



SWCS BC CHAPTER

April 2004

President's Address

By Peter C. Friz, SWCS BC Chapter President

Dealing with a Declining Membership

A decline in membership is a challenge currently faced by many professional organizations and SWCS is no exception. This was one of the topics on which considerable time was spent at the Chapter Development Workshop and at the House of Delegates Meeting at the 2003 Annual Meeting in Spokane. In the 1970s and early 1980s, the SWCS had over 10,000 members. Currently, the membership total is under 7,000 and has been decreasing steadily each year for the past ten years. In some states, which previously had multiple chapters, the decline in membership has forced chapters to merge in order to remain viable. In British Columbia, SWCS membership has decreased from approximately 70 in the early 1990s to approximately 30 as of late 2003.

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Report on 2003 SWCS BC Chapter AGM

*By Ione Smith
SWCS President -Elect*

At the 2003 AGM held on November 18th, guest speakers Cindy Hampton and Eric Mazzi from the UBC Stormwater Subcommittee gave a presentation on the state of runoff water quality and quantity on construction sites on UBC campus. The Stormwater Subcommittee is comprised of students and other concerned campus employees. It was very interesting to learn that despite the amount of construction presently on campus, with more planned, no firm rules have been put in place to ensure that stormwater runoff from these sites would be minimized. The majority of the stormwater from campus ends up in Booming Ground Creek or Wreck Beach swimming waters and can contain many toxins and high sediment loads.

Although UBC encourages Best Management Practices (BMPs) for construction sites, the UBC Stormwater Subcommittee (which is part of the Environmental Programs Advisory Committee), feel that more could be done to enforce the rules set forth. As part of their initiative, Eric and Cindy had large information signs created to be hung on the fences around construction sites so that passers-by and construction workers could learn about the effects of stormwater runoff and the BMPs that UBC promotes.

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It is difficult to pinpoint any one factor that has led to this decline in membership, but since many other professional organizations are currently struggling with this issue, there is likely no “quick fix” to this problem. Since SWCS is an interdisciplinary organization comprised of soil scientists, engineers, planners, ecologists, geologists, educators, amongst other professions, it is more challenging to meet the needs of such a diverse membership than those of an organization comprised of one discipline (i.e., soil scientists). Based on the results of the membership survey that was forwarded to all our members in the fall of 2002, the professional backgrounds of the BC Chapter membership is very diverse and includes agronomists, soil scientists, environmental scientists, geologists, and ecologists. Another theme that came through on the completed surveys was that our members had limited time to get more involved with Chapter activities due to a lack of time as a result of work, family, or other volunteer commitments.

In addition, Canadian Chapters are presented with challenges not faced by the US Chapters. Approximately one of third of SWCS members are employed by the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) of the US Department of Agriculture. At one time over 50% of SWCS members were NRCS employees. As a result, the SWCS still has a tendency to focus on issues relevant to the NRCS that would not necessarily be all that relevant to Canadian members or US members working in the private sector. To be fair, due mainly to the vigorous representation by past Canadian Region Directors, the influence of the Canadian region more than exceeded our proportion of the total membership (approximately 3%).

Fragmentation is also a problem. Locally, there are a number of organizations that have similar

mandates to SWCS and would be obtaining members from a similar pool, including the Canadian Water Resources Association (CWRA), the Pacific Regional Soil Sciences Society (PRSSS), and the Abbotsford Soil Conservation Association (ASCA). Rather than attempting to “compete” with these other organizations, we need to build alliances and work together on events and issues that would be of mutual interest. Rather than worrying about our membership inventory, we should be focusing on keeping our chapter active and viable.

The bottom line is that our chapter has to deal with these challenges on a local level and we cannot rely on with the SWCS head office to come up with a “fix” to find ways to solve our membership problems. Furthermore, given the decentralized structure of the SWCS, a head-office imposed solution would not really be feasible anyway. We have to take it upon ourselves at a chapter level to organize relevant and stimulating events, and pursue alliances with other organizations with respect to common interests in order to engage our members and ensure that our Chapter remains viable. It is up to us! ❖

Water Conservation Tips for a Healthy Lawn

Mulch mow your lawn. Set your mower height at 2-inches and leave the clippings on the lawn. The clippings help retain moisture.

Help water penetrate by aerating your lawn.

Water only during the cooler hours of the day to avoid losing up to half of your water to evaporation.

To prevent runoff, you may need to water a short time, wait a few minutes, and then restart.

Source: Saving Water Partnership
<<http://www.savingwater.org>>

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Some of these BMPs include the following actions:

- store excavated soil away from storm drains
- cover disturbed soil with plastic or vegetation to decrease erosion
- include discharge pumps to collect runoff from sediment containment areas
- install sediment traps

...etc.

The SWCS-BC Chapter was happy to learn that such an initiative is being put forth by a group of students and concerned campus employees. As such we have offered to help the UBC Stormwater Subcommittee achieve its goals by supporting them in their actions. ❖

BC Chapter Fall Field Tour

By David Clements

SWCS BC Membership Chair

October 18th was an overcast but pleasant fall day as we did a tour hosted by the Langley Environmental Partners Society. As introductions were made, it became apparent that this would be the “three Daves tour” – Dave Sam and Dave Gibson, LEPS field staff along with myself Dave Clements, a LEPS board member.

We visited two sites. The first was the Hopton Farm, where LEPS has been working over a number of years. Many restoration and habitat enhancement techniques are demonstrated there. The Hopton farm is located in the upper reaches of the Salmon River, which flows north, emptying into the Fraser River at Fort Langley. Because of recent work on the site, salmon are now able to reach spawning areas further upstream that were cut off previously. Areas

where cattle formerly had access to the stream have been fenced off, and numerous trees have been planted. Dave and Dave enthused about the creative art of restoring areas such as this and developing good relationships with landowners. There is a large barn on the Hopton Farm that LEPS has developed into a facility that can be used for educational events. The idea is to use the Hopton site as an outreach site for convincing other landowners that habitat conservation is not only a good idea, but that it can be done relatively painlessly with the help of LEPS.

The second site we visited was Gordon’s Brook, where we were met by Mike Pearson, a Ph.D. student from UBC who was also the chair of the LEPS board at the time. Mike described the creative way the site was restored – including bringing in large numbers of dead trees at considerable effort and expense to increase habitat heterogeneity. Mike studies the endangered salish sucker, a fish that is only found in a handful of watersheds worldwide. He described some interesting complications involving beavers, salish suckers and other fish – showing once again that restoration ecology will never be an exact science!

LEPS was formed in 1993. The “Partners” part of the name means that the organization has links with many other organizations - governmental bodies, community groups and educational organizations. In particular, LEPS has a strong relationship to Langley Township where the LEPS office is situated. However, LEPS “looks both ways” - helping community groups or private citizens link with government agencies, and enabling government agencies to relate better to community groups on environmental matters.

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LEPS is involved in many types of environmental projects including stream and riparian restoration and enhancement, agricultural stewardship, wildlife inventory, habitat mapping, tree planting, educational activities, operating a compost demonstration garden, organizing conferences and networking among its partners. LEPS has won a number of awards for this work, including several awards from the Minister of the Environment. LEPS is seen as a model of cooperative environmental stewardship endeavors. For more information, see the LEPS website at <http://www.leps.bc.ca>. ❖

SWCS – BC Chapter on the Web!

Our chapter will soon be on-line to provide you with news, updates on current events and all the happenings of SWCS.

Watch for the official launch coming soon!

Calendar of Events

BC Institute of Agrologists: Land Summit at UBC, Vancouver, B.C. May 12-14, 2004

<http://www.bclandsummit.com>

Impacts of Current Amendments to the Agricultural Land Reserve workshop at the University College of the Fraser Valley, Abbotsford, B.C., June 12, 2004

For more information contact ione@interchange.ubc.ca

Canadian Water Resources Association Annual Conference: Water and Climate Change – Knowledge for Better Adaptation, June 16 – 18, Montreal, Quebec

http://www.ouranos.ca/acrh/index_def_e.html

The Canadian Water Network Annual Symposium June 20-22, Ottawa, Ontario

www.cwn-rce.ca/

SWCS Annual National Conference July 24 – 28, St Paul, Minnesota

www.swcs.org

2004 SWCS-BC Chapter Executive

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Become a Member!

Not a member yet?

The SWCS was founded in 1945 with the following mission statement:

"The Soil and Water Conservation Society fosters the science and the art of soil, water and related natural resource management to achieve sustainability. We promote and practice an ethic recognizing the interdependence of people and the environment."

Membership in the SWCS includes:

- ◆ receiving the Journal of Soil and Water Conservation and the Conservogram, the society's on-line newsletter;
- ◆ being networked among the thousands of members across Canada and the US

Membership rates are \$110 Canadian or \$75 US, or \$25 US for students or \$10 for BC Chapter only membership (do not receive Journal or attend conferences, etc.).

To join the society, you can locate membership forms on the SWCS website at <http://www.swcs.org/> or contact Dave Clements for further information.

"Everything is blooming most recklessly; if it were voices instead of colors, there would be an unbelievable shrieking into the heart of the night."

-Rainer Maria Rilke