

Qualicum Beach Streamkeepers 1995-2017

The formation of the Qualicum Beach Streamkeepers in June of 1995 was one of the most significant outcomes of the QB Environment Committee. Both organizations were independent to the Town administration and sought to address concerns about increasing development within the Town's boundaries, particularly new housing near the riparian areas of Beach and Grandon Creeks.

Faye Smith was instrumental in the creation of the Streamkeepers group. At that time she was the Chair of the parent committee but recognized that the habitats of the two creeks required an increasing focus. Others sharing her vision of the Town and its growing pains were founding members Scott and Annette Tanner, Bob and Betty Drew Brook, Doug Taylor and Town Councilor Brian Dietrich. The organization received Society status in December of 1995.

One of the first issues facing the newly formed Committee was the over-flowing of Beach Creek which created great anxiety for residents along the west side of Elizabeth Avenue and the then-named Old Dutch Inn. The flooding ultimately led to one of the largest infrastructure projects in the Town's history: the rerouting of the Creek which had been culverted under the hotel for decades. The first formal meeting of the QBSK was held February 3, 1996 and at that meeting Faye announced that the QBSK Society had been awarded a \$2000 grant from the Canada Trust Foundation and another contribution from The Department of Fisheries of \$283 dedicated to stream restoration. The Streamkeepers were on their way.

The Society quickly galvanized into an organization which went far beyond its initial mandate in protecting and restoring Beach and Grandon Creeks. Under Faye's guidance, the group successfully opposed the installation of an RV sewer on the waterfront (1996) and later, the development of the housing subdivision of the 58 acre Brown property, now designated as the Heritage Forest. The covenanted property led to the formation of the Brown Property Preservation Society in 1996. The Streamkeepers, years ahead of their time, also led a drive to oppose the use of pesticides within the Town's boundaries (1997). The group was also instrumental in the formation of the Quality of Life Survey by insisting on 12 environmental items, which today remains vital in the Town's six year planning cycle (Official Community Plan). The group was also vocal in defining the riparian setbacks of the development of the Chew property on Arbutus Street which borders on the salmon bearing Grandon Creek.

Faye's concerns for the environment also extended to changes taking place on the 2.5 km waterfront bounded by Memorial Avenue and Garrett Road and as a result she formed a small but determined group which was named The Beach Watch. Her focus here was the preservation of the shoreline, noting that the sea wall since 1947 had prevented the "recharging" of the beach which for years had placed Qualicum Beach as a destination site for the tourist industry. She was successful in challenging the proposal to extend the sea wall in 1996 and as a result of her high-lighting the need to protect the Town's water

Resources, convinced the Regional District to form the District 69 Water Stewardship Task Force (1996). To promote awareness of the waterfront and the threats to Beach and Grandon Creeks, Faye published the informative Newsletter "Inflow" which regularly summarized the activities of the QB Streamkeepers and the challenges they faced. The Newsletter continued

until about 2002.

Faye's influence went beyond the Town of Qualicum Beach. A sister organization mandated to protect and improve fish habitat in the Englishman River, The Mid Vancouver Island Habitat Enhancement Society (MVIHES), was formed in 1996. This organization which continues to meet the challenges of declining fish populations however, has managed to remove the Englishman River from the front page of endangered rivers in the Province. Faye Smith was also a key player in the management and direction of the organization from its inception and the formation of the Friends of French Creek Society (2004) which continues to be an active voice in environmental protection on the southern perimeter of the Town.

The restoration of the Beach Creek coho run began in June, 1997 with the placement

2.
of 5000 coho fry by the Parksville/Qualicum Fish and Game Club. Upper Beach Creek received some Streamkeepers cover in July, 1997 in the form of evergreen plantings; a project which was to be repeated seven years later. While Beach Creek had never supported a significant coho run, QBSK observers sighted more than 10 spawners beyond the Brown property in December of 1998. However, as the Town had decided to act on the Elizabeth Ave. flooding issue, the major restoration of Beach Creek began in 1999. Over a period of 4 months the lower reach of the Creek from Elizabeth to the upper tidal area was rerouted from beneath the Old Dutch Inn to a newly excavated channel that provided three open "skylights" adjacent to Memorial Avenue and Highway 19A. Baffles and large woody debris were strategically placed in the waterway to allow easy passage of spawning salmon up-stream. One of the Streamkeepers contributions was the construction of a "bears paw" structure designed by Doug Taylor at the beach site to prevent driftwood from being forced into the culvert. The structure remains in place 17 years following the completion of the \$280,000 project in May of 2000.

Public awareness of the activities of the QBSK was always at the heart of their environmental mandate. As a result the group began a program of painting yellow fish on storm water inlets using a donation of latex paint from the Colour Your World dealership in Parksville. In the same year, the Society members working with the Department of Fisheries the B.C, Conservation Foundation created 400 meters of coho smolt rearing habitat at the mouth of the Little Qualicum River. This project was aided by the generosity of the Sherwood Marshall family, caretakers of one of the most active marine estuaries on the west coast of Vancouver Island. The Junior Streamkeepers Program was initiated in the early years in an attempt to educate the 9-12 year old age group. This activity generally involves the seconding of biologist Dave Clough for a variety of workshops and field identification of riparian area wildlife primarily in the local creeks and is conveniently set to coincide with the mid-term school break .

In one of her many field trips Faye Smith recognized the harm created by the abandoned Whiskey Creek dam in blocking a large tributary to the Little Qualicum River. Migrating fish had been unable to pass the obstacle for 80 years. Faye brought her concern forward to the Streamkeepers Board and shortly thereafter received agreement from the DFO for the removal of the dam. The demolition of the dam was completed on September 6, 1999. But blasting of the concrete structure proved to be the easier part of the project as 3600 yards of silt had collected at the site. That fall, funded by a generous \$25,000 grant from the B.C. Habitat Conservation Fund,

the silt was transported by excavator and truck to the nearby forest. Planting of the damaged area was completed in March, 2001 by a remarkable coalition of more than 80 volunteers from many district environmental groups.

The fall of 2001 marked the completion of a four year project on Grandon Creek which also removed barriers to spawning coho. The project first involved the placement of a series of concrete weirs up-stream from Highway 19A and then the insertion of 5 deep caissons above West Crescent Road which provided water flow baffles and overhead light for spawners. The caissons allowed a new passage of water from the steep deteriorating metal culvert a short distance to the west. The cost of entire project exceeded \$262,000: \$146,000 of which was raised by the Society. The remainder was borne by a consortium of funders: the Town (\$50,000 and in-kind services), Fisheries Renewal B.C., The Habitat Conservation Trust Fund, The Pacific Salmon Foundation, The Habitat Restoration Enhancement Program (DFO), The Community Development Centre and the Shell Environment Fund. The addition of the caissons with the flow reducing baffles created an additional three kilometres of spawning habitat to the creek's major anadromous fish; the coho.

The QBSK Society continued its emphasis on environmental sustainability in other ways. It championed the use of a water retention ponds in the form of the Rain Garden concept near the Kwalicum Secondary School (2006). The project was supported by a \$5000 grant from the Pacific Salmon Foundation and in-kind donations from many sources including labour from MVIHES members and KSS students. With the addition of other storm water collection points (Memorial and West Crescent), the principle of retaining storm waters now appears to be integral to the Town's storm water management plan. In 2007, funding by the Regional District of Nanaimo produced the Streamkeepers inspired eco-mapping of the Little Qualicum River watershed booklet authored by Michele Deakin. The Society was also an instigating force in the RDN Toilet Rebate Program which has been promoted by the Town as a contributor to the water conservation program.

Under the direction of Dave Clough and the newly assigned DFO Community Advisor Dave Davies, a Beach Creek water retention initiative was begun in 2004. This plan required the dredging of coho fry and cutthroat refuge pits on the Davidson Rupert Road property and up-stream at Nenzel Road. This period marked the many Streamkeepers additions of protective log placements and the use of the newly acquired biologists and biomats along the silted sections of the Creek up-stream from the pond. A Beach Creek fish ladder below the fifth hole of the golf course was constructed by Doug Taylor in 2006 with the purpose of allowing spawning salmon access to the Brown property as the Creek had been fully blocked by a beaver dam. The project was funded by a grant from the Pacific Salmon Foundation. In July of 2004, the Town directed the removal of sediment from the Beach Creek pond at the cost of \$110,000. The project also required the replacement of the inflow culvert and the addition of a rock layer on the upper sediment pond and stabilization of the west bank of the main pond. The Streamkeepers were required for the relocation of resident coho, cutthroat trout and stickleback populations.

The Streamkeepers were also dedicated to the erosion control on the Werring farm up-stream of the Little Qualicum hatchery. More than 700 meters of trees were planted in the summer of 2006, along the south west bank to prevent random cattle access to the river. Electric fencing

was later added to provide protection for the planted trees. The fence was removed a few years later due to maintenance problems on the farm site.

Throughout the monitoring of the local creeks, the Streamkeepers have always been vigilant of invasive species threatening historic fish populations. These of course, were not only competing species of fish but aggressive invasive riparian plants. The Mant road ditch, emptying in Beach Creek down-stream of Mant Road became a concern in November, 2009 when a school of goldfish were identified. With the aid of the Town's staff temporarily draining the ditch, the Streamkeepers removed in excess of 1000 fish which were then given new homes. The capture was repeated the following year with only a few caught. Invasive plants have continued to be of concern to the Streamkeepers, particularly giant hogweed, lamium, and the Japanese knotweed. On many occasions groups of Streamkeepers have been formed to remove these species at entry points along Beach, Grandon and French Creeks. Only moderate success have been made and all three species continue to be present in many riparian areas.

One of the hallmarks of the QBSK Society mandate has been the cooperative work arrangements with similar organizations and governing bodies. This has been particularly evident in its relationship with the Town of Qualicum Beach, the Regional District of Nanaimo, the federal Department of Fisheries and its Provincial counterparts. The Streamkeepers have been engaged by the RDN on number of occasions, notably in the hand removal of succulents from the Little Qualicum River spit and the planting of hundreds of trees providing additional smolt cover on the dredged channels. Tree and sedge planting on the Little Qualicum spit continues to the present (2017) in spite of the difficulty in maintaining survival due to foraging by deer, rabbits and the ever present Canada goose. In 2014 the Regional District engaged the Society to participate in a water quality base line study for the Little Qualicum watershed. 2017 marked the fourth year in which measurements of turbidity, pH, oxygen content and temperature were determined from a variety of locations within RDN lands.

A Streamkeepers habitat initiative with Town assistance began in lower Grandon Creek in the summer of 2015. Biologist Dave Clough provided a creek bed design to enhance fish cover and spawning bed access. Excavation of four small ponds and the addition of large woody debris began in August, a project which required four days to complete. Much of the work was repeated the following year due to unforeseen infill as a result of up-stream erosion by severe winter storms. Under the supervision of the DFO Advisor Davies, a smolt counting box was placed in the Creek in late March of 2017 to determine the outgoing coho migration but as a result of unseasonal conditions and disruptions of the spawning bed during the winter, the results were disappointing low. The counting program is expected to continue in both Grandon and Beach Creeks in future years.

Another important feature of the Streamkeepers mandate has been public education and environmental awareness. As a result, the group participates in a variety of community events and activities such as Family Days (late spring), Beach Day (July), Earth and Water Days (spring) and The River Never Sleeps activity (spring) as well as a host of other functions relating to the environment. For such occasions the group has assembled many displays and visuals ranging from banners and signs to fold-out panels. The Streamkeepers have acquired a

substantial inventory of field equipment over a 20 year period. These are largely tree planting tools, grub hoes and fish pughs (for removing fish carcasses) but they have also made later purchases of a chain saw, a gas powered water pump, 600 feet of hose and a collection of chest waders. The smolt counting box and a storage shed have been recently added to the inventory.

Perhaps the most interesting and news worthy activity in the course in the typical Streamkeepers year is the November “Fish Toss”. Typically, the target of this event is the transport of some 3000 chum carcasses taken from the Little Qualicum hatchery channels to 4 or 5 drop zones upstream in the watershed. The purpose of the transfer is to improve the nutritional content of the river where the chum fry are expected to emerge. The program, funded by the DFO, has been in place since 2008 and each year is wonderfully facilitated by a DFO conveyor belt at a controlled fence site and the hands-on help by several hatchery workers.

The QB Streamkeepers Executive Positions 1995-2017

1995-97	Faye Smith	Coordinator (founding)
	Doug Taylor	Treasurer
	Annette Tanner	Secretary
	Brian Dietrick	Director
	Scott Tanner	Director
	Bob Drew-Brook	Director
	Betty Drew-Brook	Director
1998	Faye Smith	President/Coordinator
	Hugh Stanhope	Vice President
1999	Mike Thomson	President
	Danny Peel	Vice President
	Michelle Butts	Treasurer
	Barbara Joughin	Secretary
	Faye Smith	Coordinator
2000-03	Faye Smith	President/Coordinator
	Barbara Joughin	Secretary
2004	Peter Drummond	President
	Paul Ryniak	Vice President
	Doug Taylor	Treasurer
	Ardith Turney	Secretary
	Faye Smith	Coordinator
2005	Peter Drummond	President
	Kyrti Eno	Vice President
	Doug Taylor	Treasurer
	Katherine Waddell	Secretary
2006	Faye Smith	Coordinator
	Peter Drummond	President
	Tom Russell	Vice president
	Doug Taylor	Treasurer

2007	Katherine Waddell	Secretary
	Faye Smith	Coordinator
	Peter Drummond	President
	Tom Russell	Vice President
	Doug Taylor	Treasurer
2008	Lynn Tomlinson	Secretary
	Faye Smith	Coordinator
	Peter Drummond	President
	Tom Russell	Vice President
	Doug Taylor	Treasurer
2009	Pat Jacobson	Secretary
	Faye Smith	Coordinator
	Peter Drummond	President/split
	Ed Dunnett	President/split
	Doug Taylor	Treasurer
2010	Pat Jacobson	Secretary
	Faye Smith	Coordinator
	Pat Jacobson	President
	Ed Dunnett	Vice President
	Doug Taylor	Treasurer
2011	David James	Secretary
	Faye Smith	Coordinator
	Pat Jacobson	President
	Ed Dunnett	Vice President
	Doug Taylor	Treasurer
2012-17	David James	Secretary
	Faye Smith	Coordinator
	David James	President
	Gord Almond	Vice President
	Louella Hollington	Treasurer
	Pat Jacobson	Secretary
	Faye Smith	Coordinator

Addendum: The QB Streamkeepers Society was greatly saddened by the passing of Faye Smith on March 23, 2017. The Streamkeepers, many other affiliated groups in the District and the Town will remain greatly indebted to Faye for her unceasing passion, energy and dedication to all matters concerning the environment of the Town of Qualicum Beach.

Peter Drummond, May, 2017