gratitude to this ancient elemental being who created all life on our planet. I found the courage to forgive myself and committed to using my creative skills to bring more gratitude to Water.

In addition to offering a simple heart-felt thank you during each of my Water interactions at home and in nature, I began

developing Water Gratitude tools, workshops, and events.

In September 2013, for World Rivers Day I invited the Prince George community to participate in my own practice of sitting on the Fraser Riverbank and giving gratitude to the Fraser through quiet reflection and art making. The idea spread through Facebook. By the end of day, 40 people in four River communities had offered gratitude simultaneously to their Rivers. And they created 53 pieces of tangible art, including poems, paintings, songs, and one gratitude soup!

The Bank of Gratitude became an annual event. With the help of Helen Styles and the new Water Gratitude Society, nine Bank of Gratitude events were hosted across B.C. and Alberta that year. In total, 132 people participated and seven Rivers received creative forms of gratitude, including the Yarrowee River in Australia. River Gratitude is alive and flowing in our world!

Our Water Gratitude Society has two mottos: Giving Back With A Grateful Act, and Get Creative With



The author expresses her gratitude with a moment of quiet reflection. Photo: Helen Styles.

Your Gratitude! As a Water lover, what are you giving back to Water? What form does your Water Gratitude take? Let me know!

For more about Water Gratitude tools and Bank of Gratitude events, visit [www.thebankofgratitude.net](http://www.thebankofgratitude.net). You can also find us at [facebook.com/thebankofgratitude](https://facebook.com/thebankofgratitude).

Danielea Castell

To receive StreamTalk by e-mail, please contact Joanne Day at [Joanne.Day@dfo-mpo.gc.ca](mailto:Joanne.Day@dfo-mpo.gc.ca) with the subject line “StreamTalk by e-mail.”

## StreamTalk

is published collaboratively by Fisheries and Oceans Canada and stewardship, enhancement, education, and streamkeeper groups in B.C. and the Yukon that care for salmon and their habitat.

You will find past issues of StreamTalk [here](#).

The current issue can be viewed [here](#).

For more information or to submit an article, please contact Joanne Day, Stewardship and Community Involvement, Fisheries and Oceans Canada  
Phone: 604-666-6614  
Fax: 604-666-0417  
E-mail: [Joanne.Day@dfo-mpo.gc.ca](mailto:Joanne.Day@dfo-mpo.gc.ca)

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