



Salt Spring Island Water Preservation Society

APRIL/MAY 2014 NEWSLETTER

Tom Gossett and the SSI Water Preservation Society

Tom Gossett passed away peacefully on March 15, 2014 at age 78.

“Tom Gossett stands out as an individual whose footsteps we can only hope to follow.”

Tom Gossett was nominated for the 2004 Community Stewardship Award. He won. Watershed protection for Salt Spring Island had been Tom Gossett’s focus since 1980, when he started drawing attention to the topic of watershed health and fresh water shortages. “Tom was passionate about preserving the island’s watersheds and was one of the founding members of the Water Preservation Society. He believed our community’s sustainable health revolved around clean water. Tom took a stand on this which wasn’t popular with some, but he believed in the greater good: a principle that guided his life.” (*Gulf Islands Driftwood Obituary Notice*)

As President of the Society he formed, his indefatigable leadership led to the securing of the covenanted lands of the St. Mary Lake watershed and a ban on internal-combustion propelled watercraft on the lake itself. He led the Water Preservation Society all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada to enforce the ‘electric motors only’ regulation on St. Mary Lake, under the *Canada Shipping Act*. As a result of this victory, this little known federal environmental protection law was strengthened throughout Canada.

In 2002, Tom led the successful campaign to secure, unlogged, the secondary watershed of Maxwell Lake, having earlier succeeded in urging the Islands Trust to place the primary watershed of Maxwell Lake into a 20-acre lot size zone. Tom helped to enforce the covenant to protect the watershed of St. Mary Lake when it was threatened by trespass logging in the lands that were eventually all transferred to the Society in 2003. This injunction application was the crucial moment in asserting the public interest in the watershed.

Tom Gossett was a hands-on volunteer, whether forcing closure of a watershed garbage dump, or conducting research and litigation. He was able to stand up against many foes in the battle to maintain clean drinking water for island residents. “Tom has been the Society’s foremost volunteer throughout its life – maintaining the vision and vigilance needed for water protection – and building a track record of integrity and commitment to protecting environmental values.”

“This record of accomplishment is impressive. More important, however, is Tom Gossett’s character as he took up the challenge of community service.” Tom was an inspiration to others. “A gentleman, an optimist, and a self-effacing leader who respects what others think, do, and offer. He thinks beyond the obvious, beyond the moment; a hundred times he has pointed the way – then buckled down to work to achieve the vision.” Tom won the award for his many years of watershed protection work (source of quotes: Islands Trust’s *Sustaining the Islands – Community Stewardship* Award Winner profile)

We are pleased to present Cate McEwen as a speaker. Cate is an environmental educator with a focus on wetlands and watersheds.

An island resident, she works as an eco-mentor in the schools, supporting teachers and students to get outside, exploring and understanding the wonders of nature. As an educator, Cate’s intention is to create the space for the learner to make a personal connection with the environment, through mind, body and spirit.



Salt Spring Island
Water Preservation Society Presents

Cate McEwen

Rescheduled because of snow

Speaking on:

“Citizen Science & Water Monitoring -
Stories from Salt Spring Island & Mongolia”

Friday May 30, 2014 at 7:00 pm

LIONS HALL

Also a brief presentation on current WPS projects



Historical Moment

Tom Gossett acting on behalf of the Salt Spring Island Water Preservation Society receiving their "first donation 'In trust' for the Maxwell Lake Watershed". DRIFTWOOD Nov 7, 1984.

About 100 people gathered in Harbour House Hotel to hear the announcement and to pay tribute to the donors. The land is a 20 acre parcel adjacent to Maxwell Lake and draining directly into it. The donation of the watershed land will ensure a supply of clean water for generations to come, said Gossett. "It is the last source of really good water on the island."



Sid Filkow, Ganges Lawyer, right foreground, presents Tom Gossett with a copy of the title deed to the property he and his friends have donated to the Salt Spring Island community. Standing behind them are, left to right, John Crofton, Gail Secor, and Phillip Swift, of the Salt Spring Island Water Preservation Society. On the right is Brian Hutchings associated with Filkow in the Land Transfer. (Photograph and text courtesy of the Gulf Islands DRIFTWOOD, and SSI Archives).

Driftwood Photo by Frank Richards

Why Does SSI Have 3 Water Groups?

We get asked this a lot. Here is a brief explanation.

SSI WPS was formed in 1982s to protect drinking water sources on SSI and is a volunteer-based membership organization. We own and steward two reserves including a 272-acre nature reserve under conservation covenant on the western slopes of St. Mary Lake watershed. We attend local government meetings to ensure that protection of water is considered, sponsor public events, and inform our members through emails and this newsletter.

Water Council was formed and financially supported by previous CRD Director Gary Holman in 2003 to support collaboration of organizations (including SSI WPS), individuals and agencies to address the lake blooms and other SSI water issues. Water Council is now a non-funded membership organization sponsoring educational events and providing comments on government actions that can affect water.

SSI Watershed Protection Authority (SSIWPA) was formed in 2012 by our current trustees and CRD Director to address island-wide water issues, first focussing on St. Mary Lake blooms. Members are government agencies and elected officials. The Authority can only coordinate, actions will be implemented by its members. SSIWPA is funded through a tax requisition of Islands Trust.

Restoration of the WPS Watershed Nature Reserve

This winter, WPS received financial support through the SSI Conservancy for broom removal on a portion of the watershed reserve land we call the Benchlands, where a Garry oak meadow ecosystem is being restored. The work was carried out by Chris Drake, owner of Coast Alive Ecological Services, a new natural landscape services firm on Salt Spring, and other WPS volunteers. Chris provided us with an enlightening summary that we share with you below.



"In the battle against Scotch Broom (*Cytisus scoparius*), one must be wary when claiming success. This incredibly invasive plant has the tenacity of a bulldog and the wiliness of a coyote, thriving when browsed or clipped, and bursting forth from countless seeds when the opportunity presents. It engages in chemical warfare by altering soil nutrients, produces chlorophyll throughout its body, and manipulates fire to kill its competitors and encourage its young — an adversary to hold in the utmost respect. (cont'd p3)



Restoration of the WPS Watershed Nature Reserve (cont'd)

Nonetheless, it cannot be allowed to proliferate in areas targeted for restoration. As many volunteers and workers with WPS can attest, the Benchlands portion of the covenanted property has taken hundreds of hours to clear of broom, and the process is not over. This report documents the progress I made in Jan. 2014.

Usually broom removal is done in a group of volunteers or paid labourers, and it is a tough process made easier by chatter and tea. However, this recent stint was just me, attempting to completely eradicate all plants over 10 cm. Though I have spent many hours over the last decade controlling invasive plants, this was my first solo broom project, and it gave me a new level of understanding. For such a simple activity it was astonishing how the removal technique became more refined, efficient and effective as I progressed. Small tricks such as working across the slope or laying the pulled plants in a tight bundle ensured that no area was left behind and all plants were removed from the site. Also, with just one pair of boots on the ground the footprint of the work performed was diminished greatly, an important factor when working in an ecological reserve.

Another interesting aspect of Scotch Broom control is the debate over pulling versus clipping. Pulling a broom plant can break apart the upper soil layer and lead to erosion and open patches of soil that are ideal for germination of the next generation of broom seeds. Broom thrives in degraded landscapes, so restoration activities need to leave the soil as healthy as possible. However, clipping the broom at ground level allows the plant to continue to grow in many cases, and it seems to strengthen its resolve, making future pulling even more difficult. Science is still determining the percentage of plants that grow after being cut. I observed that there are several factors at play.

First, invasive species seem to facilitate each other. For instance, areas covered with non-native grasses had tenacious broom patches, while areas with mostly native plants and mosses were easier to clear. Plants that had been browsed by deer were sometimes easier to pull out. Plants clipped more than a year ago that regrew new foliage were often impossible to pull out by

hand, even if they were clipped below the upper soil.

I removed over 10,000 plants from the area, of which an estimated 70% were smaller plants which were pulled, and 30% "thicker than a pencil" which were clipped.

There has been broom control on the Benchlands for many years and broom is no longer dominant. Successive generations are sparser, and no plants are mature enough to produce seedpods. But the soil, which is compact and thin in many areas, is still full of seeds, so will take years to increase in porosity and sub-surface biodiversity. I support the WPS initiative to establish experimental plots for comparing control techniques.

The main lesson I learned is the need to increase native plant diversity to outcompete the broom and help counteract soil degradation. An important part of this process is controlling the other invasive/aggressive plants on the property e.g. Himalayan Blackberry, thistles, Orchard Grass and eastern Black Cherry.

At present Garry Oaks are being planted, and other shrubs and wildflowers associated with Garry Oak ecosystems are being



propagated to accompany them. If this is successful, some woody native species may also need to be controlled. Due to high deer densities, any browse species need to be enclosed until well established. Direct planting and nurturing of the intended native plant community is necessary.

When can one claim total victory in the battle against broom? In the case of the Benchlands, certainly not yet, though there are glimmers of success. Dedicated and vigilant volunteers have turned the tide, and as long as these people pour their passion for our native ecosystems into this area, we can look forward to this special piece of land having a beautiful future."

Christopher Drake, MSc
Owner/Operator: Coast Alive Ecological Services.
cdrake@shaw.ca 250-221-1342 (838)

Maxwell
Lake
Ridge





OUR EXECUTIVE

President	Maxine Leichter
Secretary	Penny Polden
Treasurer	John Borst
Directors-at-Large	Nolan Magnus
	Rodney Polden
	Usha Rautenbach
	Linda Steager

CONTACT US

E-mail ssiwps@gmail.com

Online ssiwaterpreservationsociety.ca

Please pick up a Thrifty Smile Card from us. WPS will receive 5% of every dollar that you spend.



MEMBERSHIP

Membership dues are only \$15 for individuals or \$30 for a family/couple.

Additional donations are very gratefully received, and help to keep WPS active, effective and working hard to protect our island waters. Tax Receipts are issued.

Please consider providing us with your email address so we can notify you of WPS events that take place between the publication of newsletters.

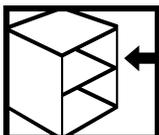
Current members - mail membership fee to:
Box 555, Ganges PO, SSI, BC, V8K 2W2.

New members - please request an application form to fill out and return.



SSI Water Preservation Society

Box 555, Ganges PO
Salt Spring Island, BC
V8K 2W2



COUNTRY GROCER TAPES
Please put your tapes in **BOX #73**