

Breaking News: Returning Salmon Spotted in Douglas Creek!

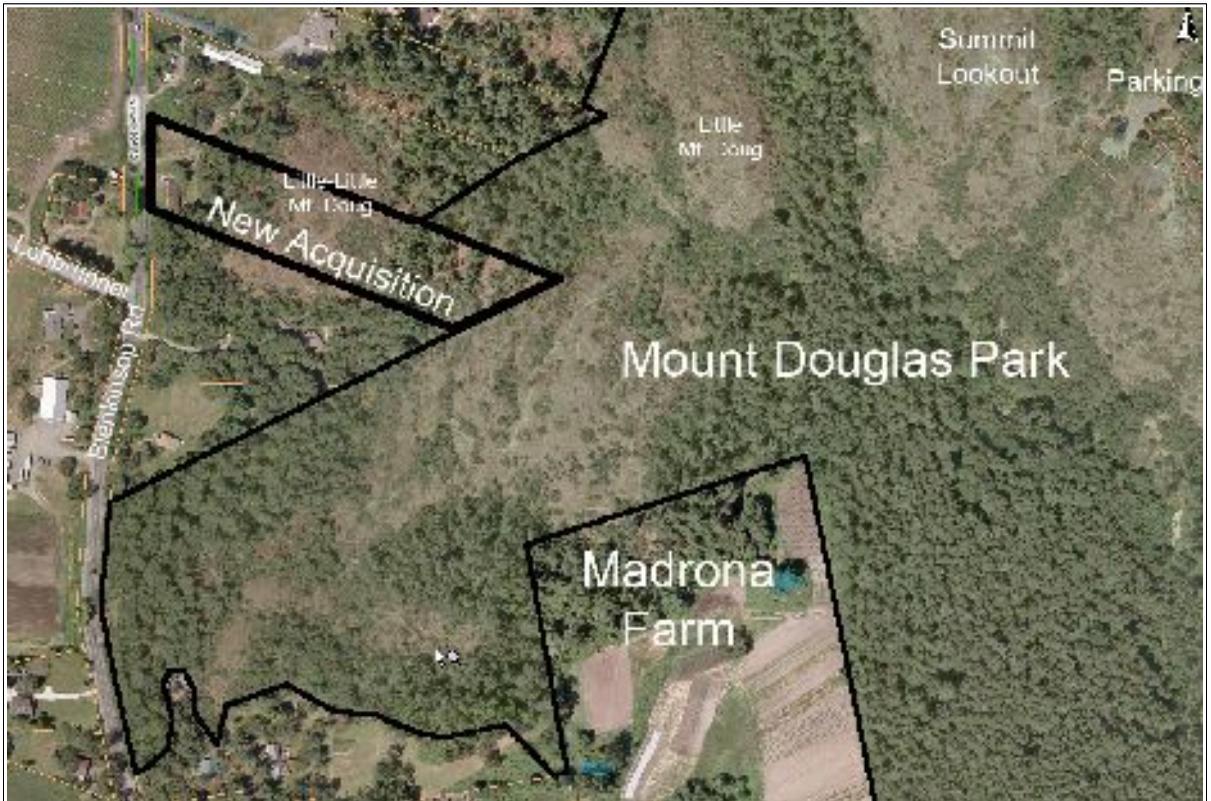
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Oh Dear, Oh Dear, What Shall I Do?
Will I Become a Rare Sight?

Latest Addition to Mount Douglas Park



Recent Park Acquisition in Blenkinsop Valley

It is a pleasure to report the latest land acquisition for Mount Douglas Park, the knoll referred to as “Little-Little Mt. Doug”. (Lined up from west to east, there is Little-Little Mt Doug, Little Mt. Doug and the Mount Douglas summit). This was the Harwood property and it is the more prominent lower knoll one sees when driving south along Blenkinsop Road or when looking from the Broadmead area. Not only is this high ground a significant addition to the Park, but now the view of Mount Douglas from the west is protected from possible development.

Currently there is no parking area on the Blenkinsop side of the park. This new addition might provide an opportunity for a much needed parking area along with a direct access to the Park.

New Interpretive Sign



FMDPS artist Kristi Bridgeman with her watercolour illustration depicting the salmon life cycle and migration route. The interpretive sign, located above Douglas Creek, was unveiled on Tree Appreciation Day.

Despite our best efforts through our newsletter, articles in the newspaper and other means, it is always a surprise how many people walking along Douglas Creek are unaware that this Creek is a successful salmon-bearing stream and also unaware of the significant work that the Friends of Mount Douglas Park Society, in partnership with Saanich Parks, Pacific Salmon Foundation, Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Howard English Hatchery at Goldstream have devoted to this restoration. A good suggestion put forward was to begin

the development of an interpretive walk that not only highlights the Creek and spawning area, but might eventually provide information about the Park itself. To this end, the first step was the installation of a “Salmon Life Cycle” interpretive sign along with two spawning bed viewing points. An Internet search and review of existing signs did not turn up any that matched the goal of featuring the salmon life cycle along with their incredible life journey from Douglas Creek, past the Aleutian Islands and back. Artist and illustrator Kristi Bridgeman took these rough ideas and delivered a wonderful water colour portrayal of that journey. Using a Pacific Salmon Foundation grant and previous private donations to our Society, we purchased the sign frame. Saanich Parks installed everything along with creating two observation areas in addition to trail and safety improvements. On Tree Appreciation Day, Mayor Frank Leonard, BC Environment Minister Murray Coell, artist Kristi Bridgeman and FMDPS President Darrell Wick unveiled the new sign.

Tree Appreciation Day

A wonderful day! Blessed with blue sky between days of rain, perhaps a hundred volunteers along with Saanich staff planted



Saanich Parks arborists Dan Fong and Jason Clarke rappel down Douglas Creek bank to help stabilize the cliff with native plants.



Saanich Parks' Cory Manton:
“Plant it over there!”



A volunteer line up!

almost 2000 trees and native plants grown by Rob Hagel at Pacific Forestry Research Centre from seeds harvested in Mount Douglas Park. Planters were in two locations, in the area of the Irvine Trail and Churchill Drive and along Douglas Creek near the new Salmon Life Cycle interpretive sign. We spotted several Councillors helping with the planting - Judy



Youngest volunteer, Arne Wick, 2, hard at work.

Brownoff, Vicki Sanders and Wayne Hunter with Mayor Frank Leonard and BC Environment Minister Murry Coell officiating at a Big Leaf Maple Tree planting. Thanks to Parks for organizing and running Tree Appreciation Day!

Summer Creek Restoration

The *Creek Restoring Woody Debris Complexes to Douglas Creek* project started with detailed planning in February of this year, and continued on a monthly basis until on-site work actually began in September. We hired a Spyder hoe again (Walter Langer owner/operator), which climbed down into the Creek and placed 200 cubic yards of boulders, spawning gravel and pit run supplied by Saanich Parks, creating four riffle and pool sequences. For the first time really large boulders were used, approximately one meter in average circumference and weighing a tonne, a material size required to withstand the significant storm-water surges. Medium sized boulders still need to be hand-placed between the larger materials, but this will have to wait for consultation with Saanich Parks, a funding source and the fisheries window for the proper permits.

A significant “behind the scenes” component of all this work, in addition to all of the planning meetings and obtaining expert advice from Fisheries and Oceans Canada



New salmon spawning pool, viewable from the new interpretive sign viewing area. The log slows storm surges and the rocks form a riffle for fish passage.

Community Adviser for Southern Vancouver Island Erica Blake, is the writing of the funding proposal and the final report. Although sometimes it never seems to end, the successes make it all worthwhile! A special thanks has to be forwarded to our funding and matching grant partners, Pacific Salmon Foundation, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Saanich Parks and also the Howard English Hatchery at Goldstream (for frozen salmon carcasses, fry transplants, encouragement and excellent advice).

Next year's goal is to finish the Creek section below Ash Road with the construction of four pool riffle sequences. This will provide a continuous sequence of spawning pools and riffles for upstream travel from the ocean to Ash Road.

Another measure of restoration success is the crayfish spotted in the Creek. You may remember the two year long effort to transplant native crayfish. Tried and true partners, the Howard English Hatchery at Goldstream, Peter McCully and all of the associated volunteers came through and actually transplanted some native crayfish into the Creek.

Although none have been trapped yet, we know for sure that there is at least one in there and hopefully s/he is not lonely.

It would be a real reward to have a salmon return again this year, but sadly, the chum population on the Coast has crashed (at least compared to the usual returning numbers), so if any do return this year, Douglas Creek will be one of the fortunate few. Nobody knows why the populations of the different species are “yo-yoing” from abundance to dearth; we just have to keep working so that when they do come back to Douglas Creek, there is habitat that can support their needs.

Trail Improvements

Saanich crews have worked on trails in three areas to address muddy and generally poor trail conditions.

- The Irvine Trail, just below where it crosses Churchill Drive, was a bit of a river when it rained, with a very muddy section. They fixed the mud section with gravel and modified the trail to divert the water.
- The first 100m or so of the Norn Trail south of Churchill was virtually impassable in the winter because of the deep mud. This area is subject to significant slope drainage, so Parks crews are constructing a short boardwalk to provide passage across the mud area without disturbing the proper water flows in the area.
- The third trail section is the Beach Trail above Douglas Creek in the beach parking lot area. Parks crews repaired and improved the trail after the summer creek work and also have created two viewing areas where one can see the Creek and some of the spawning pools. The new Salmon Life Cycle interpretive sign is also located here.

Trail Way-Finding

More than one Park visitor has become temporarily lost in walking the myriad of trails. We first proposed a way-finding scheme in our Park Plan (available on our web site). Saanich Parks took that concept and added some other ideas resulting in an overall system that will first be installed as a prototype along the entire length of the Irvine Trail. One component of the scheme is to categorize trails according to a “difficulty” rating that considers, among other factors, the surface quality, the trail steepness and whether one



Saanich Parks Supervisor of Construction Dave Hill, FMDPS Graham Shorthill and Claude Maurice with Saanich Parks Manager of Construction and Maintenance Andrew Giles discuss improvements for trail way-finding signs to be installed along Irvine Trail.

must climb over rocky surfaces. An “easy”, “moderate”, “difficult” system similar to ski trails (green, blue, black) will be used.

The Irvine Trail was selected because it includes all three categories between the lower end next to the beach parking area washrooms and the top end at the summit parking lot. There will be two types of sign posts. At major trail intersections, a post similar in appearance to existing Saanich trail signs will be used with improved trail name and direction information on the

post face. At intermediate points, especially in the upper rocky section of the trail where the way is not clear, a short post, perhaps ten inches high, will be used, again with trail name and direction information on the post face.

Hopefully, properly marking the correct trail will lessen the number of impromptu trails and shortcuts that are increasing in number within the Park. If this prototype signing project is a success, other trails will be similarly signed.

Saanich Land Commissioner, Wayne Randall retires

Our Society has worked with Wayne Randall for the past twenty years, dealing with two very important areas of concern for the Park; namely new park acquisitions and the administration of the transmitter site at Mount Douglas summit. When the Park was transferred to Saanich twenty years ago, the entire western slope of the summit, including “Little Mt. Doug”, was outside the Park; one could not walk around Mount. Doug without traversing private land. With the blessing of Saanich Council, Wayne monitored land sales and steadily acquired pieces of property on the Blenkinsop Valley side so that now the trail

is within the Park, as is Little Mount Douglas (see leading article about Wayne's departing land acquisition, "little-little Mt. Doug").

Wayne also managed the transmitter site. Some probably remember the original proposal was to build a two storey building on the southeast summit near the current tower to house the equipment. Wayne was receptive to and supported our Society's request to instead bury the building under the parking lot. The extent of the building is well hidden, with only the observation deck suggesting there is something underneath. This turned out to be a very wise decision, not only aesthetically for "up close" and for distant views of the Park, but also for the security of this very important installation. Wayne was also very cognisant of the visual aspects of the tower, and kept close tabs on the frequent requests by the cell phone companies to add more antennas or microwave dishes.

We doubt if many are aware of the significant contribution Wayne made to the Park, but those of us that knew and dealt with him will certainly miss him. We wish him well in his retirement.

Tree Trimming

During September Saanich Parks cleared overhanging tree branches along Churchill Drive in Mount Douglas Park as well as roads in Gordon Head and Cadboro Bay. This was initiated by the Saanich Fire Department's new truck that is now stationed near the University of Victoria. The trimming was done to the prescribed legal passage height of 14.5 feet. The Parks crews used a measured stick to determine what needed trimming as they worked their way along Churchill Drive and only cut branches hanging below the legal height that might catch on the fire truck, possibly dislodging a ladder or other equipment.



Saanich Parks crew measuring clearance before trimming low branches

Danger Trees & Wild Life Trees

A year ago a significant number of danger trees were cut down along the Whittaker Trail just south of Churchill Drive. This was necessitated by Work-Safe BC requirements before any trail work could be performed. Our feeling was that these requirements were oriented more for industrial work such as what BC Hydro employees might be performing but didn't sufficiently consider the needs of a Park setting. After some research by our Society, contact was made with the Wild Life Tree Committee of BC which had developed a Work-Safe BC approved danger tree assessment specifically designed for use in parks, and which includes a significant appreciation for wild life trees. Compliments to Saanich Parks for bringing in an expert in this area, Dean McGeogh from Integra Forest Consulting, who did a danger tree assessment in parallel with Saanich Parks. Another positive step was the incorporation of this Wild Life Tree Committee assessment procedure for parks within the recently approved Urban Forest Strategy.



FMDPS directors Bob Bridgeman and Darrell Wick, Wild Life Tree Assessor Dean McGeogh, Saanich Parks Manager of Urban Forestry, Horticulture and Natural Areas Cory Manton and Saanich Arborist Inspector Brent Ritson reviewed danger tree assessment.



Leave me a few wild life trees!

However, we are still in a quandary. Some of the trails do need work, but, despite the Wild Life Tree assessment approach, danger trees still must be made safe (Made safe might mean removing a dangerous branch, converting a tall tree to a shorter wild life tree or even completely removing the tree). Depending upon the area, the number of trees requiring removal or modification might be significant and one has to ask “are the trail improvements worth the tree loss?” Perhaps the current Irvine Trail work represents a test case.

Shelbourne Corridor – Arbordale to Park Entrance

The work on the north end of Shelbourne from Arbordale to Mount Douglas is finished. Many mistakenly refer to this simply as a bike lane project, but it is much more than that.

- It was a pedestrian sidewalk project with new or upgraded sidewalks along the entire east side of Shelbourne from Arbordale to the Park entrance, along with pedestrian crossing bulges complete with ramps for wheel-chairs and buggies.
- It was a storm water surge reduction project with the installation of rain water “swales”. These are the curb bulges that were installed on both sides of Shelbourne. Instead of rain water, along with street pollutants, flowing straight into the drains and down to Douglas Creek, it now flows into a small permeable holding area where it can add to the water table. The grasses and other vegetation provide filtration and cleansing, reducing the pollutants. The actual drain is lifted to form an overflow when there is too much water. Reducing these surges is not only a very important component in the restoration of Douglas Creek, but it also ensures the Municipality will not have to replace existing storm water pipes with larger capacity pipes, a significant cost saving.
- It provides defined and protected parking areas. North of Kenmore, there was always 24 hour parking on both sides of the street and this hasn’t changed.
- It was a streetscape *beautification* project. The swales and plantings were designed to offer visual relief from a long paved section with parked cars.
- It provides an important visual transition from the Shelbourne urban setting to the Park setting, a goal that we have pursued for each of the Park approaches. This has also resulted in some important traffic-calming for those who raced along the right lane between breaks in the parked cars only to pass one, perhaps two cars, before the single-lane road through the park.

Rain Water Swales

Following Saanich storm water management policies, storm water swales or mini-rain gardens are being installed throughout the municipality. Within the Gordon Head/Douglas Creek watershed, they have most recently been installed along the north end of Shelbourne, on San Juan just east of Tyndall and along Laval, just west of Gordon Head Road. For those that were fortunate enough to attend Angela Evans' very impressive presentation on rain gardens and swales at one of our earlier general meetings, you can appreciate what a neighbourhood asset these can be. As she showed, when neighbours “take ownership” and begin to care for the swales and rain gardens, they significantly add to the neighbourhood landscape. Hopefully the new neighbours won't pass up this opportunity.

The majority of the swales are placed to eliminate an existing street stormwater catch basin. They have an opening at either end to allow street water collected to drain into the swale; water in the swale then drains through sands and gravels into the water table which in time drains into Douglas Creek, contributing to the summer flows. There is a raised drain in the centre of the swale which in times of floods acts as an overflow flood control. Pollutants in the street water are captured in the permeable layers of the swales and are held there. Hydrocarbons are consumed and transformed by soil organisms in the soil. Clean water is now being delivered to Douglas Creek in ways that are reminiscent of pre-development watershed conditions.

Hopefully Saanich will provide information sheets on the design and function of these swales along with planting and care guides. The swales need native plants appropriate for the function that are attractive, suitable and can withstand both dry and wet conditions.



Bob Bridgeman at one of the new rain-water swales along Shelbourne Street. The swale acts as a small holding pond reducing storm drain surges and improving the water table for summer flows to Douglas Creek. Note that the drain is raised to handle pond overflow. Native plantings in the swales will reduce water-borne pollutants and make an attractive boulevard.

Churchill Closure

Many have noticed the very significant increase in walkers, young and old, families with baby strollers walking up Churchill Drive in the morning enjoying the no-cars, no-exhaust, no-noise until noon. Perhaps one of the most telling comments often heard is “we have to get back down before the gate opens!” The idea of the new hours was to



Mornings along Churchill Drive

schedule different times for different activities, the cooler morning hours for walkers, afternoons for those that want to drive up. Noting the number of walkers that appreciate the car free, care free opportunity here, the similar numbers on other trails such as the Galloping Goose and Lochside Trails, it's clear that Saanich residents appreciate the outdoors and such trail opportunities.

Salmon Again Return to Douglas Creek

Hold the presses! Just as the newsletter was to be printed, salmon were spotted in Douglas Creek. A large female Chum salmon was spotted in one of the restored spawning pools near Ash Road. This means she successfully



A large female Chum Salmon near Ash Road!

passed all of the spawning and stormwater structures that have been installed over the past years. She traversed each of the rock riffles and jumped the small falls by each pool to reach the top pool in the sequence. Two fresh salmon carcasses were also spotted. Hopefully with rain coinciding with the next high tide, a mate will find her!

Deer Carcasses and Invasive Plants

You may have read or heard about the recent dumping of “Bambi bits” in Mount Douglas Park. Unfortunately, that’s not the only thing some people mindlessly dump in our park system. Volunteers with the Friends of Mount Douglas Park often find evidence of people dumping lawn clippings, yard waste, and unwanted plants from old hanging baskets. We can only assume those who “don’t quite make it all the way to the Municipal Yard where they can dump yard waste for FREE” must think no harm done by disposing of yard waste in a park. After all “it will all break down and turn to compost”. Right? Wrong!

A number of non-native plant species available at local garden centres are of the kind that pose potential threats to our natural areas. We don’t realize this, purchasing plants for the way they trail downward from hanging baskets or because we are told they provide “lovely ground cover”. What we often are not warned of is the way these same plants can rapidly run and spread once they hit the ground. Many a fledgling gardener has learned the hard way how aggressive non-native ground covers can be and then spend years afterward trying to control them. Any plant described as “good ground cover” is to be carefully investigated before buying. Once you plant them they are almost always difficult to eradicate, much less control, resprouting from each small, fibrous root left in the ground.



The John Jungen and Dick Battles team, without question, an invasive's worst fear!



Judy Spearing caught in her element

Two of the worst offenders are False Lamium or Yellow Archangel and Periwinkle (Vinca minor and major). See <http://www.gvipc.ca> for excellent descriptions. Both are still sold locally, (as are English Ivy and English Holly), even though retailers know full well the dangers these plants present to our native ecosystems. There are a few garden centres in Victoria who have recently decided to eliminate certain invasive species from their inventory and we applaud them for taking action.

Please remind friends and neighbours to take their yard waste to their local municipal yard for proper treatment and that dumping anything in our parks is not only illegal, it's an additional and unnecessary cost to tax payers and seriously endangers the health of our parks.



Another friend of Mount Douglas Park

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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, perhaps as a Christmas gift, 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. We hope you will continue to support the work of the Society for another year.

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