

## **Foreshore to Forest: Restoring the Integrity of the Shawnigan Watershed and Securing Clean and Abundant Drinking Water to 12,000 Citizens in perpetuity.**

Shawnigan Lake, unlike nearby Sooke Lake, is extensively developed. The consequences of historic and recent developments, along with an increasingly volatile climate, have accumulated to affect the capacity of the watershed to provide for both a community water supply and a thriving economy. Scientific trends are showing a steady decline in our drinking water quality, leading many of our citizens to act and advocate for change.

The CVRD electoral area that includes Shawnigan Lake is the largest unincorporated population in the province. It has a mixed economy of forestry, agriculture, mining, tourism, recreation and commerce. The rural community is facing increased pressures and is approaching a tipping point where both the public and private values of water and economy are at risk. Diversity of land ownership and the need to accommodate many competing interests makes the task of restoring watershed functions very complex. The Shawnigan Basin Society (SBS) is committed to working with all basin interests to identify values, define problems, consider the scientific record, and decide on courses of action to protect, conserve, restore, and enhance the environmental and economic values that make up the basin's natural and human ecology.

SBS, incorporated in 2012, was formed to engage the public, industrial landowners, land developers, and First Nations in a collaborative effort to restore the watershed to a fully functional condition and to increase the community's resilience in response to climate change. The Society's work began with a public discussion on the "state of the basin" including informal meetings and local field trips. It proceeded to collect a base of scientific information about the character and condition of the watershed: its streams, wetlands, forests, lakes, and foreshore along with accurate maps and models of the basin geography and human footprint.

As part of the SBS effort to consult and acquire public support, our work will develop upland forested, urban-forested, and foreshore restoration projects as best practices models. Funds from Aviva will focus on foreshore restoration. Where erosion has historically been resolved with the construction of cement or rock retaining walls, such solutions are short-lived, as they do not absorb wave energy nor encourage ecological services to enhance clean water. Yet, having completed a full photographic foreshore inventory, the SBS hopes to encourage property owners to replace these human-made walls with natural barriers. By mimicking nature's design identified in intact foreshore properties, an effective means of energy disbursement, ecological restoration, and long-term sustainability will occur. With one property already converted by several local youth and a national ecological restoration expert prescribing and educating in a voluntary capacity, the value of such work in conjunction with a full-scale community public engagement effort, solidifies our likelihood of success.

Shawnigan Lake residents are proud of our accomplishments to assume locally driven ecological control of our watershed and of the stewardship we are championing. With a complete baseline of technical research nearing fruition and valued at \$100,000, we have additionally been the recipients of equal valued in-kind donations! Our momentum has been established, yet it is important to continue opportunities for citizens to show their support toward our holistic endeavour. People ought to vote for our idea, as financial backing will ultimately result in the protection of people and property from increasingly volatile weather; protect the diversity of nature and quality of life; promote watershed integrity and sustainability in a growing community; and minimize environmental impacts and restore natural ecosystems.

During its early work, the SBS has engaged and received support from the CVRD Board of Directors and senior management, a variety of provincial agencies, environmental experts, TimberWest and Island Timberlands, First Nations, local groups, and many individual residents. Local taxpayers approved an annual levy of \$50,000 for the SBS, beginning in 2014. Direct financial support for a basin level effort toward watershed management is evidence of the willingness of the community to “put up the first dollar” and as leverage for other external sources of funding. The Society believes its goal and objectives are progressive and in alignment with the philosophies of our citizens who rely on Shawnigan Lake – our heart – for its ecological services, environmental integrity, and contributing economic health. Using Sooke Lake as our measure, method, and model (as seen in the attached video), Shawnigan Lake is determined to succeed in restoring our watershed to similar integrity. This work is being done on many levels and largely by a body of volunteers. From "Foreshore to Forest", we are committed to securing our long-term water supply and to building local resiliency.