

## REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY

Hello Everyone –

Many of us involved in the Chemainus Biodiversity Education Project were privileged to be part of the first *Honour Our River Day* hosted by Halalt First Nation on Sept. 14. We have devoted this issue of our newsletter to sharing highlights of the day, especially in relation to the biodiversity and health of our watershed.

A key lesson was how water connects us to one another and to all life forms. When we think about our sense of right or entitlement to water in its many forms, we also must consider our responsibilities to others (human and non-human) now and far into the future.

Almost 150 people, including North Cowichan mayor Jon Lefebure, formally expressed their commitment to Our River by signing a Pledge prepared by Halalt.

The morning began with a formal welcome from Coast Salish speaker Willie Seymour who shared a prayer song and told ancient stories of Creation. He explained how the cedar tree is next to human beings in the chain of living things and how the cedar is also our canary-in-a-coalmine.

“Cedars have veins through the earth that are dying from lack of water along the River.”

Halalt Chief Bert Thomas emphasized



Chief Bert Thomas and Willie Seymour

Halalt’s historical and contemporary relationship with the Chemainus River and the importance for all communities in the region of a healthy watershed. Clearly disturbed by the Chemainus well water project initiated by the District of North Cowichan, Chief Thomas spoke of how all local communities and stakeholders need to work together on a watershed management plan before any changes take place.

“We are being asked to give up a resource when we need to ensure this resource is here for our children. Water is the most important commodity in this world today and all of us have to make the right decisions.”

North Cowichan mayor Jon Lefebure shared enthusiasm for a watershed management plan. “I don’t there is anything more important than the water. I think it’s a resource that we can use to determine how much



Biologist Dave Clough made a classroom out of a side channel

growth we can have and how we plan for the future. Obviously that’s been explained today, how important it is to Halalt and their concerns over the river, which are extremely valid and important and I think reflect what we all should be feeling about the river. Water is key.”

The bio-highlight of the day was fisheries biologist Dave Clough who awakened the child in all of us with a hands-on tour

through a side channel to identify the tiny fry and learn about elements of a healthy habitat. Using a pole seine, students carefully captured (then released) Coho Fry, Cutthroat Trout, Stickleback and Prickly Sculpins (Bullheads). On and under the rocks we observed Caddis and Mayfly Larvae, important food items for fish and highly sensitive to pesticides.



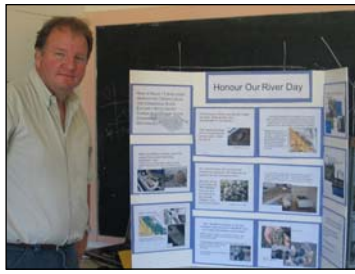
Karen Gabriel (who grew up at Halalt and now works with students in Langley schools) shared her knowledge of plants with the busloads of school children and adults during guided walks along the River’s banks.



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- Report to Community continued -

Aquaculture specialist Andrew McNaughton amazed us in his display on a thriving Halalt clam harvesting industry on our doorstep that brings in hundreds of thousands of pounds of shellfish every year and provides jobs for dozens of people.



The amazingly optimistic Ken Elliott brought samples from his Cowichan Native Plant Nursery and showed how native plants are here for a purpose and how we can benefit if we have the ear to listen to them.



A special ceremony was held before closing to acknowledge a letter from Dr. Budd Hall who is a professor at the University of Victoria. The Hall family made a public apology for the wrongs done to Halalt by the misappropriation of land through settlement in the Chemainus River valley by Dr. Hall's great grand parents in 1874.



Budd Hall talks to Chief Thomas

Dr. Hall expressed shock to "learn of the risk to the very survival of the river itself because of the uncontrolled residential and industrial development in the area." He urged: "Let us protect this river, the heart and soul of the Halalt First Nation and an historic river for all people in this part of Vancouver Island."

It was a quite an amazing day, getting to know the biodiversity and history of our Chemainus River as well as the human impacts that threaten it. On the following pages we share some of our favourite images and lessons learned at Honour Our River Day.

Please stay tuned for upcoming events this autumn. We hope to have a field trip to Ken Elliott's great native plant nursery on the Cowichan River and an outing with Nikki Wright to learn about an important marine plant called eelgrass which grows along the shorelines of Chemainus.

We are also planning some inside educational activities in Chemainus and Victoria, beginning with a discussion seminar on Aboriginal Water Issues highlighting Halalt's concerns about the Chemainus River. The event takes place Wednesday, Oct 3 from 1-3 pm at UVic's Law School (Fraser Building Room 152). It is open to the public and free of charge, sponsored by the POLIS Project on Ecological Governance.

**Sincerely, CBEP coordinators  
Kelly Bannister, Kathy Wachs,  
Karla Ryan and Mark Kiemele**



People of all ages were fascinated by the fry that they collected in a side channel of the river as they learned important things about salmon and the habitat that nurtures them (and us). Above is Florence James, a Penelakut elder and Hul'qumi'num language teacher. At right is four-year-old Katia Bannister.



Halalt always feeds its guests and Harvey August barbecued more than 20 sockeye salmon and hundreds of hot dogs while other cooks prepared corn on the cob, potatoes, salads and fruit.



## Halalt First Nation

# *Pledge to Our River*

We, the People of the Chemainus Valley, solemnly declare our role as stewards and guardians of Our River.

We recognize that we are just a small part of the great diversity of life which lives in and along Our River and hold our hands up in thanks and honour of the many things its provides for us.

We see the interconnectedness of all things including:

- The estuary, which provides our rich harvests of shellfish;
- The habitat of the Chemainus River watershed that supplies us with food and medicines;
- The source of Our River deep within the interior of Vancouver Island;
- The aquifer beneath us which provides water for people and our agriculture; and
- The River itself, that needs our help to recover in order to provide us with salmon.

The histories of all of us have been written along Our River. The time has come to give back what we have taken. It is time to listen to and watch the river, to hear what it's telling us.

We all inherit a solemn obligation to protect our land and resources for our future generations of all nations and all cultures.

We call on all governments to embark on a comprehensive watershed management plan before any more developments can impact Our River and its resources.

Signed at *Honour Our River Day*, Friday, September 14, 2007



Students from Stu'ate Lelum secondary school were among the 150 people who signed the *Pledge to Our River*.



Karen Gabriel awes school children with traditional plant knowledge



Hundreds were served at the wonderful lunch



Ken Elliott informs mayor Jon Lefebure about the value and importance of the flora found along the River. Ken runs the Cowichan Native Plant Nursery which is located near the Cowichan hatchery at the end of Boys Road in Duncan. He welcomes visitors (call ahead 732-0713) and has invited our project to visit for a field trip.

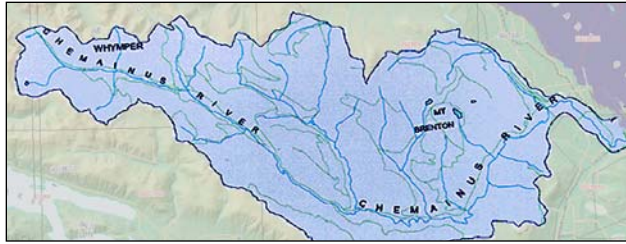
# Collaborative planning is key to a healthy watershed

The District of North Cowichan and Halalt First Nation have been opponents on river issues since the municipality first applied to BC's Environmental Assessment Office in 2003 to pump water from the aquifer to supply the Chemainus area with its drinking water.

But there is much common ground. Both the municipality and Halalt are on record as wanting a comprehensive plan for the watershed. Perhaps the contentious wells project should be set aside until such work is completed and then all parties can proceed with a better understanding of what it means to be long-term stewards of the Chemainus River.

To create such a plan, the entire Chemainus River watershed would have to be studied from estuary to headwaters (which are in the middle of the Island, near Nanaimo Lakes). Things that would come under scrutiny might include: forestry, agriculture, traditional use, population, fisheries and aquaculture. As we are discovering, a watershed is a very complex entity. It

includes many aquifers and sub-watersheds. The lakes and streams are fed by rain and melting snowpacks, both of which are likely to change as the impacts of climate change become apparent in the next decades.



The Chemainus River watershed

A watershed plan isn't all that expensive in the greater scheme of things – one could ask how can we afford not to take this approach? But it has to be done right and done well, using an inclusive and respectful process that ensures a space for all

stakeholders at the table.

It would be a tremendous opportunity for North Cowichan, Halalt, and all the other stakeholders in the Chemainus River Valley to work together toward a common goal.

Working together on a watershed plan would become not only a bridge-building exercise between cultures, it would also be a great opportunity for Valley residents and their governments to get involved in a vital on-going learning process about the lifeblood of all living things – water.

## Halalt's 10 Concerns about the Wells Project

1. The Chemainus River watershed is unique and already under stress.
2. Will there will be a "reset" of the groundwater system every year, or will some areas of the aquifer (side channels) experience a cumulative deficit in recharge over time?
3. How do we know the 50 litres-per-second release at Banon reservoir will reach the section of the River that may potentially be affected by a water deficit?
4. The water to be released from Banon Creek will be at a higher temperature than the water that is released by the aquifer. This will affect the temperature balance at a period of the

year when temperature is critical for the fish and may impact fish spawning and rearing capacity.

5. If the wells have to operate for several days in a row during the summer month, this could have significant effect on the river flow and create a thermal barrier to the movement of fish in the river.
6. The trigger for having to operate the wells could be the risk of outbreak of waterborne diseases, bacteria or algae bloom. The presence of algae is not presently regulated by Health Canada or BC Ministry of Health but it could be in the future as it is regulated in other countries and under the World Health Organization.
7. Surface water licensing and water management concerns need to be addressed. Reassessment is needed

of historic agreements such as North Cowichan's water licenses that were issued in the early 1900s and the 1980s in light of new understandings of watershed issues.

8. Who will review the monitoring data and for how long? Who will assess the effects of the project and stop the project, if the effects are unacceptable?
9. Who is going to check that the District of North Cowichan does not allocate the water before they have confirmed that this water is available forever?
10. The Halalt First Nation has used the Chemainus River and aquifer as their source of water since time immemorial. The District of North Cowichan wells will affect their source of drinking water.

The Chemainus Biodiversity Education Project is a pilot collaboration between the community and the POLIS Project on Ecological Governance (University of Victoria).

[www.polisproject.org/projects/biodiversityeducation](http://www.polisproject.org/projects/biodiversityeducation)

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