



Salt Spring Island Water Preservation Society

NEWSLETTER AUGUST 2012

SSI WPS: 30 YEARS PROTECTING OUR DRINKING WATER

Thirty years ago, SSIWPS was born out of the same controversies and challenges that face us today. In 1978, when St. Mary Lake had a serious algal bloom, Rick Nordin (then with the Ministry of Environment) was asked to study the problem. It became clear that the least expensive and most effective protection for our lakes was to minimize development around them. At that time, the community plan allowed the subdivision of land in the watersheds into five acre lots. To protect the Maxwell Lake, Mike Larmour and Tom Gossett led a successful effort to convince Islands Trust to establish a 30 acre minimum lot size that is still in place. Due to this protection, to this day, Maxwell Lake remains free of algal blooms.

Founding of SSIC – From this work, the Water Preservation Society took its roots, evolving as a non-profit, charitable society in 1981. The Society's original founders were: Sidney Filkow, Tom Gossett, Michael Larmour, Gail Secor and John Crofton.

Soon after that, WPS was donated 20 acres of land in the Maxwell Lake watershed which it still holds. Next, WPS board members and others urged that the minimum lot size in the St. Mary Lake watershed be increased from 10 to 20 acres. This initiative was passed by Islands Trust, but subsequently reversed by the provincial minister due to political lobbying by affected property owners. Although the 10 acre minimum still stands, most of the watershed had already been subdivided into lots of 1 acre or less, each with individual on-site sewage disposal. Had such dense development not been allowed or at least had a sewer been required, it is likely we would not today be faced with such severe problems with the lake. Had there been more local support for wise environmental planning, development could have been directed to more appropriate locations.

Purchase of Maxwell Lake Watershed - In 1999, Texada Logging Ltd. acquired large tracts of forested land including the land around Maxwell Lake. Their plans to log the land set off a huge community protest. As this was unfolding, Tom Gossett and Mike Larmour worked with Rob MacDonald of Texada (who held off logging the watershed lands) while the Society worked with other island groups to raise what eventually was \$1.2 million to complete the purchase of the primary and secondary watersheds of Maxwell Lake. They were also influential in gaining the support of the North Salt Spring Waterworks District ratepayers who filled the funding gap to close the deal. Much of this land is now under a conservation covenant held by the Salt Spring Island Conservancy for the purpose of protecting it in a natural state.

Electric Motors Only – In the early 1980s, concern arose over the heavy use of gasoline motor boats on St. Mary Lake. There were visible gas and oil slicks. Salt Spring's drinking water lakes were already among 400 lakes in B.C. designated as "electric motors only" (EMO) under the Canada Shipping Act. WPS members led a successful effort to have the federal government apply this provision to our lakes.

Resistance erupted from local interests who took a case to court and nullified the federal decision. The Society, with the assistance of Jack Woodward's law firm, continued legal action for several years, eventually obtaining a favourable decision from the BC Supreme Court. This decision was appealed by the opponents to the Supreme Court of Canada which upheld the EMO rule by refusing to hear the case. It is due to the dogged persistence of the WPS and the support it received from the Woodward law firm that Salt Spring lakes and all other EMO lakes across Canada are now motorboat free.

St. Mary Lake Watershed Preserve – In 1986, Louis Lindholm, the new owner of Mouat Farm along Sunset Drive, negotiated an agreement with the Islands Trust and several other local agencies whereby densities available for development on what came to be known as Channel Ridge were increased from 230 parcels on 10 acres each, to 577 smaller parcels. Also, Channel Ridge Properties Ltd. received a guarantee of 216,000 gallons/day/peak demand of water from the North Salt Spring Waterworks District, to be supplied from St. Mary Lake.

**SSI WPS: 30 YEARS** *continued*

In exchange, the community received the 20-acre Duck Creek Park and 272 acres on the slopes above St. Mary Lake were transferred to the WPS to safeguard the watershed under a conservation covenant. The watershed lands came to WPS in three portions over several years, the last of which was transferred to WPS in 2003. Over the years, WPS has worked hard to uphold its agreement to protect this land.

Other Issues – In the 1980s, most of Salt Spring's garbage ended up in a large pit near Blackburn Road. Problems included bad odours, several garbage fires, and the possibility of contaminating the drinking water in Blackburn and Cusheon Lakes. A committee was formed, with input from many interests including WPS, alternatives were researched and in the end, it was agreed with provincial government concurrence, that our garbage should be trucked off-island to the Hartland Landfill in Victoria. In 2003, WPS headed off a proposal to increase density on a lot in the Cusheon Lake Watershed. WPS board members appealed to the Islands Trust Council to uphold a

directive in their Trust Policy Statement which does not allow an increase in density or intensity of land use where there are problems with water quality or quantity.

More recently, in 2010 and 2011, WPS collaborated with other island groups and the Local Trust Committee to encourage their approval of a bylaw implementing the provincial Riparian Area Regulations. Although this provincial requirement was established to protect stream habitat for fish, what is good for fish is also good for the quality of our drinking water. Keeping natural vegetation around streams in the watersheds of our drinking water lakes reduces transport of phosphorus into our lakes to feed blooms of algae and cyanobacteria. Unfortunately, opposition to this bylaw from some segments of the community prevented it from being passed. We continue to monitor the current Local Trust Committee's efforts to pass a similar bylaw.

Regardless of the achievements discussed above, over the years, the majority of WPS efforts have been educational and scientific in nature. Our educational efforts this year

have resulted in an increase in our membership. Taking care of the 272 acre St. Mary Lake reserve lands also occupies a large portion of WPS volunteer efforts and finances.

Future Threats – As the population of Salt Spring grows, drier summers will stretch surface water supplies thin. The same may also be true of groundwater, but we have less information about that. As the NSSWD looks for ways to supply a growing population, proposals have been discussed to raise the dam on Maxwell Lake and "exercise" the lake, raising the level unnaturally high in the winter, then lowering it unnaturally low in the summer. This would likely result in blooms of cyanobacteria and destroy the natural beauty and ecosystems of this otherwise mostly pristine lake surrounded by lands protected in their natural state under a conservation covenant. There is also a proposal to pipe water from Cusheon Lake into St. Mary Lake which would be expensive and environmentally destructive. WPS continues to urge NSSWD to instead undertake conservation efforts and limit users to those it is legally obligated to serve.

VOLUNTEERS for WPS

We invite members of the Society to consider volunteering their help. There are many possible activities where your skills, knowledge and energy would be very welcome – from woodworking and small-scale construction projects, to computer work, contributing to the newsletter, serving on one of the Society's committees or board, fund-raising and staffing our information table at community events, writing letters, handling publicity, assisting with research, and so on. For those who enjoy outdoor activities, we have saved a small supply of holly trees, broom patches, thistle beds and other invasives for you to personally conquer! The sense of accomplishment is most satisfying.

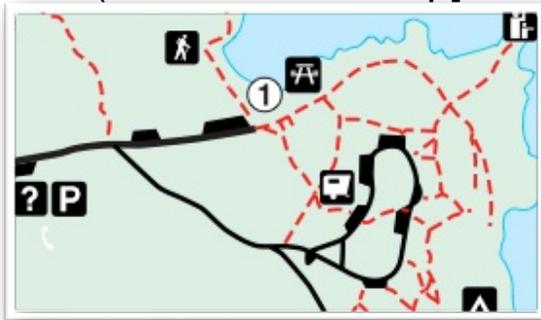
Come and contribute whatever you have to offer to the valuable year-round work that WPS handles, still protecting the island's water and watersheds after thirty years.

Contact the Society by email – ssiwps@gmail.com – our work is enjoyable and very worthwhile.



YOU ARE INVITED:

WPS Members Picnic
Celebrating 30 Years of Service
August 12, 11.00-2.00
Ruckle Park
day-use picnic area
(area 1 on the map]



Bring your own picnic -
 don't forget picnic-blanket/rugs,
 plates, utensils, mugs, folding chairs
 - frisbees! kites, guitars.

Gather at noon for the
 Commemorative Cutting of the Carrot Cakes
 (2 homemade cakes provided)
 and group photo, as in Salt Spring's past:



Community Picnic at Maxwell Lake 1910
 (photo courtesy of the Salt Spring Archives)

UPDATE ON ST MARY LAKE BLOOM

With only a break during July and August last summer, St. Mary Lake has had an ongoing bloom of toxin producing cyanobacteria since January of 2011! The last similar bloom was in 2004 – 2006. That one was more intermittent although some of the toxin levels were higher than during this bloom. The current bloom is longer and more continuous than any bloom that has been monitored. According to Bob Watson, Director of NSSWD, at its peak in May, toxins in the lake were 45 times Health Canada's drinking water limit and over 3 times VIHAs swimming limit. This resulted in the provincial government putting up signs advising people not to swim in the lake.

The North Salt Spring Waterworks District has been following the Management Plan for the lake by first installing aerators in the lake. The aerators began operating in the summer of 2009 and appeared to be successful at reducing phosphorus levels during the warm months. However, last September, phosphorus levels again began to climb and it is not known why.

Bob Watson has put it well, "Phosphorus in the lake's upper water layer needs to be reduced to less than 15 ppb (parts per billion), and preferably less than 10 ppb, to prevent algal blooms. It declined gradually from the 55 ppb range in 2006 to the 25 ppb range by summer 2011, but then increased back to the 55 ppb range during autumn 2011, and has remained in the 55 ppb range since then."

The blooms seem to follow a pattern of being active for two years then inactive for a few years before a bloom occurs again. It is possible the current bloom will stop. Even if that happens, it is important to know that the problem will not have been solved until phosphorus levels in the lake can be brought down permanently.

Our Local Trust Committee and CRD Director are focussing attention on implementing the next recommendation of the St. Mary Lake management plan which is to put lakeside homes on a sewer. They are sponsoring a conference this fall on septic problems and strategies. WPS will notify its members about the conference via email. Others can watch for an advertisement in the Driftwood. WPS urges you to attend. What is even more shocking than the bad state of St. Mary Lake is how few lakeside property owners (who are the most directly affected by the bloom) are willing to get involved in working for a solution. The problem has been a long time in the making and will not be quick or cheap to solve.

Your Society is collaborating with Water Council and the St. Mary Lake and Cusheon Lake Stewardship Committees in discussions and research regarding what else can be done at this time. We will report to you when we have a solid recommendation.



OUR EXECUTIVE

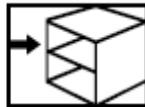
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COUNTRY GROCER TAPES

Please put your tapes in box #73

If your postal address is highlighted, your membership subscription has expired.

We appreciate your past support and urge your continued membership.

The cost is:
\$10/Individual
\$20/Family

Additional contributions are welcome and will receive a tax receipt. Send to our address :

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