

# Friends of Mount Douglas Park Society

## Fall 2019 Newsletter



*A large banana slug, with its pneumostome open for breathing, is a common sight in Mount Douglas Park. They're usually green, sometimes with spots. European black slugs are also a common sight. They're more recent invaders.*

This newsletter is available in colour at <http://moundouglaspark.ca/>

# Message from the President

Support for the Mount Douglas Park Charter is fundamental for the Friends of Mount Douglas Park Society. Two phrases within the charter stand out; "...reserved in perpetuity to the protection and preservation of the natural environment... to continue as a wilderness preserve for generations to come.". This Charter represents the primary goal of our Society and inspiration for our activities.

Much of the work centres around preservation of this natural park for future generations. At the same time, it is important to provide opportunities for the public to enjoy this beautiful Park in a way that is consistent with the Park Charter. Good trails, clear way-finding signs, trail maps all help. The Park Ambassador program, which the Society initiated in conjunction with Saanich Parks, has been a significant help.

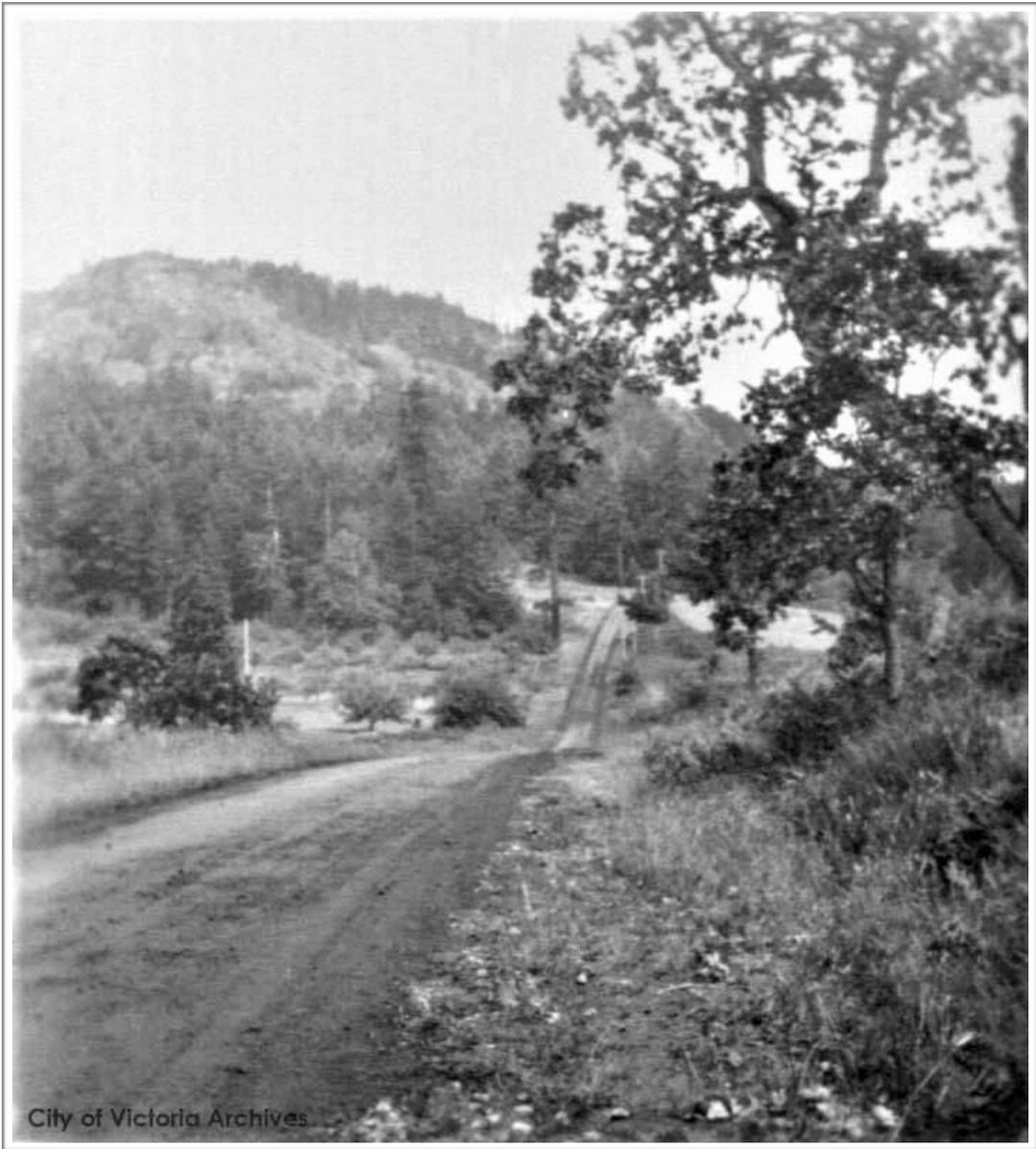
There is excellent support from Saanich Council and Saanich Parks as well as from members and park visitors. The invasive pulling groups continue to do remarkable work with never-ending invasive control. They work hard, but when finished, there are no signs they've been there, the area looks natural! Parks crews too have been

working hard with eroded trail restorations (South Ridge, Upper Glendenning).

There are challenges. Too many still walk off of the official trails, likely not realizing dozens of others will follow in their footsteps. Some off-leash dogs really should be on-leash. Reports of dogs running off-trail scaring nesting birds and wildlife continue. And on the beach, for the pleasure of one dog, should a flock of resting birds be forced to take flight? Friendly dogs also threaten trail inclusiveness when they run up to greet young visitors. What would you think if a dog taller than you charged you?

Upcoming projects include restoration of the main summit area. Natural areas will be fenced and restored while still providing access to the many rocks where visitors enjoy sitting. Over the next few years pit toilets, instead of porta-potties, will be installed at lower and upper Churchill, Glendenning and Blenkinsop parking areas. Elsewhere in this newsletter is an update on the bridge and creek restoration. Watch for the carcass "throw" in January along with fry transplant (if the hatchery has sufficient returns). Hopefully there will be more trail erosion control this winter.

**Most of all, thanks to each of you for your continued support!**



*Undated photo, early 1900s, on Cedar Hill road looking toward the park.*

# Recognizing our Precious Park Volunteers

Every week for many years, often rain or shine, a very small group of local residents gather in Mount Douglas Park to do their very best work to improve the health of this special place in our City.

As of 2019, volunteers have worked in more than half of the 188 hectares of the park, removing all manner of invasive plant species that threaten to replace native species. They have also removed any and all garbage found, old stuff and new stuff, in the process.

We all need to actively protect our native plants and trees because these are the species that best provide suitable, nutritious forage and nesting sites for our local birds and insects.

Native species don't cause damage to other native species, competing with them for water and light as invasive species do. They don't emit unusual chemicals into the soil around them that may cause harmful changes to the soil composition, making it less hospitable for other trees and plants. Invasive plant species can do all of this and more.

So, our volunteers work on, caring for this increasingly important green space we call Mount Douglas Park.

In spite of, or maybe because of this, every week dedicated community members hike into the park to look for troublesome invasive plants, carefully extracting them from the soil, while trying to leave the surrounding native vegetation intact. Not always easy to do.

As one area is cleared, replanting is done if necessary and if feasible, as some means of watering must be available for a period of time after planting to ensure a decent survival rate.

In some replanted areas, split rail fencing and other forms of *exclosures* must be employed to protect young plants. If not protected they will suffer from trampling by people, from deer or rabbit browsing, and, believe it or not, from illegal plant poaching that is becoming all too common in our parks. People don't seem to realize it's illegal to remove plants of any sort from public parks. Horticultural thieves are on the increase so if you spot someone attempting to

remove a plant from the park, do not hesitate to intervene. And then report the incident as soon as you can to Saanich Parks.

In spite of these impediments, our volunteers are dedicated and persist in doing really good work. In many areas of the Park, you may no longer be able to tell how much work has been done because you no longer see masses of thick Ivy climbing into the tree tops or large stands of impenetrable English Holly that once permeated many areas of the Park. A large percentage of Scotch Broom that once blanketed the south and west facing slopes has been removed, with more to be done as restoration strategies are developed and implemented for these areas. The toxic *Daphne laureola*, that some might mistake as a Rhododendron, has been largely cleared from many parts of the Park, increasing safety for park users, whether they realize this or not.

In return for the thousands of hours of work volunteers have done and will do on behalf of our community, they have some requests for *all park visitors*.

- Please respect this natural environment.
- Keep your feet to the established trails and avoid “bushwhacking” through the vegetation off trail.
- Keep your canine friends close beside you at all times and pick up after your dogs. Remove their “bagged compliments” from the park to a trash bin or to your home garbage bin.
- Don’t leave litter behind in the park for others to pick up.
- Don’t smoke in the park.
- Keep bicycles to paved areas only, Churchill Drive and the Beach parking lot driveway.
- Mechanized toys should not be operated off trail as their wheels damage the soil structure and native plants.
- Do your bit to care for this place so we may all enjoy it for years to come. Don’t “use it all up” today. Save some for tomorrow.

Thank you to our Volunteers and thanks to Park visitors who will do their best to care for Mount Douglas Park!!

## Red Cedars

Over the last several years red cedar trees in Mount Douglas Park and along the eastern side of Vancouver Island have been dying. According to experts from UVic and the research Centre for Plant Health near Sidney this is a result of several years of summer drought conditions.

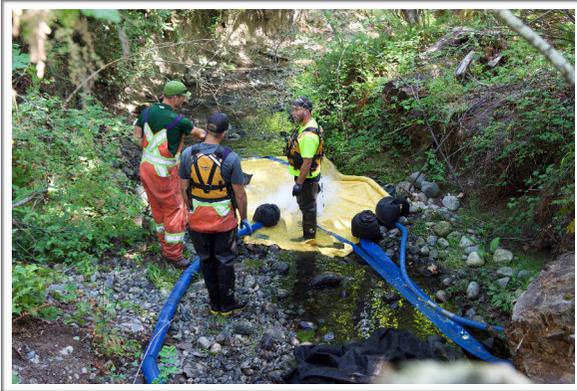
The Red Cedar trees on the eastern, drier, side of the Island, and in the park are already at the limit of their range. With shallow root systems and thin-walled cells in its wood, this tree is susceptible to summer drought. When the cells dry out too much they collapse and water can't easily get past this barrier to the top of the tree. As a result the crowns die back.



There are many cedars in the park showing red crowns or that have died completely. In general these trees will be left standing. They provide valuable habitat and food for many animals and are an important part of a living forest.

## Weir Pond

This past August the small pond above the weir on Douglas Creek was given its first cleaning since 2015. The pond has two main jobs. The first is as an oil trap, in case of spills upstream in the five square kilometre area of the watershed. Almost all of the watershed area has been developed over the past century. Surface water is collected by the storm water system and flows from two pipes into the creek. The weir is designed to reduce the risk of contaminated surface water (oil is less dense, so floats on top) entering the creek itself.



*Saanich staff set up a baffle to protect the stream bed from the flow from pumps draining the weir pond.*

The pond's second job is to capture fine sediments such as sand before they can flow down the creek. Fast moving water is energetic and carries fine material along with it. As the water slows sediments fall out of the stream and are left behind. This is why you see sand lying on the inside of bends in the creek; the flow is slower there. Fine sediments can clog potential salmon spawning sites and reduce suitable habitat for invertebrates and other animals living in the

creek so it's important to minimize them at the source.

During the work the minimal summer flow from the underground pipes was diverted around the pond and it was drained using large pumps. Then, a biologist searched the pond for fish. No fish were found but a dozen healthy crayfish were captured before the next stage was begun.

After the biological assay the sand and silt collected over the last half-dozen years was removed by hard labour and a large vacuum truck. In some places more than one metre of sediment was taken away. Overall, the project was a great success. Thanks to the crews from Saanich for their great work.



*A healthy crayfish, one of about a dozen, found in the settling pond above the weir.*



## Fry Release

On May 11, 2019 40,000 chum salmon fry were released into the weir pond at the head of Douglas Creek. The fry spent a few days there, penned by nets across the weir drainage pipes. They were active in the pond during this time and could be seen swimming strongly and gobbling insects at the surface of the pond. After the nets were removed the fish made their own way through the pipes and into the creek. It took two or three weeks for all of them to swim out. We are confident that most of them made their way safely out to see but, as you'll read next, some were affected by an unfortunate chemical spill on May 24, 2019.



## Chemical Spill

On May 24, 2019, students in the environmental program at Camosun College were at the creek below the Ash Road bridge and noticed a spill of a strongly chlorine or bleach smelling fluid flowing into the creek from the storm drain. The students noticed some dead salmon fry from the release a week before that floated up in the contaminated water. We surmise



that someone was cleaning and draining a pool or hot tub directly into the storm water system. Many people don't realize that anything poured onto their driveway or the street will make its way into Douglas Creek through the storm water drainage system. We'll continue our efforts to mark storm drains in the watershed with the yellow salmon icon to remind people they need to take care.



*Gregor Craigie, from CBC radio, interviews Eric Pelkey (left) and Eva Riccius (right).*

## **CBC Radio Broadcast from the Summit**

On July 17, 2019, CBC On the Island, the local morning radio show, broadcast live from Mount Douglas Park. The host, Gregor Craigie, walked up Churchill Drive to the summit, broadcasting all the while from a cell phone. Once at the top Craigie interviewed Tsawout First Nation hereditary chief Eric Pelkey. Pelkey told listeners the history of First People in the region and the historic importance of the mountain, which they call PKOLS. Also interviewed were members of the board of the Friends of Mount Douglas Park, some dedicated park users, Saanich's Senior Manager of Parks, Eva Riccius, and the Mayor, Fred Haynes. We accompanied CBC staff on the walk throughout the broadcast. It was a beautiful morning and very interesting to get this behind the scenes look at radio broadcasting.

## Bat House

This past summer, scouts from a local troop installed a bat house in a clearing near the Edgemont Rd entrance to the park. There are several species of bats that live in and around Mount Douglas Park. They are very active in the summer and eat many of the insects that we consider pests. During the day they find places to roost in wildlife trees, another reason to make sure we leave them standing. As well, mother bats use these trees as homes to rear their young. In general, bats here in Saanich are near the northern limits of their natural range. They must hibernate or migrate south in the winter.

The new bat house provides another small place where bats can shelter and helps to keep them healthy and active.



## Gate Damage

On June 16, 2019 one of the two oak leaf gates on Churchill drive was damaged by a driver who, locked in after 11 PM, used their vehicle to force their way out of the park. The gate was soon repaired and back in service. There was evidence at the scene from broken glass that the driver will at least have to pay for repairs to their vehicle. The protocol, when vehicles are trapped behind the gate after hours, is to record the vehicle and license plate with a photograph, and to leave a note with instructions for contacting someone to open the gate.

## Tinker Town

A new outdoor nature play area in the park has been established. This special area, located near the beach parking lot with its picnic grounds and bathrooms, is dedicated to hands-on play and learning. Nature schools, class groups, and

families that visit the park now have a dedicated space to get up close to nature, and to explore and play. The site was officially opened on Tree Day, September 25, and as part of the celebrations, 17 large Western Red Cedar and Big Leaf Maple trees were planted around the site. Parks did a great job of setting it up.

## Membership Drives

In an effort to recruit more members and to raise the profile of the Society, we held information sessions at the various entrances to the park over Spring and Summer months. We had our tent, table and banner on hand and gave out information about the park and the Society. Encourage your friends who might be interested in the park and our work to contact us. If you've recently become a member of the Friends or have made a donation, we'd like to offer a most sincere, *"Thank-you!"*. Please, let us know what your concerns or priorities for the park are. If you've seen something worthy of praise, let us know that as well so that we can share the news.



## Fall Spawning Season

In the Fall, through October and November, we see a few returning salmon in Douglas Creek. We need assistance and commitment from all the park visitors to maintain and preserve this stream so there is habitat when the salmon return. There are many ways visitors can help: keep your pets on leash and out of the stream and its banks at all times, stay on designated trails, stop pollutants from

entering the stream. Please help us keep track of returning salmon by reporting any fish sightings to the FMDPS with time, place and date of the sighting. We can confirm otters have been spotted around the creek in October. Their presence is usually a reliable sign that fish are around.

## Visitors to the Park

Some of our board and members of the Friends of Mount Douglas Park are also Saanich Park Ambassadors (see next topic for more information). We can't help but acknowledge the amazing range of places park visitors come from. We have seen visitors from nearby cities, elsewhere in BC, all over Canada, and from every continent. It seems that when people visiting ask where they can go to see a bit of forest and have a short walk or hike, local hotels and other tourism information sites point them toward Mount Douglas Park. During one of our summer information sessions we met with a visitor from Russia, and someone from Washington State took out a membership in the Society. *Welcome all!*



# Park Ambassador Program

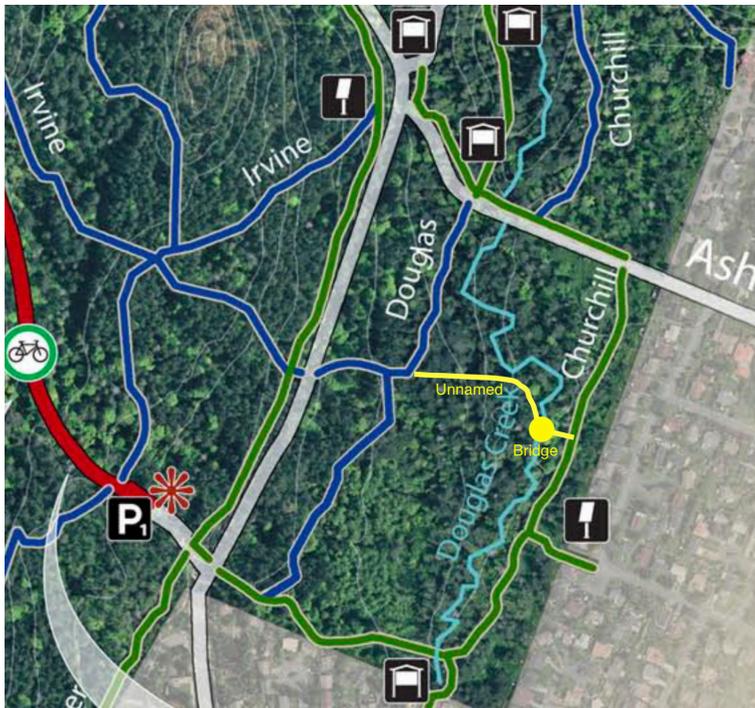
The Saanich Park Ambassador program that we helped to create continues. If you're interested in volunteering as an ambassador in Mount Douglas Park, or joining an event at a different Saanich park, you can find more information at Saanich's website. Search for "*Saanich park ambassador*" online.



# Creek Bridge

A famous quote from Steve Jobs was, “one more thing...”. This turns out to be the rule for our bridge project. This time it's because of an extremely large storm surge on September 12 of this year. Previous high water measured at the weir was 0.8 metre, this one was just over 1.0 metre, a 25% increase! It washed out large boulders just upstream where we wanted to locate the bridge, so now we have to wait until next summer's fisheries window to do in-stream repair work. But this could be a blessing because the repair work likely will require a large machine which can then also help with the bridge work. As an aside, we believe Saanich Engineering needs to address these surges, which will only increase with climate change, by installing a storm water bypass.

The bridge project plans include creek restoration near the bridge site, the bridge, bridge foundations, connecting trail construction, interpretive signs about the creek salmon plus enhancing the carcass transplant area.





*To help reduce the effects of erosion, Whittaker trail, a particularly steep and busy trail in the park, has been partly resurfaced with gravel and water diverters (humps) have been built. A steep slope on the north side of Whittaker, badly eroded by people, has also been reinforced and will be replanted this winter.*



*Bark of the Arbutus tree.*

# Board of Directors

President	Darrell Wick	darrell@mountdouglaspark.ca 477-9291
Vice President	Ed Wiebe	<a href="mailto:edwiebe@gmail.com">edwiebe@gmail.com</a> @edwiebe
Treasurer	Nancy Lewthwaite	
Invasives	Judy Spearing	
At-large	Graham Shorthill	
At-large	Alan Walton	
At-large	Deborah McEwen	

## Membership Renewal - Gift Membership

Providing information via this newsletter about the Park is an important Society function. We want to reach more Park users and Park neighbours. Why not **give someone you know a gift subscription and include it with your renewal?** A one-year membership isn't much more than the price of a good cup of coffee! You provide the gift, we'll send notification to the recipient of your generosity. We hope you will continue to support the work of the Society for another year.

Gift From: \_\_\_\_\_

New Member (or renewal) form: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Membership **4 years \$20**  3 years \$15  2 years \$10  1 year \$5

Send or deliver to: Treasurer, Friends of Mount Douglas Park Society  
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Victoria, BC V8N 6J3

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