

# Friends of Mount Douglas Park Society



Merry Christmas 2008

## In This Issue

- Natural area restoration – the effort and accomplishments are significant.
- Growth & Yield Research Study – Mount Douglas Park is the site of oldest and largest research plot in the Province.
- Douglas Creek – Construction of spawning beds, removal of debris blocking salmon migration, tree planting.
- In memoriam, we recognize the passing of two strong supporters of the Park, Hal Knight and Henry Gautier.
- Updates on the Mount Douglas Motel rezoning application and the stalled shoreline project.
- Gordon Head Recreation Centre – Society received grant money to assist with storm water management.
- Too many Park projects stagnate, yet excellent creek work.

# **Invasive Species vs. Natural Area Restoration**

## **For those who treasure parks and natural areas**

Slowly, over many years and across the globe, awareness is growing about the dangers of importing and cultivating non-native plant species.

In Victoria now, the extent to which more invasive, non-native species have overtaken our local landscape has reached alarming proportions, particularly our treasured public lands and natural areas.

Some of the most notorious and difficult-to-control “alien invaders” are English ivy, Himalayan blackberry, English holly, Scotch broom, daphne laureola, periwinkle, lamium, English privet, and various forms of laurel.

A lesser-known but more insidious invader here, and specifically in Mount Douglas Park, is garlic mustard. This freely seeding biennial infuses nasty chemicals into surrounding soil, so that native flowers, shrubs, and even trees cannot inhabit it.

Besides the serious threat to native plants, these invaders threaten the birds, animals, insects and amphibians that depend on native species for food and shelter. They out-compete our more delicate native plants for water, light, and soil nutrients. And in our temperate climate they grow faster and quickly smother the native plants in their wake.

Under the direction of senior Parks staff, we organized volunteer groups to work on approved projects that focus efforts, optimum timing for restoration work, and methods that minimize impact on native plant and animal species. Since the Park is almost 500 acres in size, so as you can imagine, there is much to do and more help is urgently needed!! If you can volunteer, even on an “as and when” basis, we want you!! If you wonder about your ability to participate, rest assured there’s an assortment of tasks, big and small, to suit most levels of ability and strength; we provide tools, gloves, and on-site training.

Restoration work has been done in the Beach parking lot area, the section between Ash Road and Cordova Bay Road, on Churchill Drive, along Cedar Hill Road, along Whittaker Trail heading north to Churchill Drive, along all trails on the south side of the Park, (Garlic Mustard removal), and now work has started near the Glendenning park entrance.

For more information, call Judy Spearing at 250-472-0515 or email her at [jandd\\_spearing@shaw.ca](mailto:jandd_spearing@shaw.ca).

## Growth & Yield Research Study

The largest and longest running “Growth & Yield” research study conducted by the Ministry of Forests is in Mount Douglas Park. It was established in 1927 and detailed measurements are taken every ten years.



*Ministry of Forests researcher Kevin Hardy takes a core sample using a custom drill he developed.*

The Ministry uses computer models to produce 350-year projections of forest growth critical to setting an Allowable Annual Cut that is sustainable over this period of time (<http://www.for.gov.bc.ca/hts/vri/ip/index.html>). They have a large number of representative research sites throughout the province that contribute data to these models. The Mount Douglas site is especially valuable since it is protected from development and other disruptive activities yet is easily accessible. This site is 63 metres by 63 metres (1 acre),

making it the largest of all their sites. Every ten years since 1927, they check every tree, dead or alive, within the plot, measuring diameter, height, and condition. Core samples are taken from a few trees to indicate age. After the core samples are taken, the holes (about 5mm in diameter) quickly fill with pitch and pose no danger to tree health. Trees need only to be cored once, after which age data is incremented over elapsed time periods.



*The core sample is extracted. It will be placed in a plastic sleeve and taken to the laboratory for ring counting under a microscope.*

New trees are added to the plot as they grow to 4cm in diameter, and all dead trees are evaluated for wildlife use until they fall. Originally, in 1927, there were approximately 300 trees within the plot, 134 of which were still alive at the last remeasurement in 1997. The oldest tree is just under 150 years old. There is no evidence of logging thus suggesting this

area of the Park likely incurred a serious fire around 1860. Crews will be collecting data for the eleventh remeasurement this fall/winter during the dormant season, before trees start growing again in the spring.

Although the Ministry's Growth & Yield model was the original impetus for the study, currently 70% of the requests for the study data come from other researchers who, for example, are looking for data to support climate change or carbon accounting models, illustrating the value of long term research to other disciplines. It is interesting to note that they already have seen changes in some plots where longer summer droughts over the last decade have caused an increased dieback of hemlock, and in other areas insufficient snow pack insulation has resulted in roots of Yellow cedar freezing, causing death.

## **Douglas Creek**

**50,000 chum fry released:** In June, volunteers from the Esquimalt Anglers Association and the Goldstream Salmon Enhancement Society released 50,000 chum fry into Douglas Creek. The fry were donated by the Howard English hatchery at Goldstream. Mike Ippen, Manager of Saanich Public Works Department, and Giuliano Stefani, Henry Bendall, and George Fitch from the Manufacturing Section of the same department, designed and built screen arrangements for the siphons at the weir. These allowed us to hold the chum in the Creek long enough for them to imprint the Creek into their natal memories. The screens were a great improvement on what we had; they were also a marvel of thriftiness and creative use of scrap material.

We had a chance to closely monitor the chum fry migration out of the Creek. There were chum fry in the Creek until late July. We watched them slowly migrate to the mouth of the Creek, spend some time in the saltwater/freshwater reaches and then move out into Cordova Bay. This was probably the best chum transplant we have seen to date.

**Habitat restoration grants:** Two of our Pacific Salmon Foundation proposals for habitat construction and vegetative restoration were funded. We received \$10,000 for habitat work in the Creek and \$1,250 for vegetative plantings after the in stream work.

The habitat work in the Creek is complete. We built 5 in stream boulder/woody debris structures with 30 cubic yards of 1 ½"-5" spawning gravel and 5 cubic yards of boulders placed upstream of the wood. This was a group project: Saanich Parks made the worksite safe, cut wood to length and got all of the gravel/boulders into the Creek; Len Masson from Nu Creek Development Ltd. got the machine in the Creek and did excellent work—fast, placing wood, gravel and boulders to build the structures; Steve Hocquard designed the



*The new spawning  
bed structures  
withstood the first  
winter gales.*

*The photograph  
shows the creek at  
full storm flow.*

project, managed day-to-day operations and wielded a shovel; Pacific Salmon Foundation provided the funds to get the project leveraged; Fisheries and Oceans provided the permits and helped with “cabling in the wood”; and the Friends of Mount Douglas Park participated in all aspects, including meetings and fund raising. The structures have withstood the first of the winter gales—dandies, at just a few millimeters less than the storm in November 2006 that destroyed the first spawning platform we built downstream. We are applying for funds to continue with this work next summer.

**Volunteers clear creek debris:** In October, arborists from Saanich cut up some of the large keystone pieces of wood and (with the help of Kelly McKeown and Meg Hatch) rolled them out of the Creek. Volunteers formed two human chains near the mouth of the creek and passed the small wood out of the Creek. We looked at the job later and concluded that we



*We cleared the blockage at the mouth of the Creek. Small woody debris had knitted together producing a sieve-like effect so water could leave the Creek but salmon couldn't swim through*

had removed just the right amount of wood. We left the big pieces as habitat structures but there were clear channels for salmon entering from the ocean into the Creek.

In the days before we humans changed the landscape there were many large pieces of wood in creeks and rivers and on beaches. The wood piles were much more stable in those far-off days because the flows in a stream like Douglas Creek were much less powerful. Stable debris piles in mouths of creeks and in creeks and rivers can be compared to productive ocean reefs, in the sense that they are the essential structures around which all of the

ecological relationships of species in aquatic communities are played out.

**Tree Appreciation Day:** This year's "Tree Appreciation Day in Saanich" was another success.. The Pacific Salmon Foundation granted us money to buy mature vegetation for planting, and the Pacific Forestry Centre and Rob Hagel supplied 1000 plugs of riparian



*A few encouraging words from Bob Bridgeman before the approximately 80 volunteers began planting 1000 native riparian vegetation plugs.*

vegetation grown from seeds picked in the Park. We had a diverse crowd of families, Brownie groups, the junior leadership group from Mount Douglas High, and many other Mount Douglas Park supporters—about 80 in number. We planted riparian vegetation along the Creek and salal, sword fern and mahonia along the trail in areas that had been stripped of vegetation for years. Well done, all!

We are waiting for salmon now. A lot of us have done a lot of work to get ready and now we can only wait. It is hard for us who measure time in years to wait patiently for changes in ecological systems that measure time in centuries. We are convinced that we are on the right track to make a difference in the Park, in our communities and on the country wide stage. We mean to keep sticking with it.

**Upcoming projects:** Our next projects will be a transplant of coho fry, followed by a carcass transplant, then the long awaited crayfish transplant, and the chum fry again next spring. Check <http://www.mountdouglaspark.ca> "Calendar of Events" for dates and details.

## **In Memoriam**

This year we have lost two stalwart members in quick succession, Hal Knight and Henry Gautier. Both gentlemen, and the word is particularly appropriate here, had strong opinions and took concrete steps to put their ideas into practice. Hal's concern for the stewardship of the land and Henry's drive to preserve fragile Garry Oak ecosystems. We would like to send our sympathies and condolences to the surviving members of both families in the knowledge that the work of these two fine men will be long remembered.

## **The Mount Douglas Motel**

Have you seen the notice of application for rezoning at the motel to change the zone designation from motel to apartments? The planning department has sent the proposal forward to Council and the item will probably appear on the Committee of the Whole agenda sometime in the New Year. It goes forward with comments from both the Cordova Bay Association and our Society recommending conversion to single family residential use and very strong opposition the idea of creating a zone for apartment development along the park boundary. As you can see as you drive past this section of Cordova Bay Road, single family housing development is rife and so our recommendations are in keeping with the transformation that has been underway since the sewers were installed.

## **The Beach**

Five years ago Saanich Council approved in principal a plan to protect Cordova Bay Road through the Park by removing water from the cliff face, stabilizing the toe of the cliff and beach remediation. Of the many stabilization proposals over the years, this is the first that takes the beach, shoreline and tidal area into serious consideration.

However, the overall story here is one of delay and further delay. The consultants, Sandwell Engineering, have done the fine tuning for their model but have still to provide realistic and current costs for the project. Once these are available the proposal will go back to Council. So, the earliest we would see any work done on the beach would be summer 2009, but given the current economic climate, it is unlikely to happen that soon.

Parallel to this, the archeologists have completed their survey of the beach including the mouth of the creek and have determined that there are no cultural artifacts at risk if this project goes ahead. What they have *not* done is explore what lies within the cliffs that rise from the beach. In order for the shore line protection to work effectively, the water in the

cliffs must be drained away and this means drilling horizontal channels into the cliffs to install drainage pipes and, at the moment, no one knows what is in there. The engineering department has kindly sent us a copy of the report on a CD. If anyone would like to look at the methodology and the details of this survey, please contact a member of the executive.

## **Gordon Head Recreation Centre**

At our last AGM, Angela Evans' presentation featured several very successful projects that addressed storm water using very attractive and innovative rain gardens and swales. We were also aware that renovations were planned for the Rec. Centre, so at Angela's suggestion, we submitted (a successful) proposal to the Nature Conservancy in Vancouver to provide funding in support of a rain garden at the Rec. Centre. We presented our rain garden proposal to the renovation planning group who were very receptive, viewing this as a valuable addition. This will address rain water from the rather large building roof. We are told there is insufficient money to also include similar provisions for water coming from the parking lot. This is even more important because of the volume and the mixture of oil pollutants. We requested that they include the parking lot in the over all plans, but delay the implementation until additional parking lot work is done.

## **Project Delays**

Your executive is disappointed at the lack of progress on many projects:

- Unused telephone lines along Ash Road. Some years ago funds were available along with a proposal to remove them, then nothing. Similarly for the power lines on the first stretch of Cordova Bay Road from the Ash Road junction. The tree trimming for the lines noticeably damages the tree canopy, a heritage protected Park feature.
- The summit parking lot and east summit project was identified for restoration and enhancement last year (See our Spring 2007 newsletter). Other than some trail work toward the southeast summit, nothing has been done.
- Trail marking. Increased Park use has resulted in a myriad of unofficial trails. Some jeopardize the Park's natural ecology and others make way-finding difficult. We have proposed small directional signs and a test trail with the idea that a clear main trail will channel users and reduce the ad-hoc trails. There has been no action on this.
- Trail Maintenance. We remember when one major trail would be restored (or upgraded) each year. Now it seems there is only minor damage repair. Additionally

Parks staff no longer check for fallen trees on the major trails, but instead rely on citizen reports.

- Churchill Drive Closure: Our Society provided survey results comparing usage before and after the Sunday closures were enacted with strong support for daily closure until noon. The Parks Department decided to conduct their own survey and, although we have informally heard that the respondents strongly supported morning closures, nothing has happened.

However, on the positive side, Saanich Parks has done considerable work in support of the creek restoration, construction of the spawning beds, growing and planting native vegetation. We have been very impressed with this work and it is truly appreciated.

## Newsletter On-line

This newsletter is a collaborative between several people with different computer types, so we are trying a new (free) software package, **OpenOffice.org**, that runs on Windows, Macs and Linux. So far we are very impressed. You can view the on-line newsletter complete with colour photos on our web site at <http://www.mountdouglaspark.ca>.

## Board of Directors

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Historian Pam Lewis

Coordinator - Native Habitat Restoration

Judy Spearing 1545 Eric Road V8N 5Y6 472-0515

## Christmas 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 this Christmas**? A one year membership isn't much more than the price of a good cup of coffee! You provide the gift and we'll send notification to the recipient of your generosity.

Use this form for a gift membership; we will send a gift card. Or for your own renewal, please check your address label; the label shows the year your membership expires (e.g. '08). We hope you will continue to support the work of the Society for another year by sending \$5 for each one-year membership to the address below.

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