

SOSCP Annual Report 2002 – 2003

Introduction

This year, the third year of the program, has seen significant progress in terms of implementing the SOSCP strategic plan. The six teams in SOSCP are actively implementing the strategies for conservation of important habitats, the north-south corridor and biodiversity conservation. By demonstrating progress on the ground, SOSCP has also become a model for successful conservation Partnerships.

The Annual Report outlines the many accomplishments of the teams working to implement the conservation strategies. The following are some of the accomplishments of the partners.

Highlights of the Year's Accomplishments

Conservation Legacy Fund

SOSCP, with the Community Foundation of the South Okanagan, formed the SOSCP Conservation Legacy Fund to perpetuate conservation activities in the South Okanagan Similkameen. The Legacy Fund, the first conservation fund dedicated to the needs of the program area, provides an opportunity for residents to contribute to a conservation legacy that can sustain conservation forever in the South Okanagan-Similkameen.

Partnership Building

The Partnership grew from 31 to 32 Partners. The Osoyoos Lake Stewardship Society joined SOSCP as a Partner. Growth of the Partnership has centred around strategic objectives of working with cross border groups and non traditional conservation organizations. In addition to the 32 organizations that have formally joined SOSCP, there are other organizations that SOSCP cooperates with on a less formal working basis. These organizations include the Canadian Okanagan Basin Technical Working Group, Forrex (forestry extension) and well as local government organizations.

Technical Environmental Advisory Committee

The Technical Environmental Advisory Committee (TEAC) was formed as a groups of volunteer

professionals to provide technical advice to the RDOS board and planners on environmental issues. The role of the TEAC is to ensure good technical information on the environment is available for local government decision making. The TEAC is available to rural directors in the program area, and has been formally endorsed in the updated Official Community Plan for rural Oliver.

Okanagan River Restoration

SOSCP is working with the Canadian Okanagan Basin Technical Working Group on a pilot project to restore a section of the Okanagan River. The river, considered BC's most endangered river, has lost approximately 90% of the riparian habitat and only about 10% of the river has not been channelized and remains in a natural or near natural state. This project called "proof of concept" involves purchase of private land, a set-back of the dykes to recreate a natural flow of the river, and habitat restoration for both fisheries and riparian habitat values. Activities during the year included reaching a cooperation agreement and investigation of potential land purchases and funding sources.

SOSCP Governance Policy

During the year the Partners developed a governance policy to address issues of branding of the SOSCP name, improved decision making and long term funding. Development of a governance model had been identified as a priority for the program. A committee was formed by the Partners to work on governance issues and options, and a formal governance policy was approved by the Partners in January 2003. In addition to the policy statement on governance, the Partners confirmed their commitment to support the SOSCP Partnership, defined the roles and positions in SOSCP, endorsed the role of an Executive Committee and defined the scope of endorsements and advocacy on conservation issues.

Work of the Teams

All six teams were actively implementing their work plans as part of the overall, coordinated strategy of SOSCP. There were more than 50 projects going on over the past year under the SOSCP umbrella. Details of the accomplishments of individual teams are discussed in following sections. Two areas in particular should be noted. The Outreach team made great strides in communication and awareness to build support for conservation in the community and to improve communication between Partners. In addition, members of the Science team worked to draft a Landscape Recovery Plan for the recovery of species at risk in the SOSCP area. The development and effective delivery of recovery efforts through SOSCP is critical in the SOS area due to the large number of species at risk, common threats, the complex landscape and due to the high level of concern for other species which may not (yet) be on the endangered list.

Cross Border Initiative

SOSCP continued to coordinate with and support the formation of the Okanogan-Similkameen Conservation Corridor Program (OSCCP) in Washington State. This program has been modeled after SOSCP and used the SOSCP Partner contributions to help obtain US federal matching funds for their program. SOSCP and OSCCP are looking at areas for sharing scientific and stewardship

information and for joint funding of cross border projects

Contributions of the Partners

This year saw continuing growth of contributions from the Partners. The contribution by the Partners, including cash and in-kind contributions, exceeded \$3.2 Million. This is an increase of just under 15% from the previous year.

The source of contributions by sector are shown in the attached figure. The year saw a major increase in the contributions for the non-government sector to over 51%. This illustrates the successful leveraging of resources that result from the cooperative nature of the partnership.

In Summary

The Partnership has made significant progress in implementing the strategic plan for conservation in the SOSCP area. The Partners have shown their commitment to the Partnership and significantly increased their total contributions to conservation in the program area. The program is also increasing its profile and general acceptance in the community.

report from the program manager (cont/d...)

SOSCP Contributions 2002-03
\$3,200,000
Non-Gov't
51%
Federal
30%
Provincial

19%

report from the chair

This has been an exciting year for SOSCP. This third year of operation has seen the program achieve results on the ground to protect important habitats and species at risk. I am particularly proud of the cooperative effort of the Partners for habitat securement – the purchase of sensitive habitats, land donations and land covenants. The purchase of two large parcels of land north of Osoyoos Lake and the Lehman Springs EcoGift Donation are two examples of the securement team's efforts.

During the year the Partners re-committed to supporting SOSCP, the vision and strategic plan, and to the values of cooperation and collaboration. We all know that the South Okanagan Similkameen is a very important area. The successful collaborative effort of the Partners in SOSCP has resulted in a concentrated effort of expertise and resources into the South Okanagan and Similkameen. This is a major achievement. It has raised the profile of the environmental values of the South Okanagan Similkameen and given priority to the recovery efforts for species at risk. It is hard to imagine that the South Okanagan Similkameen would have achieved or would continue to maintain its position as a prime focus of conservation efforts without the SOSCP.

The SOSCP is a good model for collaboration. An example is that SOSCP was able to serve as model for a cooperative conservation program along the Okanagan and Similkameen rivers in Washington State. We look forward to increased cooperation with our neighbors to the south to share expertise and to achieve common conservation objectives in the watersheds.

While it is important for us to constantly focus on achieving results on the ground, we also have to look at sustaining these efforts over the longer term. This requires increasing community awareness of the environmental values and increasing involvement of local governments in conservation. The long-term success of our conservation efforts depends in large part on the commitment of local Partners. We are achieving significant progress in this area. Our outreach program has been very busy and effective in supporting local events and with some new events in the community such as the fall wildlife forum.

I want to thank all of our Partners for their time and commitment over the past year to make SOSCP successful. In particular, the volunteers organizations, team leaders and other staff from agencies who have volunteered so much of their time to SOSCP. I also want to give heartfelt recognition to Rob Hawes our Program Manager. Without program coordination and management, the program would not succeed. It has been my pleasure to work with Rob and I can assure you that the job of chair would be impossible without his dedication and wisdom. This is a challenging job with 32 Partners organizations. A special thanks Rob for your contribution to facilitating our collaborative efforts.

SOSCP Chair Bill Turner with Past chair Trish Hayes.

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BACKGROUND

The South Okanagan Similkameen – A National Treasure

A combination of geography, geology and climate have combined to make the South Okanagan and Similkameen valleys a unique part of Canada. From the dry desert-like bench lands, shady cottonwood riparian woodlands along the rivers and tributaries, to upland forests and rocky terrains, the region has a rich variety of habitat types. Due to habitat diversity and the fact that these ecosystems are in such close proximity, the region supports one of the highest ratings for “species richness” in the country. Some of these species are found nowhere else in Canada or the world. For this reason, the South Okanagan Similkameen is known as Canada’s “hotspot” for species richness and rarity.

Animals such as the Yellow-breasted Chat, Pallid Bat and Tiger Salamander are among 38 COSEWIC-listed species at risk (Federal) and 256 Provincially listed species at risk. Due to increasing human pressures within this small geographic area some species are facing local extirpation, while others have already disappeared from the region. The goal of concerned citizens throughout Canada is to ensure that the wildlife diversity of the South Okanagan Similkameen is conserved in perpetuity.

The Okanagan-Similkameen corridor is also integral to maintaining the biological diversity and ecological adaptation of natural environments in British Columbia. The corridor provides a vital link for plants and animals between the interior grasslands of British Columbia and the Great Basin and dry interior desert ecosystems to the south.

Program History

The South Okanagan Similkameen is a focal area for cooperative efforts to conserve biodiversity. The South Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Program (SOSCP) represents a unique effort of cooperation of local, regional, provincial and national and international organizations towards conservation of the wildlife and habitats of the South Okanagan Similkameen.

The formation of the SOSCP follows a long history of dedicated conservation activity in the region. Habitat conservation for wildlife began in the 1960’s, with the securement of important wildlife lands and the later formation of provincial parks and ecological reserves. The movement towards ecological sustainability continued as many local groups formed, specializing in various aspects of conservation.

On July 2, 2000, 19 government and non-government organizations formed SOSCP when they

signed a Statement of Cooperation which outlined principles for partnering together in a mutual effort of cooperation. In 3 years the program has grown to include 32 Partner organisations. By working together, sharing information and resources, the Partners believe they can achieve more than they could working alone. This type of partnership between Government and non-government organizations is setting a model for conservations in other areas.

The purpose of the SOSCP is to coordinate conservation efforts to maintain the rich biodiversity of the area, including species at risk, and a viable ecological corridor between the deserts of the south and the grasslands to the north.

The Partners developed a 20 year strategic plan with a vision for SOSCP. The vision is : “A healthy environment that sustains the diversity of indigenous plants and animals while enriching people’s lives”. This vision reflects the desire for both environmental and economic sustainability.

In order to achieve the objectives of the program, specific goals were established for conservation of the four broad habitat types that occur in the area: riparian-wetlands; grassland/shrub-steppe; rocky terrain; and coniferous forests. The specific habitat goals were established in the SOSCP Prospectus report. A strategic plan was developed to guide strategies and work plans to achieve the habitat conservation goals.

The SOSCP program has six strategies, each with a team of Partners to develop and implement the work plans.

Focus On Habitat

Many SOSCP efforts focus on habitats that are important to a variety of species at risk and associated wildlife. There are four main habitat types in the South Okanagan Similkameen that are of special importance to species at risk. Together these four habitat types, often occurring in close proximity in the narrow valleys, leads to the richness of the species which occur in the area.

Grassland and Shrub-Steppe

Home to many rare and endangered species, including Badgers, Sage Thrashers and the rare Behr's Hairstreak Butterfly, these habitats are extremely sensitive. Being an extension of the American deserts to the south, these grasslands are corridors for the migration of desert-adapted wildlife. With sandy soils and dry climate, these habitats are easily damaged and slow to heal. Conservation efforts attempt to reduce damage or destruction of these areas while maintaining connectivity.

Wetland and Riparian

These moist habitats are the most biologically productive. Providing shelter and food for animals such as the Western Screech Owl, the Yellow Breasted Chat and the Great Basin Spadefoot, wetland/riparian areas are the most imperiled in the South Okanagan Similkameen. Approximately 85% of the historical riparian habitats in this region have been lost.

Coniferous Forests

Defined by large and stately conifers such as Ponderosa Pine, Douglas Fir and Western Larch, these forests have often evolved with and been maintained by fire. Veteran trees provide habitat for White Headed Woodpeckers and a variety of other cavity-nesting animals. Habitat restoration in these areas often entails forest thinning and prescribed fire.

Rugged Terrain

Rock outcrops, cliffs and jumbled talus slopes provide shade and shelter for many plants and animals. Snake dens, bat roosts, bird nests and Bighorn Sheep lambing areas are frequently located in these rocky habitats.

SOSCP Teams:

Science

Applying scientific knowledge

Outreach

Involving the community in conservation

Stewardship

Voluntary caring for the land

Traditional Ecological Knowledge

Applying first nations' knowledge and ecological heritage

Ecologically Sustainable Land Use

Assisting in land use decisions

Habitat Securement

Securing critical habitats

Science: *Applying scientific knowledge*

In accordance with the recovery process and requirements set out by RENEW and COSEWIC, recovery of species, habitats and the overall South Okanagan Similkameen ecosystem must be based on sound science. Scientific approaches (and specific actions) required for recovery of species, habitats and the overall South Okanagan Similkameen ecosystem include:

- 1. Biological Research, Inventory and Monitoring** (including data collection and analysis, and evaluation of prescribed recovery treatments);
- 2. Recovery Planning** (including literature research and review, data analysis, mapping, identification of knowledge gaps and development of recovery prescriptions);
- 3. Science Reporting** (including communication and reporting of scientific results and provision of science-based recovery advice).

Successful implementation of these scientific strategies will provide critical information required for delivery of other recovery strategies and actions including habitat securement, habitat management, land use planning, development of policy and legislation, and development of outreach and stewardship programs.

Within the South Okanagan – Similkameen area, the SOSCP Science Team has been formed to provide sound scientific advice to the Steering Committee, other SOSCP teams and Partners to help identify, prioritize, plan, implement and evaluate recovery objectives and actions in the SOSCP area. While the Science Team will strive to provide quality assurance for science-based recovery activities in the SOSCP area, lack of full scientific certainty will not be used as a reason to delay measures to avoid or minimize threats to species and habitats at risk. The goal of the Science Team is to develop and evaluate SOSCP priorities and prescriptions that are based on science, monitoring the ecological results of prescriptions, and, using evaluation of those results to refine subsequent prescriptions. The Strategic Objectives of the Science strategy are:

1. Form a team of broad conservation expertise to provide scientific advice to Steering Committee and other SOSCP Teams
2. Identify species and habitat conservation priorities to meet SOSCP vision/goals
3. Identify and prioritize research and monitoring needs
4. Monitor key selected ecosystem indicators
5. Review and assist in preparing status reports regarding distribution, abundance and trends in populations of selected species
6. Participate in species/ecosystem recovery planning
7. Recommend scientifically valid monitoring and evaluations of prescriptions
8. Assess ecological responses of “Species/Ecosystem Recovery Plans”
9. Assess achievement of “SOSCP Criteria for Program Success”

Some of the Science team’s work this year includes :

1. **South Okanagan Ecosystem Recovery: A scientific assessment.** Independent assessment of the “state of the valley,” and of the needs, issues and species priorities for a South Okanagan-Similkameen Ecosystem Recovery Strategy.
2. **South Okanagan – Similkameen Habitat Atlas.** Determine distribution and status of species populations and recovery habitats: map species distributions (1:20,000 Terrestrial Ecosystem Mapping); Identify threats, biologically limiting factors, recovery habitat requirements and required ecological interconnections and processes; Identify ecological and socio-economic considerations involved in recovery; Determine recovery potential, rationale and scale of required recovery action.
3. **Complementarity Analysis and Mapping.** Identify priority areas to be secured and/or managed for the recovery of multiple species at risk.
4. **Vaseux Lake Riparian Restoration Project.** Planning and implementation of in-stream,

wetland and riparian restoration project.

5. **White Lake Basin Recovery Project.** Planning and implementation of landscape-level conservation/recovery effort.
6. **Antelope brush Recovery Working Group.** Setting specific objectives and development of action plans and strategy for the conservation of antelope-brush habitat.
7. **Species At Risk Inventory Projects.** Inventory for Species at Risk on federal, provincial and private lands; primarily for birds, amphibians, snakes and Behr's Hairstreak.
8. **Species At Risk Monitoring Projects.** Monitoring of at-risk species populations in the SOSCP area; in particular Yellow-breasted Chat.
9. **Species At Risk Research.** Research by a range of university researchers (OUC, UBC, SFU) and government biologists on species at risk. Population demography and habitat research for at-risk species populations in the SOSCP area (for example Yellow-breasted Chat, White-headed Woodpecker, Sage Thrasher, snakes and amphibians). Other research on various species. _____

OUTREACH

The goal of the Outreach Team is to foster increased conservation awareness, involvement and commitment of residents and visitors alike. Outreach activities will strengthen the conservation ethic to protect the biodiversity of the region.

The third year of the Outreach Program saw excellent success and movement forward. The focus of the Outreach program was to support awareness and recovery of Species at risk. Highlights for the Outreach Team include supporting the annual Meadowlark Festival, various community lecture series, new opportunities for school and community involvement, and the creation of a new outreach coordinator position. A number of events and displays by all SOSCP members also contributed to the overall conservation awareness of area residents and visitors.

Outreach Projects

The following events and projects are part of the Outreach teams' initiative to foster increased conservation awareness, involvement and commitment of residents and visitors alike; and to strengthen the conservation ethic to protect the biodiversity of the region. Information regarding the SOSCP program and the conservation activities of the Partners are highlights at many of these events.

The Meadowlark Festival

The Meadowlark Festival is one of the major outreach events highlighting the natural attributes of the South Okanagan Similkameen and species at risk. SOSCP is a major sponsor of the Meadowlark festival, and many of the SOSCP Partners are directly involved. The program benefits from increased public awareness, exposure through the festival brochure, the Nature Expo, and the bus tour that introduces participants to various project and Partners. The outreach coordinator has been involved with the Nature Expo, SOSCP bus tour as well as assisting with festival coordination.

Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance Lecture Series

The OSCA lecture series raises public awareness about ecological issues facing the people, wildlife and habitats in the SOSCP area. The OSCA lecture series included two lectures as part of the "Testing the Water's" Series in which two speakers and various local conservation groups presented information regarding lake and watershed stewardship. This series was attended by over 60 people.

The Law Talks series sponsored by OSCA and by the Community Law office had 5 speakers present information on environmental economics. This lecture series was very successful, with over 200 people in attendance.

The lecture series continued with a speaker's event, "The Heat is On" lecture series involved two guest speakers who raised awareness about climate change and its impacts locally. 40 people attended the lectures.

SOSCP / OSBFP Fisheries Awareness Night

The Fisheries Awareness Night on March 25th 2002 at the En'Owkin Centre had guest speakers give information to community members regarding fisheries management, stewardship and community involvement. This even included displays and presentations by four guest speakers. Over 50 people attended the event.

Okanagan Falls Elementary School Workshops

Seven environmental educators from the community gave a series of presentations to students at the Okanagan Falls Elementary School as part of a full-day earth day event. Topics included endangered species, bighorn sheep, bears, spiders, weeds, the puddles project and an art collage. Nine classes and the entire school staff participated in the half-day event. This was seen as highly successful by both teachers and environmental educators and is hoped to become a model for future school programs.

Osoyoos Lecture Series

The Osoyoos Desert Society has been actively promoting a variety of SOSCP Partners and conservation issues during it successful lecture series this quarter. Lectures included weed control, fire management, the puddles project, SOSCP, Bluebirds and Partners in Flight. The lectures were well attended.

Public Displays

The SOSCP display was erected at various show venues and events. Three home shows, the environmental mind grind challenge at Cherry Lane mall and the fisheries awareness night promoted environmental information to over 3000 community members. Updated display materials for the SOSCP display include a new SOSCP brochure, a new brochure for the Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance, as well as a new poster of SOSCP Partner logos.

Green Gifts Open House Event

The Green Gifts Open House Event sponsored by the SOSCP was initiated in December 2001 as an annual event highlighting all SOSCP Partners. This event, held at the Environmental

Resource Centre, promotes Christmas giving that supports local conservation organizations by way of donations, sponsorships and purchase of merchandise. It also serves as a venue to familiarize the public with the Environmental Resource Centre and to raise public awareness regarding conservation. The event was highly successful, bringing 150 people to the office and raising over \$1500 for SOSCP Partners.

Environmental Resource Centre

The downtown office at 27A Front Street continues to act as a centre for environmental outreach that promotes awareness of endangered species and critical habitats. Funds from the Okanagan Similkameen Boundary Fisheries Partnership helped to establish a collection of aquatics and fisheries information, as well as new display stands. The resource centre also promotes the new outreach materials regarding snakes, cottonwoods and beavers produced by the South Okanagan Stewardship Program. The office is currently being used as the headquarters for the Meadowlark Festival.

Okanagan Falls Community Program

Several members of the Okanagan Falls community were contacted to gain input for the proposed Okanagan Falls Project. Members of schools, chamber of commerce, the ranching community and the regional district were contacted. All individuals indicated that the project would be well received.

STEWARDSHIP

The goal of Stewardship under SOSCP is to enhance and promote land stewardship by landowners, land managers, and interested community groups in order to protect the diversity of native plants and wildlife. The activities and projects of the SOSCP Stewardship Team work towards this goal, and the overall aims of SOSCP.

Stewardship Essential Services, Coordination & Support

- *Protocol/Operating Principles for SOSCP Stewardship Delivery*

Since the inception of SOSCP, stewardship activities have increased exponentially and there are now more opportunities with increased attention and funding to raise awareness of key conservation issues. This increased focus on stewardship is welcomed; however, it has created some confusion on the part of landowners both in terms of multiple contacts delivering different stewardship messages and of understanding who is who.

It was recognized that some key operating principles were needed to both maximize limited resources and deliver a cohesive and well-coordinated stewardship delivery program on behalf of SOSCP.

The SOSCP Stewardship Coordinator and key members of the SOSCP Stewardship Team drafted a set of operating principles/protocol for SOSCP partners. These operating principles/protocol were presented to and approved by the SOSCP Steering Committee, and all partners, stewardship projects, and initiatives are being asked to operate in accordance with these principles.

- *SOSCP Landowner Contact & Stewardship Database*

The SOSCP Landowner Contact & Stewardship Database is a confidential registry of landowners and their properties that has been developed and maintained by The Land Conservancy as part of its role as Chair for the SOSCP Stewardship Team. The creation of this database was identified as a key element of the Stewardship Team's 5 year strategic plan. The database is designed to track stewardship activities and help ensure effective and coordinated delivery of landowner contact and stewardship initiatives.

By the end of the 2002-2003 fiscal year, there were records for 357 landowners owning 504 properties in the database. Many of these landowners/properties have been linked to GIS based cadastral maps (property maps) and are being used to help with stewardship planning and coordination in the SOSCP area.

- *Conservation Covenants & Stewardship Agreements*

A significant amount of work was done over the last year to raise awareness and understanding about what conservation covenants are and how they can be used, as well as the promotion of various forms of stewardship agreements. Workshops, presentations, articles, radio interviews, and displays were all used to inform landowners, professionals, and the general public about conservation covenants and stewardship options. In the 2002-2003 fiscal year, The Land Conservancy (*TLC*) worked on 5 conservation covenants, which are now at various stages of discussion and negotiation. These covenants propose protection for up to 200 ha of grassland/shrub-steppe, riparian, wetland, and coniferous forest habitats.

This was also the first year for the Max Lake Conservation Covenant on Penticton's West Bench. Covenant holders, *TLC* and the Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen conducted the first annual monitoring visit for the Max Lake Conservation Covenant. Similarly, The Nature Trust (*TNT*) was also into the first year of its covenant on the Long Ranch south of Okanagan Falls. Monitoring of this covenant will occur this coming year.

· *Donations of Land*

The Land Conservancy actively worked on two donations of land this year, with a third donation in early stages of consideration. The Lehman Springs Ecological Gift donation of 24 ha of coniferous forest habitat progressed through the year. The Lehman Springs EcoGift is expected to be one of the largest donations of land in the southern interior of BC in terms of cash value. This donation protects a special forest that includes a stand of old growth western larch trees and other large ponderosa pines, interior douglas firs, and spruce trees. It is known habitat for a variety of bird and wildlife species, including the Williamson Sapsucker, and a recent (unconfirmed) sighting of a white-headed woodpecker. According to the BC Conservation Data Centre's Large Trees Registry, the largest of the old growth western larch found within the donation area is the second largest in BC.

Stewardship Projects

· *Action for Antelope-Brush*

The Action For Antelope-brush project focused on landowners who have expressed an interest in habitat enhancement and securement/protection opportunities, and on identifying large functioning habitat units comprised of several properties with the idea of promoting a neighbourhood/community approach to stewardship. Focal species targeted under this project included California Bighorn Sheep and Behr's Hairstreak.

Over the last year, the Action for Antelope-brush project drafted and prepared a new Living in Nature Series informational document called "Butterflies of the Antelope-Brush Plant Community", presented a paper at the 2003 Antelope-Brush Symposium, contributed to recovery planning for Antelope-brush and Behr's Hairstreak, completed an environmental assessment of the Fairview Heritage Townsite, and helped the Fairview Townsite Society with planning for the Eco-Discovery Centre. The project also contacted 93 landowners reminding them of the project and the importance of responsible stewardship, conducted follow-up site visits, identified a potential Antelope-brush stewardship/restoration demonstration site on private lands, facilitated discussions on habitat securement, and assisted *TLC* with planning a planting/restoration project. Project personnel will continue to work in cooperation with the applicable recovery teams, agencies, and organizations, along with landowners to help them protect and steward this rare plant community.

- Caring For Cottonwoods

The Caring for Cottonwoods project is an initiative of SOS Stewardship that focuses on remaining tracts of cottonwood found along the Similkameen River. The main activity conducted under this project in 2002-2003 was the preparation and printing of a new Living in Nature Series document called "Caring for Cottonwoods". A number of key landowners have been identified, and one landowner is working to restore cottonwood habitat on his property.

- Conservation Partners Program

Since being piloted by The Land Conservancy in the SOSCP area in the summer of 2001, the Conservation Partners Program has grown quickly and gained recognition from farmers, wholesalers, retailers, and consumers. In 2002, the program grew to 17 "Conservation Partners" who protected approximately 150 ha of habitat, including habitat that was confirmed to support a pair of Western Screech Owls, and other habitat areas with high potential for the Sage Thrasher and Yellow-breasted Chat. In addition to habitat protection, the program also worked with one farmer to plan and implement a planting/habitat restoration project, and is helping a couple of other farmers to plan habitat restoration/enhancement projects.

- White-headed Woodpecker Suet Feeder Program

The White-headed Woodpecker Suet Feeder Project was a component of a larger outreach project designed to increase public awareness about three COSEWIC listed species, the Yellow-breasted Chat, the Sage Thrasher, and the White-headed Woodpecker. Forty seven landowners were targeted in areas with known and recent sightings of White-headed Woodpeckers.

Each landowner was given a suet feeder to monitor for use by White-headed Woodpeckers. In many cases project personnel helped put up the feeder. All landowners were provided with informational materials on how to identify a White-headed Woodpecker, a number to call to report any sightings (the Species At Risk Hotline), and additional stewardship information, including materials on the Ponderosa Pine forest. Follow-up was conducted with the landowners and will continue over the next year.

- Lake Okanagan Foreshore Protection Project

The 2002-2003 fiscal year was the final year of the BC Lake Stewardship Society's landowner contact project on Lake Okanagan. In the summer of 2002, the project made contact with landowners on the south end of Lake Okanagan (within the SOSCP area). Approximately 50 site visits/homesite assessments were completed and information on shoreline stewardship was provided.

- Okanagan Tree Encroachment Project

Under the direction of the BC Conservation Foundation, the Okanagan Tree Encroachment Project calls for the use of thinning and prescribed fire to enhance/restore habitat for White-headed Woodpeckers. In 2002, this project proposed thinning and prescribed fire for approximately 80 ha of ponderosa pine forest. Thinning work was completed on land owned by The Nature Trust in the McLean Creek area, but the prescribed burn was delayed because

of site and fuel conditions. Site monitoring and additional thinning was also done in the Vaseux-Dutton area.

Additional thinning and prescribed fire projects benefiting California Bighorn Sheep and White-headed Woodpeckers were carried out by various agencies. This included the completion of thinning work on the westside of Vaseux Lake, with The Land Conservancy organizing volunteer work parties to help prepare the site for a planned burn. Six work parties were organized and over 100 volunteers responded putting in over 400 hours of work time to prepare the 20 ha treatment area. The Ministry of Forests and Ministry of Water, Land & Air Protection also worked on thinning/prescribed fire projects in the valley.

- Osoyoos Lake Stewardship Program

The Osoyoos Lake Water Quality Society has teamed up with the Department of Fisheries & Oceans to initiate the Osoyoos Lake Stewardship Program. In 2002-2003 the program purchased some equipment and with the help of a local elementary school and the high school, they raised and released over 500 salmon fry into the lake and taught the students about the salmon life cycle and habitat needs. To improve lakeshore monitoring, a video was made capturing the entire length of the shoreline of Osoyoos Lake and photos were taken at specific locations. The Osoyoos Lake Water Quality Society was able to purchase a new boat that will be used to continue their water quality monitoring project which has been active since the 1990's.

- Puddle Project

The second year of the Puddles Project brought some exciting changes for this stewardship project. Most significant of these changes was Ducks Unlimited Canada taking responsibility for administration of the Puddles Project with funding support from the EcoAction Community Funding Program. Late in the 2002-2003 fiscal year, Ducks Unlimited was able to hire a full-time Project Coordinator, which has allowed the project to gain momentum and start working with identified landowners. Through the summer of 2002, the project focused on promoting the provincial Frogwatch Program, and training volunteer wetland monitors.

- Riparian Habitat Restoration Project

The Nature Trust of BC and the Canadian Wildlife Service initiated this project a few years ago to help protect and restore riparian habitat needed by the nationally endangered Yellow-breasted Chat and other species using the riparian area. One of the main focuses of the project has been to install fencing that will stop livestock from damaging and destroying fragile riparian habitat. Last year, The Nature Trust installed fencing on five properties, protecting 35 hectares of riparian habitat. This adds to the 15 km of fencing installed in the previous year. Monitoring points established in previous years were monitored again for Yellow-breasted chats and other bird species.

- Riparian Rewards Initiative

The Riparian Rewards Initiative was designed to build on the success of SOS Stewardship's 3 year Riparian Restoration of Oxbows in the Okanagan Valley project. In 2002-2003, project personnel contacted 40 landowners and conducted 3 follow-up site visits. Additional planting work was organized for two habitat enhancement projects, and information on specific properties targeted for acquisition was gathered and provided to members of the SOSCP Habitat Securement Team. A significant amount of project energy went into working with landowners on the Marron River, assisting a landowner on her conservation goals, facilitating a community based stewardship project on the watershed, and providing landowners with stewardship and species information.

- SOS Stewardship

In 2002, SOS Stewardship Landowner contact program, under the SOSCP stewardship umbrella, was presented with a Minister's Environmental Award in the category of Environmental Stewards. This award recognizes the outstanding work and commitment made by SOS Stewardship to promoting private land stewardship and conservation within the SOSCP area. On the ground, SOS Stewardship was busy with its special projects (Action for Antelopebrush, Caring for Cottonwoods, Riparian Rewards Initiative, Stewardship of California Bighorn Sheep in Recovery, and Wildlife in Vineyards/Understanding Snakes

- Stewardship of California Bighorn Sheep in Recovery

This project was developed by SOS Stewardship to help support the recovery of California Bighorn Sheep in the Okanagan Valley and to build on the success of a previous Bighorn Sheep project. Mainly focusing on the east side of Skaha Lake and the McLean Creek/Okanagan Falls area, this project was active in assessing threats to habitat (proposed development hotspots), mapping potential problem areas, and bringing forward potential acquisition candidates for consideration by the SOSCP Habitat Securement Team. Habitat sensitive development and stewardship opportunities were discussed during site visits with landowners in the Heritage and Golden Hills subdivisions, and in the Vaseux Lake area.

The promotion of habitat sensitive development and protection will continue to be a focus under this project.

- Weed Management & Coordination

The Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen has taken a lead role in the implementation of weed education and coordination through the Regional Weed Coordinator and the regional weed committee. In 2002, weed control efforts focused on seven priority treatment areas (East Vaseux, Chute Lake, Osoyoos Oxbows & Ecological Reserve, White Lake Basin & Mahoney Lake, Kilpoola, Bald Range, Isintok to Shatford) identified by the regional weed committee. Agencies involved in weed control efforts included the Canadian Wildlife Service, Ministry of Forests, Ministry of Transportation, Ministry of Water, Land & Air Protection, Town of Osoyoos, Town of Oliver, Town of Summerland, Village of Keremeos, City of Penticton, Aquilla Networks, BC Hydro, BC Gas, Telus, Weyerhaeuser, Gorman Bros, Nickle Plate Mine, Upper Similkameen Indian Band, Osoyoos Indian Band, The Nature Trust, SOS Stewardship, and The Land Conservancy. Both The Nature Trust and The Land Conservancy were involved in organizing volunteer weed control work parties, which resulted in the treatment and

inventorying of more than 50 hectares of land. The Nature Trust also had a youth crew working on manual treatment and inventory of weeds.

- Wildlife in Vineyards/Understanding Snakes

The development of agricultural and residential properties on the fringes of the valley has resulted in increased encounters between residents, farmers, agricultural workers and snakes. This SOS Stewardship project collaborated on a snake educational initiative and coordinated the delivery of school talks, including the preparation and provision of informational packages for students living in snake country and school libraries.

New informational materials researched and developed under the project included a snake poster-board, a *Snake Facts/Northern Pacific Rattlesnake* fact sheet, a draft fact sheet called *Working in Snake Country*, and a discussion paper called *Managing Snakes in Agricultural Settings*. With funding support from the Agriculture Environment Partnership Initiative, this project is working on a demonstration project on managing snakes at Tinhorn Creek Vineyards.

This demonstration project will be used to show how snake fencing, working training, and other tools can help reduce conflicts and lost productivity when workers are disrupted by snakes.

Traditional ecological knowledge team

The En'owkin Centre TEK (Traditional Ecological Knowledge) workers and an advisory group made up of the knowledge keepers from each of the participating Okanagan bands worked together to deal with endangered species, conservation and habitat restoration.

- Yellow Breasted Chat

Early in the spring of 2002, Christine Bishop in consultation with the TEK team hired a technician (Jason Emery) to do a point check bird count in the Gabriel Property Wetlands. TEK technician Richard Armstrong accompanied Jason and helped set up and do 4 specific point checks in that area. Nets were set up; bird species were caught and banded. A video was produced by the En'owkin Centre in collaboration with the TEK Technician and TLC (The Land Conservancy) to document the work that the Partners are doing to protect species at risk, Yellow Breasted Chat, painted turtles and tiger salamanders and habitat restoration.

- Wildlife Tour of Gabriel Property

During the spring and part of the early summer of 2002 TEK technician Richard Armstrong consulted with the Land Owners of the Gabriel Property, on the Penticton Indian Band, and obtained written permission to take biologists and conservationist and environmentalist and bird watching groups to the Wetland areas. These excursions lasted until nesting and fledging were completed. Many species of birds, amphibians, waterfowl and animals were observed. During these excursions, sites that were once burrowing owl habitats and badger habitats and long billed curlew habitats and sharp tailed grouse habitats were pointed out to the

biologist. Talks between the TEK technician Richard Armstrong and certain CWS members are discussing the possibility of the re-introduction of these species.

- Cottonwood Riparian Habitats

A think tank session was held at the En'owkin Centre with TEK Advisory groups on linkages of Ethno-botanicals of importance and species at risk on cottonwood riparian habitat. The En'owkin TEK team began special Eco-niche areas on the grounds of the En'owkin Centre. These special Eco-niche areas are designed to duplicate the specialized conditions of certain plants important to the Okanagan People and critical to the habitat recovery plans for Yellow-Breasted Chat. Some drip irrigation methods and special soils were brought in to accommodate certain plants temporarily until they are established and will be removed once recovery of natural ground cover is established. The movable temporary drip irrigation system was prepared designed and installed by the En'owkin Centre TEK workers.

The En'owkin TEK team were also involved in extensive soil testing for heavy metal traces and other contaminants along the old abandoned railway that goes through the En'owkin Centre. The TEK team can provide the results of these tests upon written request. A site map for the En'owkin Centre Grounds was developed with the help of Anne Hargrave, Eva Durance Janelle Parchumchuck and the En'owkin Centre TEK workers.

There were many events in conjunction with Eco-Action and community volunteers to sort label and plant seeds in small pots to get them started. Noxious weed eradication work groups scheduled as

In September of 2002 the Similkameen Indian Band was concerned about the impact on indigenous plants and medicines that could be lost or destroyed by a proposed pipeline route in the southern Okanagan. More specifically in the Madden Lake area. This area is a known berry picking and medicine gathering area of the Okanagan people. The TEK team went to the area and documented plants, medicines, and habitat that may be impacted. If required the list of species mentioned in the letter/document to the Similkameen Indian Band, "September 30, 2002, Lower Similkameen Indian Band, Subject: Plant species at risk in Proposed Pipeline" route to the Attention of Peter Wardenberg can be obtained from the Lower Similkameen Indian Band Office.

- **Native Plants**

There were many events in conjunction with Eco-Action and community volunteers to sort label and plant seeds in small pots to get them started. Noxious weed eradication work groups scheduled as community volunteer events on locatee lands were highly successful. The long-term plan is to eventually make available to other bands in the Okanagan any indigenous plant species that is at risk or threatened in their areas. The En'owkin TEK team was also involved with the gathering of wild seeds of indigenous plants. The seeds were gathered with the help Janelle Parchumchuck (SOSCP) and Eva Durance. The list of plant species that was propagated, transplanted and started from seed can be obtained by special written request from the TEK workers at the En'owkin Centre.

En'owkin Centre.

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- Western Screech Owl

During February and early March 2003 En'owkin Centre TEK technician Richard Armstrong and a well-known Owl man Jared Hobbs did a Scientific Survey of the endangered Western Screech Owl. The survey is conducted during the night in areas that are suspected Screech Owl Habitat. During the many cold nights of the survey a pair of mating Screech Owls were recorded and marked on a map giving GPS positions. Other Screech Owls were located and recorded, one site being across the creek from the En'owkin Centre. Also Andy Bezener a member of Partners In Flight accompanied us one night and was able to capture a picture of the Gabriel Property Screech owl. Results of this survey can be obtained from the En'owkin Centre TEK team or the Owl Survey group.

- TEK Protocols

Meetings of the TEK advisory group and the En'owkin Centre TEK team were planned and carried out and recorded in Penticton, Similkameen, and Oliver Indian Bands on March 5th 2002, March 8th 2002, March 15th 2002, and June 10th 2002. From these meetings the Elders of the Okanagan Nation passed a motion to support the work of the En'owkin Centre. The letter to the En'owkin Centre of the motion is dated 7th day of November 2002. The meetings were called to start a coordinated effort in each community to produce a protocol list and to document concerns of elders and band member gatherers. The development of a protocol document will identify how traditional ecological knowledge may be articulated and used to assist in the recovery and protection of species at risk. Concerns included over use, habitat erosion by livestock etc. A list of recommendations came out of these meetings. The list of recommendations and the dates of these meetings can be obtained from the TEK coordinator at the En'owkin Centre.

- TEK Education

As an aspect of TEK information outreach, the En'owkin Centre recently started; A cooperative program between the Centre and the Penticton Senior Secondary High School. The Outma Squilxw Band Operated School. The Eco-literacy program of NVIT College readiness. En'owkin Centre TEK is involved with these programs in that it takes the participating students to special sites on the Indian Reservation and teaches them about the Land and the culture and the species at risk in their habitats and their lines to Okanagan Cultural uses and conservation practices. This is an important program because it examines the plants, the Land and the culture and how all are connected as well as to familiarize them with species at risk in the South Okanagan. This program is aimed at giving the aboriginal student an understanding of how this community is an important remaining strong hold for some

of the last remaining pristine riparian habitats.

It is hoped that contents and the practices of this building will also be a teaching tool for the En'owkin Centre to be integrated into the recovery and restoration of habitat for rare and endangered species. It is the dream of those involved with TEK to someday produce our own group of experts who are versed in both the western science methods as well as TEK Knowledge in special medicine plants and recognition their uses and to be able to teach and pass on the knowledge to special people that are inclined to be indigenous keepers.

Ecologically Sustainable Land Use Team (ESLUT)

The goal of the Ecologically Sustainable Land Use Team (ESLUT) is to help SOSCP implement the strategic plan by providing sound technical information, tools and other kinds of support to those who advise on and make decisions about land use. Led by the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management with Terry Macdonald as the chair, this Team also includes the participation of the Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance, South Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship Program, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, BC Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection, BC Ministry of Forests, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Grasslands Conservation Council of BC, Okanagan Similkameen Parks Society, Protect our Parks and the Canadian Wildlife Service.

Projects undertaken by this Team during the 2002-2003 year include completion of the inventory and gap analysis of current land use planning tools on private and Crown lands in the SOSCP area, the establishment of a Technical Environmental Advisory Committee (TEAC) for the Regional District of Okanagan Similkameen, research on regional growth strategies, completion of a visioning process for Penticton and Area, and habitat mapping of sensitive ecosystems to support the Rural Osoyoos Official Community Plan.

- Inventory and Gap analysis of Land Management Tools in the SOSCP area

The work this year was to complete the report which is housed at the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management. The report consists of an inventory of current land use planning tools that apply to private land, as well as to provincial and federal crown lands (excluding Indian Reserves), in the SOSCP area. A spatial gap analysis was then completed using the database information to determine where land use planning tools fall short in conserving habitat for species at risk. The information from this project will be used to provide recommendations to land managers and policy makers.

- Technical Environmental Advisory Committee

The technical environmental advisory committee (TEAC) was approved by the Board of the Regional District of the Okanagan Similkameen (RDOS) as an advisory committee to the Regional District of the South Okanagan Similkameen. The advisory committee, made up of 12 volunteers with at least 15 years each of professional experience, is available to advise the Regional District with sound technical advice as it develops Official Community Plans, reviews major development proposals and in the implementation of the forthcoming Regional Growth Strategy.

- Sensitive Ecosystem Habitat Mapping

To support protection of sensitive habitats, the ESLUT has made it a priority to complete mapping of sensitive ecosystems for consideration in the updating of Official Community Plans. Areas that are mapped as sensitive ecosystems, can receive a Special Development Permit designation in local

planning and protection. Areas that are not mapped, do not receive local government protection. The ESLUT concentrated this year on developing the terms of reference, raising funding, and contracting with a consulting firm to complete approximately 7,000 acres of uplands in rural Osoyoos. A contractor was hired to begin the mapping project for completion in 2003-04.

Securement Team

The SOSCP Securement Team Consists of the following members:

Brad Arner	– Ducks Unlimited Canada (Chair)
Shawn Black	– The Land Conservancy of BC
Michael Dunn	– Canadian Wildlife Service
Rob Hawes	– SOSCP
John Holdstock	– Okanagan Region Wildlife Heritage Fund Society
Carl MacNaughton	– The Nature Trust
Tom Swann	– Nature Conservancy Canada
Bill Turner	– TLC

The Okanagan Region Wildlife Heritage Fund Society became the newest member on the Securement Team. John Holdstock is their representative.

The Securement Team meets approximately every three months to review activities of the partners and prioritize land parcels for potential securement. The Team reviews unsolicited referrals of land that is up for sale and targets specific areas that contain priority habitats. The partner organization take the lead on specific securement activities depending on the opportunity, funding and habitat type. The partners also cooperate on developing strategies for funding and securement options. To follow are some of the highlights of the partners achievements during 2002-2003.

- Proof of Concept Project

After an meeting between the SOSCP Securement Team and the Canadian Okanagan Basin Technical Working Group (COBTWG) the Proof of Concept project was announced. This cooperative effort between the two groups highlighted the mutual goals and benefits of the terrestrial and aquatic conservation efforts in the Okanagan. The project, which is ongoing, focuses on securing and restoring a section of the Okanagan River Channel with The Land Conservancy, Okanagan Region Wildlife Heritage Fund Society being the lead in negotiating with the landowners in the area of interest.

- Lehman Springs EcoGift Donation

This donation of 24 ha was completed in July 2003 (just outside of the Annual Report reporting period). Most of the activity to see this donation through to completion was done during the 2002-2003 fiscal year (completion of subdivision application and actual subdivision, preparation of transfer documents, revisions to the appraisal, etc.)

- Eagle Bluff/SORCO Property

In the 2002-2003 year, TLC negotiated an agreement to purchase the Eagle Bluff property that

is home to the South Okanagan Rehabilitation Centre for Owls. This 5.62 acre property is located adjacent to the Vaseux Bighorn National Wildlife area. Although small in size, this property is used by a variety of wildlife species, and a number of species at risk. In February TLC launched a public fundraising campaign to help raised the money needed for the purchase. This campaign is continuing. Once purchased, the land will be leased to SORCO for 99 years, and the site is being considered for a Burrowing Owl Breeding facility.

Similkameen River Pines (Harper) Property - TLC finished paying off the mortgage to this property last year

Osoyoos Oxbows – Nature Conservancy Canada (NCC), Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) and Canadian Wildlife Service together purchased 2 lots from the Quintal family at the north end of Osoyoos lake adjacent to SOWMA. The two parcels totalling approximately 120 acres will be restored to riparian, and wetland habitat as well as managed with an agricultural component.

soscp partner info
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