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Kelly Bannister's plan to start a biodiversity educational project in Chemainus benefited from it being opposed by North Cowichan Municipal Council, she says.

Council voted not to endorse the project which will be based at the 52-acre Echo Heights area. The site is owned by the municipality.

Kelly, a Thetis resident, doesn't know why council refused to endorse the project. Because it's public land, her project is not an 'event', and only a small number of students will be in her group, they can't be kept off the public property, she says.

Council's rejection triggered a flood of sympathy and even promises of financial support from people in the area, she says. "I only asked for support in principle, not permission."

Echo Heights is a controversial mixed forest that is under urban development threat.

"Council owns it and wants to develop it," she says.

"What I find really strange is that when a group of citizens suggested they might raise funds to buy the land to turn it into a park, the mayor said that wasn't an option."

The site is ideal for her educational pilot project. It has broad biological diversity, many trails, and it's close to Chemainus and local schools.

Her aim is to raise awareness and develop educational materials for local schools, including those on Thetis and Kuper Islands.

She explains that biological diversity, or biodiversity, means the variety of life. We know little about diverse species and interactions of plants, animals, insects and microbes.

Thetis environmentalist sees silver lining in council snub

and climate change."

The undertaking is a pilot collaboration between the University of Victoria's POLIS Project on Ecological Governance and several individuals and organizations in the Chemainus, Thetis, Kuper and Chemainus areas. POLIS is a research and action centre where academic and community researchers try to dismantle the notion of the environment as merely another sector and to make ecological thinking and practice a core social value.

The project will include a number of "fun and educational field activities" that will bring together volunteers, students, teachers, First Nations experts and scientists to learn about local plant and animal species and their importance to humans.

Several field activities are planned for June. Everyone is welcome. Possible educational materials to be produced include handbooks, posters, and sample learning-units for school curricula.

"We are currently raising funds to pay for the costs of producing the educational materials and we hope to be able to make them available to schools for free," Kelly says.

"I hope the Chemainus project will be a springboard for other island community-based initiatives."

For more, check webpage at www.polisproject.org/projects/biodiversityeducation

"Biodiversity helps to sustain life on earth and human health," she says. "Yet it is increasingly clear that the planet's biodiversity is at risk due to human activities such as pollution, erosion, desertification, deforestation, and larger trends of extinction