

Our Relationship with Nature

One of the e-mail services to which I subscribe is a Newsletter called *World Science* at www.world-science.net. It is an excellent service, which usually provides information on fascinating scientific breakthroughs in the fields of cosmology, physics, biology, etc. It engenders a sense that we are living at a truly momentous time in world history and that we are moving rapidly into new domains of knowledge that enhance our understanding of ourselves and our place in the universe. That is the good news.

Much less encouraging, however, was a recent report in this Newsletter. Dated February 4, 2008, this article gave details of a study just published in the online issue of the research journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. Researchers Oliver Pergams, a biologist at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and Patricia Zaradic of the Environmental Leadership Program at Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, gathered and analyzed survey data on various nature activities from the past 70 years.

Pergams and Zaradic discovered “an alarming trend” that outdoor activities are on the wane as people around the world spend more leisure time online or watching TV. “There’s a real and fundamental shift away from nature—certainly here [in the United States] and possibly in other countries,” said Oliver Pergams.

The researchers analyzed data on per capita visits to US national parks as well as participation in such outdoor activities

as back-packing, fishing, hiking and hunting. They found that from 1981 to 1991 per capita nature recreation declined at rates from 1 percent to 1.3 percent per year, depending on the activity studied. The typical drop in nature use since then has been 18-25 percent, they said.

The researchers found that these data correlated very strongly with a rise in video-game playing, Internet surfing and movie watching. They labeled this shift to sedentary electronic diversions “videophilia” and remarked that it “has far reaching consequences for physical and mental health, especially in children.” Moreover, they added, “We don’t see how this can be good for conservation. We don’t see how future generations, with less exploration of nature, will be as interested in conservation as past generations.” And that, we might add, has not been particularly great.



For those of us promoting nature-based education at GICEL and other similar programs this is sobering news indeed. What are the benefits to civilization of more advanced knowledge in science if through its application in technology people become increasingly ignorant of

their fundamental connection to and dependence on nature? Of course, some of the electronic activities engaging people's attention are excellent educational programs about nature, but I would not put much faith in that as a way to raise ecological awareness. There is absolutely no substitute for direct nature-based experience to teach people, young and old, about who we really are in the circle of life and what responsibilities we have for stewardship and conservation.

However, let us not despair at the statistics reported in the research quoted above, but rather let us be energized to redouble our efforts to provide more opportunities for children and adults to experience our programs at GICEL. Let us also be enthusiastically strategic in promoting ecological learning as a high priority to political, corporate and community leaders. Above all, let us be the change we wish to see and understand that in re-energizing human connection to nature we are the people we have been waiting for.

Desmond Berghofer
Chair

Report from Board Chair For Year January 1, 2007 – December 31, 2007

In 2007 the GICEL Board oversaw the continuing development and expansion of GICEL's summer programs. We welcomed the development of the Saturna Ecological Education Centre (SEEC) as a partner in promoting the Gulf Islands as a place for fostering ecological learning. In the light of this new development the Board held a re-visioning day at SEEC on November 8,

2007, which has given us new direction for our role and development in the future.

Board Membership

During the year the Board received with regret the resignation of Kathy Tamashiro who served us well for several years as Secretary-Treasurer and established a solid financial recording and reporting system. We wish Kathy well in her new life in Hawaii. We were pleased to welcome in 2007 three new Board members: Jeff Hopkins (Superintendent of Schools for SD #64) as Recording Secretary, Cate McEwen (from Salt Spring Island), and Murray Doucette (Director of Human Resources SD #64) as Secretary-Treasurer.



At year end the Board of Directors was as follows: Desmond Berghofer (Chair), Mike Hoebel (Vice-Chair), Murray Doucette (Secretary Treasurer), Jeff Hopkins (Recording Secretary), Michael Dunn (Programs), Steve Dunsmuir, Shelly Johnson, and Cate McEwen.

Board Meetings

The Board held regular meetings on February 20, April 10, July 3, and December 7. The AGM was held on April 10 and the special re-visioning session on November 8.

Board Activities

The major activities of the Board in 2007 beyond overseeing the summer programs and finances were developing a working relationship with SEEC and carrying out our own re-visioning process. Separate reports on SEEC, the Summer Earth Education Programs, and the Re-Visioning Day appear elsewhere in this Newsletter. Following the re-visioning session, we had a lengthy discussion at the Board meeting on December 7 about GICEL's relationship with the Gulf Islands School District #64. We see advantages to both parties to developing a more formal relationship and we agreed to negotiate with the School District to develop a Memorandum of Understanding regarding a partnership between the two organizations.

GICEL Re-Visioning Day

On November 8, 2007 seven board members met at the Saturna Ecological Education Centre (SEEC) on Saturna Island to explore a new vision and direction for GICEL in the light of the development that has occurred since GICEL was established in June 2003.

Contextual Changes

A number of changes have occurred in recent years in the context in which GICEL operates. These include an increased political awareness of the reality of global warming and climate change, the creation of SEEC and the increased participation of other agencies in delivering environmental education programs, and various changes that have occurred in the provincial school system.



Implications for GICEL

With regard to climate change, we considered the sobering analysis of Professor Bill Rees of UBC of a human system that is quite clearly overwhelming the planet. Given the declared concern about this issue by the Provincial Government, we discussed the possibility of an **advisory** role for GICEL from the standpoint of our unique perspective on nature-based education and the role it can play in raising **awareness** of necessary action.

We reviewed GICEL's history, noting in particular the success and growth of our Summer Earth Education Programs. We recognized that for a variety of reasons we had not been able to proceed with classroom-based programs during the regular school year. However, we do have the teaching expertise to do this, so we should explore the potential of working with other parties who can contribute the pieces we don't have. In particular, with the development of SEEC the possibility now exists for GICEL to cooperate with SEEC to

deliver classroom-based education. This led us to discuss the possibility of **affiliation** with SEEC and with other possible partners like Royal Roads University and Island Conservancies. A more formal relationship with SD #64 is also a fit with this affiliation role.

At the same time we recognized that GICEL could play a more active role in raising **awareness** of the importance of ecological education. We could, for example, host conferences, act as a resource to other groups, submit articles for publication and write letters to support aligned initiatives.

We also recognized that GICEL has the strength and capability to market and deliver programs for adults and families in cooperation with other partners who can provide facilities, accommodation and food.



GICEL's Future Role

Out of the above discussion emerged a working statement for us to consider as we move forward: "Based in the rich and diverse ecosystems of the Southern Gulf Islands GICEL is a consortium of educators and learners acting to help ensure a sustainable world and the greater good."

Embedded in this concept is the triple role of **Advocacy, Awareness and**

Affiliation. We should consider developing a graphic around this concept.

In 2008 we will use this framework to guide our thinking as we move forward.

Our Summer Earth Education Programs (SEEP)

What we do ...

These programs are designed to provide learners with a variety of hands-on experiences while we explore the marine, forest, freshwater and agricultural ecosystems of the Gulf Islands. To do this, we incorporate what we call Nature's gifts or more formally ecosystem services as an overarching theme. While within this theme, we connect all activities with ecological explorations using the "Big Four" ecological processes - cycles, interrelationships, adaptation and change. We also recognize that participants learn in different ways so we work to apply the various approaches to assist in the learning process including art, music, games, natural history and free explorations.

What's our experience ...

We have been a registered society and federal charity since 2003. Our highly successful SEEP programs have been held over the course of several years on four of the southern Gulf Islands.

- Mayne Island since 2001
- Salt Spring Island since 2003
- Pender Island since 2005
- Saturna Island since 2006

On a less frequent basis, we have offered day and school based programs on Salt Spring Island, Mayne and Pender Island since 2003. Since the first summer

programs were held we have had over 525 placements filled, some of whom have come every year since the beginning. Some of these young people have now come back to be part of our team acting as young counselors-in-training. An important side note to highlight is that these summer programs offer significant part-time employment and training for the youth of our island communities. Last year alone we filled 17 positions that offered from several days to two weeks of counseling experience.

GICEL has been very successful in developing partnerships with other local and regional agencies and organisations to assist in the delivery of all our programs. Key among the regional partners is School District #64, Parks Canada – Gulf Islands National Park Reserve, and BC Parks. In addition, we have had tremendous local support from a range of organizations including Mayne Island Parks and Recreation Commission, Mayne Island Agricultural Society, Galiano Conservancy Society, Saturna Parks and Recreation Commission, Tru Value Foods, the Lions Clubs on Mayne and Salt Spring Island and the Rotary Club of Salt Spring Island just to name a few. We are also very pleased to have an ongoing relationship with the Saanich Native Heritage Society.

The coming year and beyond ...

After five years since GICEL developed its vision and mission, the Board of Directors re-visited this along with our objectives and proposed outcomes. The result was a reaffirmation that what we are doing and offering is very important in light of the growing numbers of people who have not had real

experiences in nature nor understand their connections to the natural world. Our new motto **Advocacy, Awareness, Action** will serve us well as we continue to provide and improve on delivering nature-based learning experiences to all ages of participants. In keeping with this we are very excited about the future which includes hosting a pilot family oriented retreat on Mayne Island for Spring Break 2008 with Eco-literacy Canada and Royal Roads University Continuing Studies. Another very significant development is School District #64 creation of the Saturna Ecological Education Centre (SEEC) in the 2007-08 school year. The SEEC is now operational and is moving forward on a very exciting District sponsored nature-based curriculum. GICEL is a



supporter of this facility and over the next year will work with the School District to formalize a relationship with respect to SEEC and other shared interests. In order to continue to use Federal and Provincial protected areas for our programming there requires a

constant level of communication as well as, responsibility around conditions of permits we are required to hold while using these areas. In that we continue to be involved with the Burgoyne Bay Provincial Park management planning to ensure that our programs have long-term access for summer and day use programs. Our relationship with Parks Canada has broadened to include participation of the Parks Canada interpreters' programs in our SEEPs on Pender and Saturna islands. Our other long term objective is to continue to explore and develop our working relationships with First Nations groups with properties and interests on each of the southern Gulf Islands.

What we know ...

GICEL, and particularly its summer programs, have matured to the point where we are ready to move on to more extensive levels of operation. We know that there is both a demand and a need to provide this type of learning to the wider world. We also know from our experience and the constant feedback on our programs that we are making a difference. This experience as well, has

Did you know ...

That on Mayne Island alone in 2007, GICEL :

- Provided bursaries to 9 Mayne Island families representing 15 children over the two weeks so they could attend our SEEP program there.
- Disbursed just over \$2000 in total bursaries that covered fees for some, as well as costs of solar car kits, cameras, film and film developing for all.
- Received all of the funds from sponsoring organizations on Mayne Island.

taught us that moving to the next level of operation requires dedicated and sustained effort that we must develop.

Saturna Ecological Education Centre Celebrates First Semester

One of the biggest highlights of semester end at Saturna School has been our Celebrations of Learning, which have brought together and showcased the individual work and projects of our students. Since September, each learner at the Saturna Ecological Education Centre (SEEC) has been working on his or her own Independent Directed Study (IDS) project in an area of personal interest. As the first high school term drew to a close in late January, it was time to celebrate accomplishments and share our learning with the community.

Before the holidays, Allison Gaines started us off by preparing and organizing her own bake sale, which raised over \$200 for World Vision! Grade two student, Indigo Lainus, created miniature clothing that she sold at the Christmas Craft Fair to raise money for elephant welfare. James Thiebault followed soon after by exhibiting his new training as coxswain aboard the Saturnita. As a result of a term of expert training with his Community Mentor, Richard Blagborne. James commanded a crew of six peers as they made their way from Boot Cove to the Lyall Harbour beach, stopping for lunch aboard a navy vessel that just happened to be anchored nearby! Grade 12 students, Jenna Bakemore and Ted Ritson teamed up with grade five learner, Natalie Dunsmuir, to create a wonderful Multi-Cultural Evening at the Community Hall for over 40 guests. Jenna headed the event, creating four



interesting international displays of artifacts, information, posters, music and food representing China, Mexico, Germany and Australia. She was ably assisted by Hubertus Surm, who volunteered as her Community Mentor during the semester.

Ted premiered his first effort as a filmmaker, documenting the learning projects of his peers through visual and musical creativity. Natalie was involved in the kitchen where she produced eight delicious pizzas for the appreciative audience as part of her individual project.

In January, Grade 11 student Matt Burnaby, worked with his mentor, Cassie Hull, and five of our elementary students to develop kickboxing skills, while also conducting a series of basic self defense lessons for his high school peers. Clorisa Simpson worked with Jacques Campbell to develop an activity day at the sheep farm for all of our students, while Rachel Gerlach and her mentor, Lester, constructed a much-needed storage shed for the school.

High school students Britney Oswell and Natalie Shergold, with mentorship from

Priscilla and Athena, created a colourful and informative field guide for Winter Cove's plants and animals and then facilitated an activity day at the beach for our students and community members, which involved an introduction to the field guides and some fun putting the new resources to use!

Future celebrations will feature the rest of our elementary students as they complete their work and get ready to share. Emily Dunsmuir will be producing a documentary about the Mayne Queen, while Arielle Middleditch is exploring the idea of a pet sitting service. Justin Hammuda has been working to produce a puppet show, while Izaak Gaines has his sights set on a fishing derby!

We would like to extend a big thank you to all of our Community Mentors who have helped to make our celebrations of learning a reality!

Connecting to the Real World Wide Web: A Family Exploration of Nature

Course Description

This weekend family-oriented exploratory camp is designed to provide participants with key lessons on the processes in nature that support all life, including humans. The course is a combination of the basic theories of ecological principles that are demonstrated with hands-on experiences in an outdoor setting. The course will use a variety of learning vehicles including natural history, science, fine arts, and self reflection activities.

As a group we will explore the forest and marine ecosystems of the Gulf

Islands, local food production, and First Nations perspectives. The course will be hosted on Mayne Island, British Columbia, which includes portions of the new Gulf Islands National Park. It is a joint undertaking of the Gulf Islands Centre for Ecological Learning and Eco-Literacy Canada. Food and accommodations are included in the fee.

Topics:

- Basic Ecological themes – Energy flows, Nutrient cycles, Interrelationships and Adaptation.
- Journaling/self reflection practice
- Natural history of the islands
- Place-based knowledge and your communities
- First Nations knowledge and understanding of place
- Our local food supply

Learning Outcomes:

- Ecological literacy – participants will be able to demonstrate an understanding of the connection and interdependence of all living things.
- Ecological citizenship – participants will be able to demonstrate what it means to be an ecological citizen by personally accepting a more sustainable lifestyle and committing to participation in change.

Dates: Tuesday, March 18, through Thursday, March 20, 2008

Length: 1 evening and 2 full days

Times: Tuesday evening, 6:00 p.m.-9:00 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday, 9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. ; Dinner at 6 p.m.

Cost (cost includes lunches and dinners plus accommodations):

Adult: \$275 + GST

Please Register By: Friday, March 7, 2008 To register an **Adult and Child** together and receive a discount (\$350+GST), please visit this link: <http://www.royalroads.ca/continuing-studies/GLEL1271-Y07.htm>

To register an **additional Child** (\$150+GST), please visit this link: <http://www.royalroads.ca/continuing-studies/GLEL1273-Y07.htm>

Facilitators:

Your facilitators for the weekend will be **Michael Dunn**, Founder of the Gulf Islands Centre for Ecological Learning, and **Rick Searle**, President and Senior Producer of EKOS Communications, Inc.



Michael Dunn is a passionate life long learner and has thirty-five years' experience as a naturalist and community educator developing creative and fun environmental education programs and activities for learners of all ages. As an accomplished naturalist, he founded two natural history groups

within the Gulf Islands. He continues to work with young people and adults alike, providing natural history interpretation and guided walks, and has developed school-level inventory techniques for marine debris and intertidal biological surveys. He has also developed and coordinated experiential school-based programs for Environment Week and Oceans Day as well as community-wide events such as Oceans Day, Environment Week, Wildlife Week, Earth Day and summer nature camp programs. Michael is the founder of the Gulf Island Centre for Ecological Learning which has been operating nature-based programs in the southern Gulf Islands since 2001.

Rick Searle brings a life-long passion and commitment to ecological literacy. It infuses his work as an instructor within the Department of Geography at the University of Victoria where he has taught upper-level courses on protected areas and forestry for the past sixteen years. He is the president and senior producer of EKOS Communications, Inc., a new media company that produces, distributes and broadcasts content on the environment and sustainability, principally through its website "ekosTV.com" but also through off-line products such as CD-ROMS and DVDs.



2008 Memberships are now due

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

- ⊖ Family/individual \$25/year
- ⊖ Organisation \$50/year
- ⊖ Charter Membership \$1000
(includes life membership)

I would like to renew my GICEL membership and continue to support its vision of providing ecological education in the Gulf Islands

Amount enclosed: _____

Signature _____

Please mail your cheque or money order to

GICEL P.O. Box 496
Salt Spring Island, BC
V8K 2W1