



HAT

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Are you a Good Neighbour to the Shoreline? HAT launches stewardship program in Metchosin

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The gentle lapping of a shoreline as the tide ebbs and flows over pebbles with beach grasses whistling in the wind is a familiar sound to many in Metchosin. Not far away new subdivisions and homes have taken root with rows of budding families finding a place to call home. With so many of these changes to the lands around the lagoons, salt marshes, and estuaries in the Metchosin region, the future of our healthy shorelines could be bleak.

“The communities in and around Metchosin are gifted with such superb intact natural areas, and the fate of the shores could be very different if local residents understand the value of what they have, and what they could be losing in the long run” says Paige Erickson-McGee, Stewardship Coordinator with Habitat Acquisition Trust (HAT).

That is why HAT is focusing their Good Neighbors Stewardship program this year on the Metchosin Shoreline, and the surrounding upstream lands that drain into the ocean. HAT is offering assistance to qualified and interested landowners to support and enhance natural features on their land, while maintaining current land use such as farming or recreation.

“Residents can learn how to control invasive species, provide habitat for birds, or create a garden that needs little to no water even in the dry summer months” says McGee, project manager for this initiative. “Whether or not you live by a stream or right on the ocean, we all contribute to what flows into them and can help be responsible for their well-being. The health of the creek impacts the estuary downstream and each landowner can play a role by being a good neighbour to nature.” says McGee.

The goal is to increase water quality and connecting natural areas like parks with habitat corridors through naturescaping, or naturally landscaped backyards and maintaining intact forests. These corridors allow wildlife, including bear and cougar, to travel through the community without disturbing the living space of residents. We also discuss options for those who may have habitat or want to enhance areas for animals like the Western Painted Turtle, Western Screech Owl, amphibians and bats.

One of the most common threats to our water is the increase of impervious surface – roofs, asphalt roads, paved parking lots – these just force the flow of water filled with metals, oils, and fertilizers into the creeks and directly into the ocean. “Without plants to filter out the

pollutants before they enter the ocean, there is a large pollutant load that can negatively affect our marine resources.” McGee says. “By shifting some simple actions, we can benefit our water quality which support wildlife as well as our own food source – salmon” McGee says.

Dave Polster, biologist and plant ecologist with over 30 years of experience in vegetation studies, reclamation and invasive species management, explains that healthy waters are not just for fish either. "Healthy riparian and coastal areas provide a multitude of benefits from holding the banks in place to providing habitat for birds and leaf litter and insect fall for the stream. Maintaining native woody riparian vegetation on properties will ensure these ecological services are available to local landowners" Polster says.

Retaining shorelines as a natural as possible not only provides habitat to our local fauna, but also maintains many ecosystem services that benefit us humans. Healthy shorelines prevent flooding and erosion with storm surge protection and by keeping the bank in place with the root systems. Over 80 hectares of land that borders the shoreline in this area is permanently protected by CRD Regional Parks and conservation covenants held by Habitat Acquisition Trust. Unfortunately however, less than 3km of the 48 km of shoreline in Metchosin, (just 6%) is legally protected for conservation purposes.

“We are looking forward to working with the locals, other community groups, and professional restoration specialists and ecologists like Nikki Wright of Seachange, Dave Polster, and Andy MacKinnon to determine how we can plan for future restoration options” McGee says.

HAT’s next step is focusing on increasing resident stewardship from the shoreline area. Which is why this year HAT will offering an important landowner survey, skills-based naturescaping workshops in the fall, shoreline walks and talks on habitat stewardship as well as free and confidential property visits to qualified landowners in this area with information on how to be a “Good Neighbour” to the Metchosin Shoreline. These visits include a stewardship plan for the property from land trust staff.

We want to hear from you about barriers to stewarding your land – what has prevented you from taking that first step? Look for our survey in the mail this summer, or visit the HAT info booth at the Metchosin Farmer’s Market, at Marine Day on July 11 at Witty’s Lagoon, and at many other upcoming Metchosin community events.

This project is funded in part by the Metchosin Foundation and donations from the public. For more information visit hat.bc.ca, call 250 995-2428 or email hatmail@hat.bc.ca.

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