



POLIS Project on Ecological Governance

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April 24, 2007

Dear Community Member,

RE: CHEMAINUS BIODIVERSITY EDUCATION PROJECT

This letter is to let you know about a fun environmental education project in your area that is being planned and to ask if your school, organization, business, and/or you as an individual are interested to be involved.

The name of the project is the **Chemainus Biodiversity Education Project** and it is a collaboration between the University of Victoria through the POLIS Project on Ecological Governance (www.polisproject.org) and a growing number of interested individuals and organizations in the Chemainus area, including the Cowichan Valley Naturalists Society. While POLIS is a Victoria-based organization, our work spans local to international levels and we are particularly interested to support community-based projects on Vancouver Island that are likely to benefit local communities and meet local research and educational priorities related to ecosystem and human wellbeing. You will find the project webpage with basic information and ongoing updates at <http://www.polisproject.org/projects/biodiversityeducation>.

The goals of this pilot project are three-fold. First we wish to foster an awareness of and inspire interest in local biological diversity (plants, animals and other critters), and connections between community and ecosystem health. Second, we hope to build understandings of the links between biological diversity and climate change, the theme of **International Biodiversity Day** on May 22, 2007 (see <http://www.biodiv.org/programmes/outreach/awareness/biodiv-day-2007.shtml>). Third, we plan to develop educational materials for local schools and the general public (which could also be adapted for tourists) that are based on active participation and experiential learning activities.

A number of field sites for learning about forest, riparian and marine biodiversity are being identified. For example, one site is Echo Heights in Chemainus, chosen because of its unmatched ecological characteristics – relatively large size, high biological diversity, extensive accessible trails – and close proximity (within walking distance) to Chemainus town and local schools. The project will include a number of fun and educational field activities that involve bringing together volunteers, students, teachers, First Nations experts and scientists to learn about, identify and document (geographically and photographically) the local plant and animal species. Some of the anticipated educational materials to be produced include a pocket-sized handbook, posters, and sample learning units that could be used in school curricula and more widely for educational purposes. We are also open to additional ideas of local schools and community members.

You can see our planned project activities and timeline posted at:

<http://www.polisproject.org/projects/biodiversityeducation/timeline%2526activites>. We anticipate building support, raising funds, and liaising with schools and organisations in April-May, and ongoing as needed. The official launch of the project is the week of May 21-26 to coincide with Aboriginal Awareness Week (May 22-26) and International Biodiversity Day on May 22 (this year's theme is Biodiversity and Climate Change). A local Variety Show will take place on May 25 as a fundraiser for the pilot project.



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We hope to initiate field activities in June-Sept with local schools and community organisations. Results will be compiled, educational materials will be developed, and reporting back to schools will take place in Oct-Nov. We are also planning a collective assessment of the pilot project and planning for continued longer term biodiversity education and outreach activities in the region.

There are many different ways to be part of this pilot project and all forms of support are invaluable. For example, we are asking local government and businesses to consider a financial contribution to offset costs of production and distribution of educational materials for local schools (**Note: cheques can be made out to "POLIS Project" or to a willing community member or organisation. All contributions will be acknowledged on the educational materials and on our project webpage unless anonymity is requested**).

We are asking local schools, teachers and students to help us define appropriate field activities and to give input on creating outcomes that are most useful for student learning. We are asking local experts (naturalists, First Nations, scientists) to consider sharing some time and expertise with students and interested community members (e.g., a group walk in the woods, a talking circle, a presentation, biodiversity mapping activities). Some other possibilities for individual participation include: volunteering your time as an interested learner or adult field-activity supervisor for school children and youth, assisting with organizing one or more field activities, assisting with fundraising, attending a fundraising event, being part of developing educational materials or curricula, making a donation to the seed fund, or simply showing up when you can to be part of the shared learning experience. We also welcome other ideas you might have to make this project a success.

If you would like to share your ideas, make a financial contribution, express your support-in-principle and/or interest in being part of this pilot project, or have your questions answered, I invite you to contact one of the following individuals who are part of the initial organizing team:

Ms. Kathy Wachs (Chemainus) phone 250-416-0382 email: k_6032@hotmail.com
Community Liaising

Ms. Karla Ryan (Saltair) phone: 250-245-9135 email: pnk@shaw.ca
Schools and Educational Outreach

Mr. Mark Kiemele (Chemainus) phone: 246-3438 email: bio-variety@shaw.ca
Publicity and Media Relations

Dr. Kelly Bannister (Victoria) phone: 250-472-5016 email: kel@uvic.ca
Project facilitation

On behalf of the POLIS Project on Ecological Governance and the community partners that have offered their support to date, I thank you in advance for considering a role in this fun and exciting project, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,



Kelly Bannister, M.Sc., Ph.D.
Director, POLIS Project on Ecological Governance



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