

# Friends of Mount Douglas Park Society



Spring 2009

## **Annual General Meeting**

**Wednesday 7:30pm April 29, 2009**

**McMorran's Beach House**

**5109 Cordova Bay Road**

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## Bequest

The Friends of Mount Douglas Park Society are very pleased to have received the generous bequest of \$10,000 from the estate of Hendrick (Henk) Gautier.

Many of you likely know Henk, or met him walking in the Park. He started each day with a walk up the mountain. He and his wife came to Victoria in 1984 and they walked together every day until she passed away in 1992. He then carried on the healthy ritual until his body no longer allowed him to continue. He was 88 years old when he died, and no doubt the daily walks helped him to reach this considerable age! The exercise and the social meetings with other walkers and their dogs were very stimulating for him. His pockets were always filled with dog biscuits—just in case!

FMDPS directors are looking for one or more projects that would benefit the Park that Henk liked so much. We are in no hurry to spend the money, but prefer to carefully weigh possibilities where other funding is not available.

## Maple Tree Planting

During the third week of March, Saanich Parks, with some assistance from the Friends of Mount Douglas Park, planted 20 bigleaf maple trees along the Ash Road end of the Edgemont trail.

This corner of the Park used to have a substantial tree cover, but suffered severe blow-down during a heavy windstorm in the mid 90's. Without any tree shade, the underbrush has grown tall and thick, effectively stopping any new tree growth. Hopefully the maples will provide a canopy, reducing the undergrowth and allowing for new cedar and fir trees. We will be monitoring the trees, watering them the first summer.





Many thanks to the Saanich Parks' crew who really did a marvellous job! More photos of the planting operation are on our web site.

## New Churchill Drive Gate Hours

Saanich Council recently approved a new schedule for the Churchill Drive gate, extending the closure time until noon on a daily basis for a six-month trial. We understand the trial will likely start May 1. The change recognizes the significant increase in the number of morning walkers, their concerns about safety conflicts with cars, and being able to enjoy nature without exhaust fumes and motor vehicle noise.

Saanich Parks conducted a Churchill Drive user survey last summer. And in March, our Society expended a considerable amount of effort in identifying the actual morning user groups and understanding their preferences. As part of this project, we set up our tent near the Churchill gate and monitored users on three different mornings. On the first morning we counted more than 150 walkers that included many family groups with small children, some pushing strollers.



A couple of interesting statistics from our survey: 61% of the walkers were from outside

the local Gordon Head area, most arriving by car and parking in the bottom lot. Ten per cent of the walkers were visitors from off the Island, commenting that Mount Douglas was a true “gem” and that they came to walk for exercise and to enjoy nature.

It also became clear that the lower parking area is too small. We have been in discussion with Saanich Parks about how best to enlarge it within the natural setting. The Department is developing some proposals.

## **Gordon Head Recreation Centre - \$4000 Grant**

Past engineering practices dictated “getting water into a pipe as soon as possible”. The shortcomings of this approach are now well recognized—at the same time that this depletes the ground water, it creates a large storm surge of water containing oil residues and other pollutants that damages downstream environments. Douglas Creek is a local example of this.

If one follows along the Creek, the evidence of severe bank erosion is everywhere. The strength of the surges last year was sufficient to wash out some of the salmon spawning beds. Our water quality monitoring has recorded that the hydrocarbons and pollutants jeopardize the salmon fry directly, but also affect the small water insects the salmon need to survive. Our Society has been steadily working on addressing stormwater management issues within the Douglas Creek watershed, but progress is slow.

The Gordon Head Recreation Centre is the largest municipally-owned area within the watershed. When we heard that they planned some renovations—with a small addition on the northeast corner—we mobilized quickly to investigate what, if any, stormwater management could be incorporated into the plans. About the same time, at our last AGM, Angela Evans (Local Solutions Consulting Services) made an inspiring presentation on stormwater management. What really impressed the audience was the wide range of ideas (rain gardens, bioswales, etc.) about true landscape assets that provided demonstration of the positive benefits of these approaches. She gave us some further on-site consultation about possibilities at the Rec Centre and, best of all, pointed us to The Nature Trust of BC and its funding program. We made an application and were awarded \$4000 that we will forward to the Municipality of Saanich for a demonstration rain garden landscape feature to address a portion of the rec centre's stormwater problem.

Details are still in the planning stage, but we are pleased to report that the new addition will include a green roof, another good technique for absorbing stormwater surges that also

provides roof insulation stabilizing the temperature control of the building, thus requiring less heating and cooling. We thank Angela for her advice and suggestions, The Nature Trust of BC for its funding, and Saanich staff for their excellent support and ideas on this project.

## Holly in Mount Douglas Park

Some Park users ask “what's wrong with leaving holly in the Park?” If you're one of them, just walk in and look around. Holly is almost everywhere—along all trails and deep into the forest.

English Holly was introduced to this region years ago, primarily as a commercial crop. Remnants of old holly farms still exist in the Mount Doug area. Unfortunately, these old



FMDPS distributes mulch provided by Saanich Parks

plantings continue to provide a constant source of berries/seeds that re-infest the region, year after year, choking out native trees and understorey.

It's a resilient plant, difficult to control. It thrives in our region's optimum growing conditions. And it's a “waterhog”, competing aggressively with our threatened native trees and plants for moisture. You can ring the bark, chop the tree down, or lop its branches, and it will resprout and survive. It is harder to remove the longer it grows, forming a thick, doglegged taproot with strong secondary roots.

It produces berries, it suckers from its roots to form new trees, and where its branches touch ground, it roots and runs, forming thick ground cover as it spreads. As groundcover, it smothers native plants, stealing water and light from them. This impedes regeneration of native trees and shrubs by preventing seed getting to the soil surface to germinate. Birds don't generally nest in holly trees and nothing browses its leaves. Moreover, in displacing native plants, it deprives native birds, insects, and other wildlife of more choice native

flowers, berries, nectar, leaves, and bark to sustain them. The wildlife either dies out or moves elsewhere.

Mount Douglas Park has a strong volunteer crew committed to fighting the holly and all other invasives. The members enjoy the outdoors, they relish the exercise, and they take pleasure in seeing the native plants regenerate in places they've cleared. Though the group is growing, we still need more people to help us. The health of the Park is slowly improving, the tide is turning, but it takes time and lots of people to make change happen.

Think about joining us! Even if you can't be active, there are lots of other skills we need. Go to our website at [www.mountdouglaspark.ca](http://www.mountdouglaspark.ca) and look under "Calendar of Events" for contact information and work party details.

## **Replanting Douglas Creek - \$13,300 Grant**

We want to emphasize the tremendous part that Saanich Parks played in the logistics and delivery of Tree Appreciation Day in November of last year. The department was directly responsible for the success of the event and since it became involved, public participation has increased and we are achieving greater planting success. And it wasn't just Saanich Parks staff that showed up for the planting, we saw employees from several different Saanich departments working along with many other volunteers.

In October 2008, we applied to the Pacific Salmon Foundation for \$13,300 in funding for further habitat restoration in Douglas Creek. The application was supported by Saanich Parks and by Fisheries and Oceans Canada. In November we hosted a Creek walk for the Ottawa representatives of National Non-Government Organizations PSF tour. Later in November we were informed that PSF will support our application for habitat enhancement work this summer. It is a bonus to have our funding confirmed so early in the year that we have plenty of time to plan.

In January and February we planted 270 red elderberry, 50 bigleaf maple, and 30 willow plugs into the riparian of the upper reaches of the Creek. The plugs and one-gallon shrubs/sword fern that were planted last fall are starting to show life, stirring in tempo with the shrubs in the Park that are pushing out flowers and leaves. Salmonberry has started to flower: the Indian plum is almost in bloom.



Bob Bridgeman at one of the stormwater and spawning bed installations. Water is diverted away from creek banks, stopping erosion. Gravel is placed behind the dam for Salmon spawning. Thanks for the help from Saanich Parks.

## Douglas Creek Restoration Work

We have had a number of meetings to set out the scope of the habitat restoration work for 2009. We don't have a dedicated project manager this year, so we're trying to find a way for the partners to manage the project. Briefly, we want to continue work on the bottom structures by adding boulders and cobble downstream of the structures. These embed the log structures into the Creek channel, reinforcing the structure and a 'swim up riffle' to allow easy access upstream for the salmon.

Above Ash Road Bridge the Creek banks are eroding at an alarming rate.

One of the beautiful creek "S" curves that significantly slows the water flow, will disappear unless preventative measures are taken. Without action, we can expect the same destructive storm events magnified by the lack of stormwater management upstream of the head waters. The same successful techniques employed in the lower creek need to be applied to the area below the weir.

## The Weir

Discussions are underway with Saanich Parks concerning a project that would see the weir, or properly the oil interceptor, modified in some way, to intercept the various pollutants that now make returning life to the Creek so difficult. The project impetus came to a head several years ago when the Saanich Fire Department oil tank emptied into the storm drain system and then into the creek. Follow-up meetings with department managers along with the Municipal Administrator initiated the current process. Although the weir is a necessity to address spills, a complete solution involves cleaning up the watershed, the Creek and the beach. Source control is the most effective means but it is difficult to get that message out to 5000 or so households, and difficult to change the way people live.

## **Chum Transplant**

We will be transplanting about 50,000 chum into the Creek in May and by the time they have moved through the Creek it will be time to get started on the habitat work. Watch our website “Calendar of Events”; the chum transplant is a good event for children.

We had a Creek walk with an aquatic ecologist who specializes in aquatic benthic (bottom dwelling) invertebrates. In the hope that he will be interested enough in the intellectual puzzles of the Creek to help set up another invertebrate sampling program, we are supplying him the copious information we have collected through the years.

## **Interpretive Walk / Signs**

In March of this year, we again applied to the Pacific Salmon Foundation, this time for \$1,500.00 to support a project installing two signs along the trail that overlooks the Creek. The signs are to show the salmon life cycle and talk about the ecology of the Creek and the riparian zone. There are potential viewpoints along the Creek that look down into the Douglas fir forest, the Creek and all the associated riparian biodiversity.

We hope to include these signs within an interpretive walk that would utilize the trail that follows the creek from the beach to Ash Road. This sign would not only explain about the salmon and the creek restoration work but also include something about the Park trees and vegetation along that trail.

We are also working with Saanich Parks to design and install an interpretive sign at the “Cedar Hill Knoll”, explaining what has been done there along with something about the native vegetation we planted there.

## **The Beach and Cliff Erosion**

The consultants, Sandwell Inc., have finished their model testing and are preparing a budget for presentation to Saanich Council. Already the municipality has applied for funds to carry out the project under the Federal Government’s infrastructure renewal program. In these hard economic times this is the largest pot of gold available for new projects. Because all governments throughout Canada have submitted applications, the competition will be fierce.

And the fundamental cliff erosion problem? It gets worse. If you walk along Cordova Bay

Road from the old view road toward the motel, don't stray close to the edge. Many small trees have come down and some of the brush that has been cleared reveals the stark reality that the gap between the top of the cliff and the edge of the blacktop used by the travelling public is now less than ten feet (3m) wide in places. And there are no restraining barriers. So we are faced with the prospect of having an agreed engineering solution but no money to pay for it, while the problems become more acute with every passing winter. Mother Nature is working at a slower rate than the engineers originally predicted, but she is inexorable.

## **Archaeology Sites**

In a calmer vein, the archaeologists have completed their work on the beach and have presented their report. They found an additional site containing, to use their term, "culturally modified" artifacts; specifically, three stone wedges. This site has now been added to the two sites identified in the nineties—the shell midden by the mouth of the Creek and a burial site of a single body. (Apparently, after the burial site had been catalogued, the disinterred body was reburied in the Park, but the exact location is restricted information).

In their report, Golder Associates clearly state that they conducted a survey, not an exhaustive dig, and it is quite possible that more artifacts will come to light when work begins in earnest. If this happens, a "Stop Work" order would be applied, to allow the find to be assessed. However, the really eye-catching aspect of this report is the long list of First Nations that have an historical interest in this stretch of beach.

## **The Mount Douglas Motel**

Good news: The issue of rezoning the motel has been resolved: the application to convert the site from Commercial C10 to Residential Apartments (RA1 or variation) was rejected by Saanich Council. The Cordova Bay Association led the opposition, with support from the Gordon Head Association and our Society. The general threat of apartment development on either side of the park brought these groups together, but it was particularly heartening to hear the Mayor refer specifically to the large acreages next to the park that could be open for development if the rezoning went ahead. He and six councillors voted against the rezoning, with only one vote in favour.

Though the threat to the surrounding neighbourhood has now passed, the future of the motel is still uncertain. Because of events outside the control of the owner, notably the dramatic drop in the number of visitors since 9/11, he has still to develop a viable business plan for the site. We wish him success and hope that future developments at this site will mesh smoothly with the Park.

## **San Juan Greenway: a lost opportunity**

The work at the lower end of San Juan Avenue is nearing completion and we should have a compromised greenway in operation by spring. There are some good features to this development; the road has been narrowed, sidewalks and bike “sharrows” have been installed, and some water detention measures have been incorporated in the upper sections. (See the two new rain water swales on San Juan up the hill from Tyndall just past the Gordon Head Store.) In addition, the loss of trees has been far less than originally predicted.

However, the finished project comes with more impervious surface than before and a lack of water detention in the lower section near Shelbourne Street. These two avoidable negatives have compromised what could have been a showcase for the future. What is particularly disappointing is that the engineers, in their professional judgement, had addressed these issues very well in the original plan but did a complete about-face just prior to the backhoes going to work.

It is clear that Saanich needs to provide better education about stormwater management, especially for their own projects such as this on publicly-owned land. In general, people simply are not aware of the many excellent methods for successfully dealing with stormwater that also create positive landscape amenities and provide other neighbourhood benefits.



Bicycle Sharrow – a word made from “share” and “arrow” indicating roadway to be shared between bicycles and motor vehicles.

## Board of Directors

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Historian	Pam Lewis			
Coordinator - Native Habitat Restoration	Judy Spearing	1545 Eric Road	V8N 5Y6	472-0515



## 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 and we'll send notification to the recipient of your generosity.

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