

Ecological restoration in Lillooet

Don Gayton

An innovative and multifaceted restoration project is taking place, at the confluence of the Fraser River and Seton Creek. The origins of the project reach back to the 1950s, when the construction of the Seton Dam, canal, and powerhouse caused extensive alteration to the creek and the foreshore areas. Huge amounts of earth were moved, piled, and redistributed in this megaproject, and access roads ran in every direction. In 2005, the Lillooet Naturalist Society created a bold vision, to not only restore the site, but also turn it into a stewardship education “commons” for the nearby community of Lillooet.

By 2006 the Society had generated a feasibility study, and enlisted several partners, including the Cayoose Creek St’át’imc Band, on whose traditional land the project resides. 2007 was a year for study and analysis, and in 2008 the group set to work, de-activating roads, removing invasive plants, propagating native plants, and preparing the ground for seeding. The BC Hydro Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program is providing the major funding for this work.

The project area is ecologically unique, belonging to the Ponderosa Pine very dry hot subzone (PPxh2) and, as such, it is potentially host to a number of unique



FIGURE 1. Disturbance on the grand scale: construction of the Seton Dam and Powerhouse in the 1950s. The Fraser River is in the foreground.



FIGURE 2. Using heavy equipment to deactivate old roads.

and rare species, including the Western Screech Owl, the Western yellow-bellied Racer Snake, the Spadefoot Toad, and various bat species.

I had the privilege of visiting the site in the summer of 2010, and was struck by two things. First was the pride and enthusiasm of the project volunteers. Second

was the scale of the restoration undertaking. The site was originally destroyed by bulldozers and earthmovers, and these naturalists are not shy about using big, industrial machinery to help put things back in ecological order.

Kim North of the Lillooet Naturalist Society is the Project Manager, Odin Scholz is the Restoration Specialist, and Chief Michelle Edwards of the Cayoose Band is a key player in the project. Scholz is enthusiastic about the progress. “It is amazing to see the ecological healing on ground that was once nothing but weedy roads, broken asphalt, and piles of gravel,” he says. “We’re now seeing grasslands developing, and animals moving back in.”

I look forward to reporting on the future progress of this innovative project.

Suggested Links

- Gayton, D. 2001. Ground Work: Basic concepts of ecological restoration in British Columbia. <http://www.forrex.org/publications/forrexseries/ss3.pdf> (Accessed January 2012).
- Society for Ecological Restoration, British Columbia Chapter website: <http://www.ser.org/serbc/default.asp> (Accessed January 2012).

Contact information

Don Gayton is a FORREX Dry Forest and Grassland Extension Specialist based in Summerland.
Email: Don.Gayton@forrex.org

Citation –

Gayton, D. 2011. LINK News: Ecological Restoration in Lillooet. *BC Journal of Ecosystems and Management* 12(3): xviii-xix. <http://jem.forrex.org/index.php/jem/article/view/183/105>.