

## Realizing Common Ground

# Keeping nature in our future

Ellen Simmons

The *Keeping Nature in our Future* initiative is creating a strategic road map for biodiversity conservation in the South Okanagan–Similkameen region. This collaborative endeavour represents a plan to determine priorities for protecting the health and resilience of the region’s natural areas, and a decision-making strategy to enhance and preserve the natural legacy of the South Okanagan–Similkameen.

First Nations’ input on the biodiversity conservation strategy was spotlighted during a recent seminar jointly hosted by the **South Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Program** and the **En’owkin Centre**. The objective of the January 19th meeting, entitled “Biodiversity Conservation Strategy: Realizing Common Ground,” was to further the immense amount of work already completed for the strategy. Presentations centred on projects currently under way in the region that may be of value to the strategy.

This event brought together representatives from several First Nations groups who highlighted ongoing environmental work and discussed the strategy’s present and future goals. The gathering focussed on the shared responsibility we all have in our response to change—to work together and set aside our differences with the knowledge that we do have common ground.

**Bryn White**, program co-ordinator of the South Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Program, welcomed the participants and presented an overview of the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy.

**Jeannette Armstrong**, Executive Director of the En’owkin Centre, provided insight on the purpose of the seminar—to share views with each other and to collaborate. Both actions generate a strong process for making change happen through a solidarity of action to work within the confines of common ground. In the Nsyilxcen language, *En’owkin* comes from the word *En’owkinwix<sup>w</sup>*, which describes how communities should operate by means of deep communication as a community process. In this way, communities must be able to include everyone—*En’owkinwix<sup>w</sup>* is an inclusion-seeking process.



*Some of FORREX’s ongoing environmental work involves the integration of Indigenous knowledge with prescribed burning. Here, we discuss the important role of fires in our environment at an ecological reserve near Summerland, B.C. (left to right: Sam Mitchell, Joanne Dennis, RJ Edwards, Levi Bent, Richard Armstrong, and Levi George; Ellen Simmons photo).*

I spoke of FORREX’s ongoing work concerning traditional burns and mapping projects for First Nations culture and values (*see above*). The following are some of the other topics covered during the seminar.

- **Jeanine Terbasket** and **Lauren Terbasket** discussed the proposed National Park for the South Okanagan Similkameen Region.
- **Chad Eneas** and **Joan Phillip** reviewed the conservation and environmental collaborative projects within the Penticton Region.

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- **Myrah Baptiste** and **Ron Hall** talked about the South Okanagan Similkameen Syilx Environmental Committee and the promotion of Syilx values in conservation areas.
- **Karilyn (Long) Alex** offered some information about Okanagan Nation Alliance's work on the McIntyre Dam issue, the Okanagan River Restoration Initiative, and future projects.
- **George Saddleman** introduced himself as the new outreach co-ordinator for the Okanagan Nation Alliance's Natural Resource Land Use Team.

For more information on the *South Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Program* and the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy, go to: <http://www.soscp.org/>

For more information on the *En'owkin Centre*, go to: <http://www.enowkincentre.ca/about.html>

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