

New Partnership is formed between Ducks Unlimited and the Conservancy

2011 has started on a very positive note for the Stewards in Training School Program. The Salt Spring Island Conservancy is pleased to announce a new partnership with Ducks Unlimited.

For a number of years the Salt Spring Island Conservancy has been running two of our Stewards in Training (SIT) school programs at Ford Lake, with permission of the owners Ducks Unlimited Canada. We take all the grade 2/3 classes there to learn about wetland stewardship. We have students doing a number of activities including creating a nature journal, examining freshwater invertebrates (insects) and weaving with natural wetland plant material. We also take all the islands grade 6/7 students to another part of Ford Lake where they learn about beaver ponds, marshes, and how to tell if a creek is healthy.

Wetlands are one of British Columbia's greatest resources. Ducks believes wetland conservation is essential in maintaining British Columbia's rich natural heritage and that these wetlands play a critical role in replenishing groundwater, absorbing floodwater and purifying surface water. They provide habitat for more than 300 species of birds, millions of salmon and many other wildlife species. Wetlands and their associated habitats continue to be threatened by human activity. That's why Ducks works so hard to ensure wetland habitats remain a part of BC's landscape.

Ducks Unlimited is big on education. One of their highest priorities is to make students more aware of the value of healthy ecosystems and to give them first hand experiences through field trips to local wetlands. This is exactly what we do. A partnership between our two organizations just makes real good sense. They are generously supporting our school's program with a grant of \$10,000. This insures that there will be a school program in 2011. We could not be happier about our new partnership.

But that's not all, we have other good news. The Hamber Foundation, whose motto is "Bettering the lives of British Columbians", is also supporting our school program this year. This grant is a legacy of Mr. Hamber who was Lieutenant-Governor of the Province of British Columbia from 1937 to 1941 and served as Chancellor of the University of British Columbia. The Hamber Foundation is a new supporter of the school program and once again we could not be more pleased..... Especially in these times of more organizations going after dwindling funding.

And (yes, there is more), the SSI Foundation who has supported the Conservancy for many years, has decided this year to fund the SIT new Kindergarten/grade one program (pilot project). This year, Kindergarten students in the province are going to start attending school full days instead of the traditional half day. We have been combining grades 1/2/and 3 together and have realized for some time that what we really need is a Kindergarten/grade one program. Now we can have one.

A big thank you to all our grantors and Conservancy donors and to all our volunteers who are going to create this new program and who volunteer to teach the program. We absolutely could not run this program without all your support. The School Committee would also like to welcome two new members, David Paine and Jean Wilkinson to the School Committee. Both have had kindergarten experience which will be extremely helpful in the development of our new program.

In March of 2011 we will start our program by teaching grade eights about water quality and marine ecology. In April/May we will host the grade 6/7 at Ford Lake with a program about Wetlands as a critical ecosystem. Then in May/June we will go to Burgoyne Bay Provincial Park with the grade 4/5 classes. We are always looking for new volunteers. We will train you and cherish you. We guarantee you will have a good time.

Please call Susan at the SSIC office (250-538-0318) or our school coordinator, Kris at (250-653-9870) if you are interested in volunteering. You are more than welcome to join us for a day in the field with student, to learn more about our program before committing.

Happy New Year on behalf of the School Committee. Hope to see you out in nature.

Jean Gelwicks