

Halalt Honour Our River Day participants asking for watershed management plan

The chance to hold a tiny salmon fry and then carefully release it back to the cool river waters makes an impression – on children and adults alike.

The Halalt First Nation hopes it is an experience that will last a lifetime for the 300-400 local school children and citizens who participated in “Honour Our River Day” hosted by Halalt on Sept 14.

Halalt Chief James Thomas explained the need to devote an entire day to the Chemainus River. It arose from concerns about the health of the river, which is key to Halalt’s well-being and also important to all communities of the region.

“We are connected to each other and to all living things by water. The health of our river is closely linked to the health of our communities. It is urgent we work together towards a healthy future for everyone.”

Chief James Thomas talked about how a once-healthy river has been threatened by logging and development. He said North Cowichan’s plan to pump millions of litres of water every day from the river’s aquifer is just the latest thing that will negatively impact the watershed.

“The histories of all of us have been written along our river,” he said. “The time has come to give back what we have taken. It is time to listen to and watch the river, to hear what it’s telling us.”

Clearly those who attended the gathering agreed as 150 people signed a Pledge to Our River declaring our role as stewards and guardians and calling for “a comprehensive watershed management plan before any more developments can impact Our River and its resources.”

Among the signatories was North Cowichan Mayor Jon Lefebure, who expressed his support for a watershed management plan.

“I don’t think there is anything more important than the water. I think it’s a resource that we can use to determine how much growth we can have and how we plan for the future,” Lefebure said.

“Obviously that’s been explained today, how important it is to Halalt and their concerns over the river, which are extremely valid and important and I think reflect what we all should be feeling about the river. Water is key.”

Following an opening ceremony on the riverbank, guides took visitors on tours showing native plants and Halalt’s work to introduce juvenile salmon to the river.

Highlights of the day included using a pole seine to catch and release fry (coho, cutthroat trout, stickleback and prickly sculpins or bullheads) led by fisheries biologist Dave Clough.

Halalt’s hatchery increases the chance of survival of the River’s salmon fry from 10 per cent to 70 per cent.

Aquaculture specialist Andrew McNaughton assembled a display of Halalt’s clam harvesting industry, which brings in hundreds of thousands of pounds of shellfish every year and provides jobs for dozens of people.

Educator Karen Gabriel, formerly of Halalt and now working with Langley schools, shared her traditional knowledge of plants along the River banks.

Ken Elliott of the Cowichan Native Plant Nursery had a display of native plants and information on habitat restoration.

The Chemainus Biodiversity Education Project showcased their activities and growing educational resources for using the nature as an outdoor classroom.

Following custom, Halalt fed all the guests a generous salmon barbecue lunch.

A special ceremony was held before closing to acknowledge an apology



Penelakut educator Florence James is thrilled at seeing a three-spine stickleback fry. Florence was one of the participants in Honour Our River Day.

from the family of education professor Budd Hall from the University of Victoria. The Hall family settled in the Chemainus River valley in 1874 on land that was later found out to be unfairly taken from Halalt and sold.

Professor Hall acknowledged his family’s gains at the expense of Halalt people. He has committed his career to supporting Aboriginal education.

“The people of Halalt should know they have a friend at UVic.”



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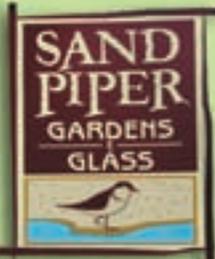
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