

Pilot diversity project coming to Chemainus

Chemainus will be the focus of a unique pilot project teaching the value of biodiversity this spring.

The Chemainus Biodiversity Education Project will be officially launched on May 22 by the POLIS Project on Ecological Governance with support from local groups and individuals. May 22 is International Biodiversity Day, and the theme this year is biodiversity and climate change.

Dr. Kelly Bannister, who heads the University of Victoria-based POLIS, said she hopes the Chemainus project will be a springboard for other Island community-based initiatives.

“While POLIS is Victoria-based, our work spans local-to-international levels and we are particularly interested to support community-driven projects on Vancouver Island that meet local research and educational priorities related to ecosystem and human well-being.”

She said the Echo Heights forest would be used as a field site for the project.

“This 52-acre mixed forest is unique in the area, given its size, high biological diversity, extensive accessible trails, and close proximity to town and local schools.

“We plan to develop educational materials for local schools and the general public, which could also be adapted for tourists. These materials will be based on active participation and experiential learning activities.”

An initial supporter of the project is the Cowichan Valley Naturalists Society. At the national level, Environment Canada has also indicated enthusiasm.

On May 25, a Variety Show will be held in Chemainus to help raise funds for the biodiversity project. Field activities will begin in June with anticipated participation of local schools, volunteers, First Nations experts and scientists. Results will be compiled and educational materials developed and made available to participating schools and organizations.

“We have a committed group of local volunteers who are getting the word out to the community,” Bannister said. “By May 22, we hope to have a number of organizations, businesses and government supporting



University of Victoria biologist Dr. Kelly Bannister is surrounded by salal, red huckleberry, mahonia, hemlock, red cedar, Indian plum, sword fern, liverwort, fungus and moss.

the goal of building understanding of the links between biological diversity and climate change.

“Biodiversity is something that could be forgotten as we all try to deal with the issue of climate change, but it’s really at the core of the debate,” she said. “Protecting local biodiversity can reduce the impacts of climate change in a number of ways.

A special webpage has been created for the pilot project. It is at: www.polisproject.org/projects/biodiversityeducation

For information on International Biodiversity Day, see Environment Canada’s website at:

<http://www.biodiv.org/programmes/outreach/awareness/biodiv-day-2007.shtml>

The local coordinator for the project is Chris Weicht who can be contacted at 246-1203 or at bio-variety@shaw.ca.

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