

Forum to talk critical water issues

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Aside from a handful of naysayers, most believe conserving water is the way of the future.

But after you turn off the tap while you're brushing your teeth and use a rain barrel to gather water for your garden, where do you start?

What's the big picture?

Managing and protecting our watersheds is a complex and oftentimes confusing topic but with its increasing importance comes the need to get a proper handle on the daunting mountain of information.

That's why A Community Forum on Sustainable Approaches to Healthy Watersheds is being held on Environment Day, Saturday, June 5, at the Quw'utsun' Cultural and Conference Centre.

The event is being co-hosted by the BC Lake Stewardship Society, the Somenos Marsh Wildlife Society and the Quamichan Watershed Stewardship Society.

"The community needs to be both knowledgeable and informed about what's going on in their watershed because we're no longer at the time where the government will take care of this for us," said Roger Hart, chair of the Quamichan Watershed Stewardship Society.

He said he recognizes that to lay people the information can be quite overwhelming.

"That's one reason we're holding the forum," he said. "We've got some very eminent people coming. Not only are they eminent but they all possess the rare gift of being able to explain complicated issues in a simple but not over-simplified manner."

The speakers list for the event includes many experts from a variety of fields, including Canada's longest standing Environment Minister, David Anderson, now of the Cowichan Water Board.

"This talk will focus on an overarching view of community involvement in addressing these issues," Hart said. In other words, the big picture.



CREDIT: Andrea Rondeau, file
Water, our most precious resource, is the subject of a forum in June.

Among other speakers, Dr. Nancy Olewiler will discuss what happens when the goods and services provided by watersheds and the ecosystems that comprise them are under-appreciated and undervalued when it comes to making land use decisions.

Keynote speaker, Dr. Richard Hebda will address climate change and the implications it has on future planning while Dr. Ken Ashely and riparian biologist, Dave Polster, will speak about habitat enhancement.

The Cowichan Valley Regional District's Kate Miller will discuss innovative approaches to flood management that work with as opposed to against nature and can result in significant improvements of habitat for fish and wildlife species.

"What people have to understand...is that all of the water is interconnected and if you aren't careful you can solve a problem in one place only to move it further downstream," Hart explained.

The overriding goal, he said, is to start getting an informed discussion of the issues that are facing the watersheds in the province in general and in the Cowichan Valley specifically.

Having an integrated management plan is essential, Hart said.

"That's what we're trying to do on a small scale with Quamichan Lake and our friends at Somenos are doing it on a small scale there as well and we have high hopes for the Cowichan Water Board that they will take an even bigger purview," he said. "Water is becoming a very valuable resource and if we're not careful we will not have enough to go around. We have to protect and safeguard what we've got. It means looking at things in an integrated way."

The event will feature a wine and cheese social on Friday, June 4 at Godfrey-Brownell Vineyard, followed by the Saturday conference and a workshop, complete with field trip to Quamichan and Somenos Lakes on Sunday.

Cost of the Saturday presentations, including lunch and coffee, is only \$15. The Saturday dinner and keynote address is \$30 and the full conference, including the Friday reception, all presentations and meals on Saturday, and the Sunday workshop is \$65 for BC Lake Stewardship Society members (\$80 for non-members). To learn more visit www.bclss.org and click on the events link.

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