

OSPS NEWSLETTER

OKANAGAN SIMILKAMEEN PARKS SOCIETY - AFFILIATED WITH THE NATURE CONSERVANCY OF CANADA

February 2005

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OSPS 40TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING SPEAKER

Gordon Northcote, a BSc, graduate from U.B.C. teaches Biology 11 and 12 at Summerland Secondary. He came to Summerland 10 years ago after spending 10 years at Keremeos Secondary.

In 1976, Gordon spent a year in New Zealand during his father's sabbatical there. He was fascinated by the variety and differences in the natural life of New Zealand. He returned in 1982 and again, with his family, 2 years ago, and is planning another visit shortly.

New Zealand drifted away from other lands eons ago, as a special diversity developed on those islands, unlike anywhere else. An incredible bird life was enabled as no reptiles existed.

In his slide and speaking presentation, Gordon will give us a taste of a New Zealand Outdoor Experience.

GORDON NORTHCOTE

"A New Zealand Outdoor Experience"



Everyone Welcome



Refreshments

Friday March 4th at 7:15 pm
Summerland Centre Stage
Rosedale Ave.

Donations are appreciated anytime - tax receipt will be issued. OSPS appreciates your continued support in our attempts to save OUR parks. 2005 memberships at \$10.00 individual, \$15.00 family, \$20.00 organization have been rolling in. THANKS!

POLLUTERS CAN BE SUED, TOP COURT SAYS

The Supreme Court of Canada has opened the door for governments to sue polluters who damage trees, wildlife and water that lack commercial value.

In a ruling that delighted environmentalists, the court said governments may act as trustees of the public good, seeking compensation for damage from negligence ranging from oil spills and poisoned air to forest fires.

The virtues of an unspoiled environment are inarguable, the court said, and there is no reason members of the public cannot have recourse to the courts through their governments when corporations

negligently damage it.

“This is a major environmental law precedent in Canada on an issue – compensation for environmental harm to public assets – never before tackled by the Supreme Court,” said Jerry DeMarco, a lawyer who argued on behalf of the Sierra Legal Defence Fund.

“The court specifically recognizes the inherent value of forests and recognizes that trees are much more than timber waiting to be cut,” Mr. DeMarco said. “This case will have repercussions well beyond forestry law to air pollution, water contamination, oil spills and the like – indeed any case where a natural asset or resource is held in common for the benefit of everyone and is harmed by corporate negligence.

The case before the Supreme Court involved a 1992 forest fire that burned 1,491 hectares in Northern British Columbia.

The Canfor case covered in the Sun and Globe & Mail presents slightly different versions of the case. I know the lawyer who represented Canfor and she considered this judgement a victory.

The fire started from slash piles that were burned one fall, the coals stayed alive but dormant over winter and spring and then flared up again the summer after the initial slash burning.

The Muskwa-Rechika was set aside by Glen Clark/NDP to satisfy the Provincial promise to make 12% of the province as protected areas. So much for protection of natural areas.

Bill Johnston, OSPS Director

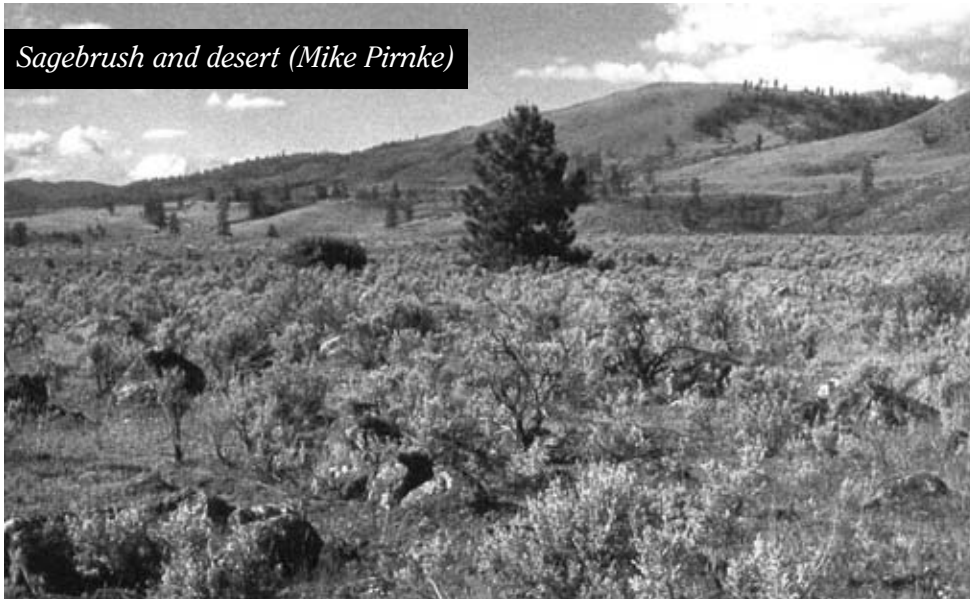


Companies for environmental damage – for example starting a forest fire that destroys trees such as these – can be sued by government for ‘environmental’ damage, not just lost commercial value, the Supreme Court of Canada says.

BC'S SOUTH OKANAGAN DESERVES PROTECTION

by Rick Searle

The South Okanagan is at the lower end of a region known as the Interior Dry Plateau. Rugged



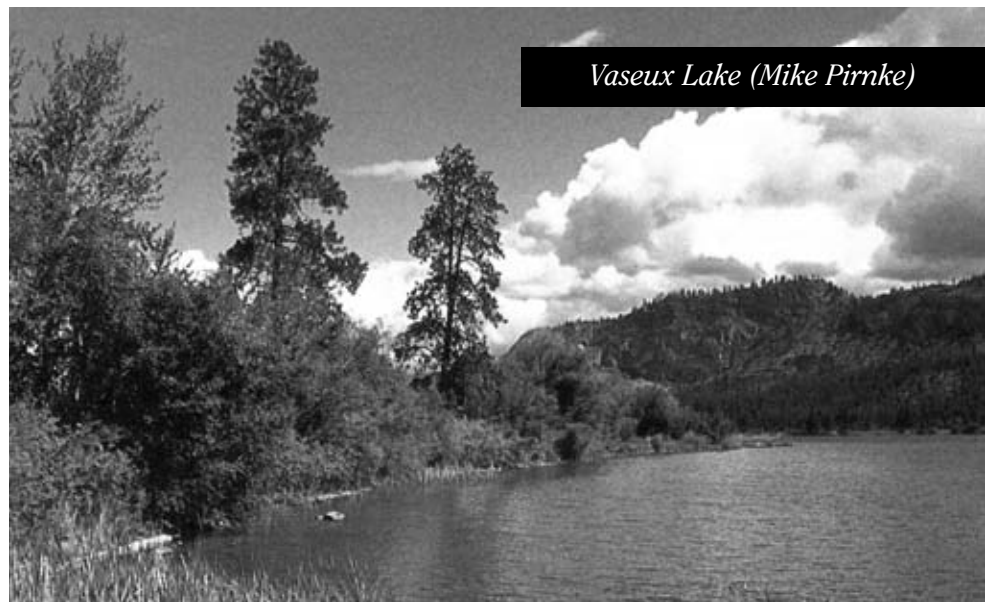
mountains, gently undulating benches, deep steep-sided river valleys, and long narrow lakes characterize the area. Low rainfall and high temperatures have encouraged a tendrill of America's Great Basin Desert to poke into Canada here and fragile hold. Cactus, sagebrush, bitterroot, lizards, scorpions, badgers, and rattlesnakes make it home.

The region is comprised of four eco-zones. Picture the Okanagan River, lying at the very bottom of the valley, as marking the centre of the region with different zones radiating outwards like rings of a tree. The centre ring is the shrub-steppe and grasslands ecosystem carpeted with bunchgrasses (bluebunch, wheatgrass, needle-and-thread grass, junegrass and Sandberg's bluegrass) intermingled with rabbit brush and antelope brush. Ponderosa pine and bunchgrass dominate the next ring higher up the surrounding mountainsides. This zone grades into a thick ring of thick Douglas fir

forests with the final ring consisting of high-elevation spruce and pine.

The area's native flora and fauna desperately cry out for more protection. Intense and intensifying pressures of human population growth and conversion of the

landscape for higher and higher economic ideals are destroying ecosystems that are unique not just to British Columbia, but to Canada as well.



The greatest damage is being done to the antelope brush and bunchgrass ecosystem, which covers only 0.3 percent of the province. Ongoing

rapid conversion to vineyards, golf courses, and subdivisions has made it one of Canada's four most endangered ecosystems (the other three are the Carolinian forest of Ontario, the Garry oak meadows of British Columbia, and the tall grass prairie of Manitoba) and home to about one-third of BC's rare and endangered species, such as the pallid bat, burrowing owl, sage thrasher, and painted turtle. Birders flock here for the possibility of spotting rare grassland species, such as the yellow-breasted chat.

But what are the chances the park will actually come to fruition and provide the protection needed to save these species? That depends on a lot of things, particularly the outcome of the feasibility study that must precede the establishment of any new park. The creation of a park in the South Okanagan is consistent with the National Parks System Plan, which envisions at least one park in each of Canada's 39 natural regions, and the National Parks Action Plan. Yet it must still go through a lengthy process of research and public consultation during which some thorny issues will need to be worked out.

The park will only be established if sufficient public support is demonstrated to the federal and provincial governments. Senator Ross

Fitzpatrick, a strong park advocate, has suggested that the communities of Oliver, Osoyoos and Keremeos will mark the corner posts enclosing Mount Kobau, East and West Chopaka, Kilpoola, and just possibly the White Lake area and the Vaseux Lake lands. But such talk makes ranchers, hunters, and off-road vehicle users nervous, aware that they'll likely be excluded from areas they've had access to.

That many people in the region

want the park is good reason to be optimistic protection will arrive before it's too late. The tourism sector, backed by local and provincial politicians, sees the park as an economic booster. Meanwhile, conservation and naturalist groups continue to press for the park's creation as quickly as possible, knowing that time is running out for the South Okanagan's endangered ecosystems and species.

Nature Canada Winter 2004 / 2005

NATIONAL PARK NOTES

Ottawa is in the midst of a three-year study to explore the idea of a national park in the South Okanagan-Lower Similkameen, beginning with a series of open houses in the region that attracted 900 people.

The next phase is to determine the criteria for including lands in the park, create some boundary options, and generate a study to show how a park would benefit the local economy.

The study area covers 2,400 square kilometres - an area roughly extending south of Penticton to Osoyoos, east to Bridesville and west to Keremeos - but the ultimate boundaries of any park would be substantially smaller than the study area.

No specific boundaries have been proposed, but during the recent creation of the Gulf Islands National Park, several provincial parks in the area were rolled into the national park, along with new lands purchased by Ottawa.

In the South Okanagan, the list of new protected areas includes 9,364-hectare South Okanagan Grasslands, 25,889-hectare Snowy, and 3,741-hectare White Lake Grasslands. Cathedral Park and Crater, should be included in any management plans for a National Park.

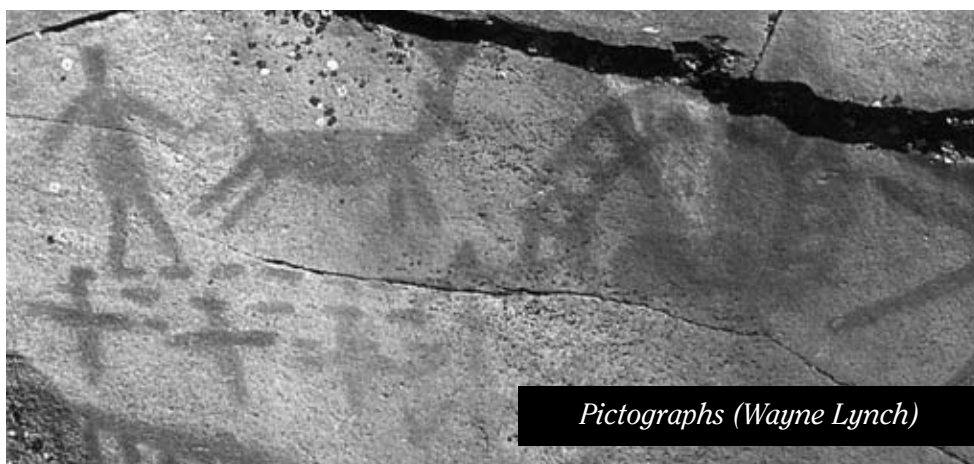
Thirty percent of B.C.'s endangered and threatened species are found in the South Okanagan, an area beset by residential development, orchards and vineyards. As a result, the South Okanagan is rated one of the four most endangered landscapes in Canada.

B.C.'S NATIONAL PARKS:

The province already boasts seven national park reserves: Pacific Rim National Park Reserve, Gulf Islands National Park Reserve, Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve and Haida Heritage Site, Mount Revelstoke National Park, Glacier National Park, Yoho National Park and Kootenay National Park.



Pincushion cactus (Robert McCaw)



Pictographs (Wayne Lynch)

NOTES FROM HERE AND THERE:

It is unfortunate to have the OSPS hear of an important meeting only second-hand. Luckily, our directors also belong to other organizations, so do learn of these events. (See letter and notes in this newsletter.)

IGNORE CONSERVATIONISTS, NATURALISTS, ENVIRONMENTALISTS!

• David Suzuki news reports on a Premier's pine beetle symposium: "Of the 14 invited speakers, six were from the timber industry, five were representatives of government agencies, and first nations, **ACADEMICS AND CONSERVATIONISTS HAD ONE REPRESENTATIVE EACH.**" Jim Fulton of the Foundation says, "I am absolutely flabbergasted and, in fact, insulted." (He had been invited but was told he could not present a report, but could only observe from the audience.) "I have never been invited by a senior government official to travel 400 kilometres so I can be window dressing.....you have to wonder.....if they are really interested in gathering all the best information on this issue." (Pine Beetle)

• A Western Wilderness dispatch reporting on the Working Forest Legislation: "the Working Forest Initiative received only 14 comments expressing support and 1,269 letters against...." Ken Wu, Executive Director of the Western Canada Wilderness Committee's Victoria chapter says that timber companies will get de facto ownership - "All the rights of private ownership without having to pay taxes."

• Seven of our Directors were involved in the Land and Resources meetings over the seven years since the LRMP meetings started. There were many meetings and

agreements were worked out, but our present government has not seen fit to pass the legislation. Certainly, declaration of a National Park in the South Okanagan that includes areas now protected (Snowy and Crater) would help.

• Our main concern is **MANAGEMENT** and OSPS feels an agreement between National and Provincial Governments will provide better protection. This management agreement should include Cathedral Park and the now protected areas (**SNOWY and CRATER**). This was in the LRMP, however, only a small piece of Crater is now protected but all of Crater area should be included in a National Park. Our concern is great when our local newspaper reports that the Ministry has already eliminated 400 jobs, including 186 conservation, science and planning officers - the people responsible for protecting species-at-risk, such as mountain caribou, mountain murrelet and spotted owls. Staffing levels at provincial parks have been cut so dramatically that employees can no longer effectively protect our parks. Contrast Alberta's 260,000-hectare Kananakis Country Park system which employs 75 full-time and 19 seasonal staff while Mount Robson provincial park employs 1.8 full-time and 3 seasonal staff to manage 300,000-hectares.

Privatization and parking fees are what we see. Visitations to our Parks has decreased. Reduced regulations re industrial development on Crown Land also worries us.

I know you must be concerned as I am. Thus, please help us pursue our efforts to leave a legacy for our children and grand-children which we are proud to be a part of making.

R.D. White, Editor

OSPS is having new membership forms printed (because of change in dues to \$20, \$15 and \$10). Community mail boxes locally cause us to ask you to excuse changes we had to make on the labels. Many of you have sent in money for your 2005 membership and many also sent donations. **WE THANK YOU SO MUCH!** The membership form in this newsletter could be passed on to add to our membership. If you don't need it.

Most of you are members so give your form to friends or neighbours, especially the younger ones.



**Okanagan Similkameen Parks Society
Box 787, Summerland, B.C. V0H 1Z0
Membership Form**



Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____ Fax: _____

_____ Email: _____

Postal Code: _____

Individual [\$10.00] Family [\$15.00] Organization [\$20.00]

Donation: [Income Tax Deductible]

Please help support our continuing programs.

EARTHCARE SUPPORT OKANAGAN NATIONAL PARK FEASIBILITY STUDY

We support a feasibility study in the area and also the inclusion of the provincial parks into a National Park.

“So where are we with Park management in this province? Park staff in WLAP (What’s Left-over After Politics) have been decimated and the budget for management of parks slashed. The proposed area has the highest concentration of Species at Risk in all of Canada. What is the province doing about this? Again, hardly anything except to participate on Recovery teams and provide almost no funding to them as well. How many of these Species at Risk are listed in the Wildlife Act? Hardly any!!!!

The record of provincial government is pathetic..... Our organization would rather see these areas managed within a National Park setting that is properly funded and also works to save Species at Risk in the area.

The people mentioned in the news article are the redneck, right wing faction that exists in that area. They have put out information in the community that is blatantly false. Should the provincial parks move to a National Park, certain uses can be grandfathered such as grazing. Furthermore, if grazing is going to assist in the maintenance of grassland it can be used as a management tool in the National Park management plan. This tool is currently used in the Saskatchewan Grasslands National Park.

Current polling and focus groups in the area show that support is strong for Parks and the legacy they bring for all. We hope that your organization will take another look at the issues and facts of this conservation initiative and support the establishment of a National Park in the Okanagan.

*Lloyd Manchester, Director
Canadian EarthCare Society,
PO Box 66, Kelowna, BC*

Part of letter replying to reports of organized opposition to a National Park. – *Editor*

REPORT ON MEETING OF ENVIRONMENT LAND USE COMMITTEE OF THE SOUTH OKANAGAN SIMILKAMEEN CONSERVATION PROGRAMME (SOSCP)

Still doing Sheep Research, connected to the North East Penticton Expansion Plan. WLAP (Water, Land and Air Protection Ministry) is STILL working on Their Best Management Practices (BMP’s), some of which are posted on their website. ALL this ties together with the PLANS to protect and preserve Endangered Habitat.

We had a visit from Bryn White from Okanagan University College. Her team is working on Fragile Ecosystem Function, assessing how much there was of each of the fifty types of habitat and HOW much WE NEED, (Bryn says “forty percent”) that, of course, is NOT possible in some CASES. For example, Antelope Brush, the signature PLANT of OUR desert, is in the neighborhood of 5 to 10%. Then again, SOME plans contradict one another, it is then

necessary to set priorities, BY THE RESOURCES THAT ARE NOW AVAILABLE!!!! We also heard that MANY things are going to be DOWNLOADED to REGIONAL Districts (A.L.R. for example). They would LIKE technical advice, so the Technical Advisory Committee (TEAC) probably WILL be reinstated.

Ike Scheffler tells us that there is a HIGHER concentration of the TWO types of Mosquitoes that would transmit the NILE virus in the OSOYOOS Ox-bows than anywhere else. He is using this as ammunition in the move to put water back in those Ox-bows, moving Water = NO live Larva. He told us that they will be spraying with a NEW type of B.T., that he said has a 30-day active period!

N.E. Pent. Growth is an ongoing study, but apparently, the BACK side of Campbell Mtn. is now not in the plan!! (Plan for 7,600 people up there), where do We Get the Water??? Ike talked of storing water above Princeton and tunneling under Kruger Mtn. to put the water into Osoyoos Lake, LONG RANGE PLANS? Plans to use American money?? THAT WOULD need SOME LONG thought and CONSIDERATION, AMERICAN MONEY SPENT UP HERE, WOULD IN MY VIEW LEAD to AMERICAN CONTROL!!!!

Plans are continuing with assisting communities with urban/rural interface problems. This is being done now in the Thompson Region and when successful will be used as a pattern for other areas.

There is ALSO money available FOR Species at Risk.

Harold King, OSPS Director

RULES SET FOR DRILLING IN WILDLIFE AREA

New plans guiding a potential \$16 billion worth of oil and gas development in one of B.C.'s most spectacular regions were announced on Friday by the provincial government.

The new 'pre-tenure' plans detail environmental requirements for companies undertaking exploration and development of presumed oil and gas reserves in the 64,000 square kilometre Muskwa-Kechika region in north central B.C.

They are expected to guide development of the area through

strategies that were custom developed by the government in consultation with a stakeholder group that includes local environmental groups, area residents, municipal governments, aboriginals and tourism interests.

The plans give direction for conservation of biological diversity, soil and water resources, as well as targets for minimizing disturbance to the general area.

The Vancouver Sun, Sat., May 29, 2004

B.C. COAL MINE PROPOSAL KILLED

Energy and Mines Minister Richard Neufeld announced Friday that a proposal to mine the Flathead

coal deposit near Fernie won't be allowed.

"We won't allow the Cline mining project to go ahead. A number of years ago other people wanted to go into production, but an International Joint Commission study in the late 1980's recommended against it," said Neufeld.

The mine lies close to the Alberta-Montana borders and there were fears that pollution from the open pit mine could be spread through the river system that flows from the area into the United States.

The Vancouver Sun, Sat., May 29, 2004



GROUP PUTTING TOGETHER BID TO SAVE DESERT PARK

John Wilkinson is heading up a group of concerned citizens that wants to preserve the Desert Park equestrian facility and improve it into a year-round multi-use recreational facility. The town of Osoyoos has contracted a consulting firm to look at options for the 52 acres.

*Laurena Weninger,
Penticton Herald*

ENDANGERED MOUNTAIN CARIBOU FACING NEW THREAT

A heli-ski tenure application for a huge area in the Rocky Mountains east of Prince George is raising serious concerns for the endangered mountain caribou. The application is for 493,432 hectares. There is great concern that helicopter activity in specific areas of the proposed tenure will be incompatible with mountain caribou recovery, and will impact the survival of the species.

Land & Water BC Inc. (LWBC) is in the final stages of approval for licensing the BearPaw Heli Skiing tenure. BearPaw's application overlaps with prime wintering habitat for approximately 1/4 of the world's last remaining mountain caribou (the Hart Herd).

Dave King, a retired provincial biologist, spent 30 years studying this same caribou population. King states, "I do not have the slightest doubt that should this application be approved, it will result in a decline, likely a significant decline, in the populations of mountain caribou found in the McGregor plateau area."

Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection (Omineca - Peace Region) has submitted a response to the application stating that "the proposal as it stands continues to expose Mountain Caribou to high risk of environmental degradation and population decline".

The provincial Recovery Implementation Group (RIG) charged with making recommendations for the recovery of the Hart Herd will be submitting a scientifically based and peer-reviewed Mountain Caribou

Recovery Plan within 1-2 months. Currently, Land and Water BC states that they do not intend to wait for these new recommendations.

If the tenure is granted and the Mountain Caribou Recovery Plan is then legislated and found to be in conflict, BearPaw will likely be entitled to financial compensation.

The Federation of British Columbia Naturalists (FBCN) is extremely alarmed at the apparent rush to approve this application before the Mountain Caribou Recovery Plan is complete. "We hope LWBC will acknowledge the significance of threatened mountain caribou, and await the release of the Recovery Plan before making any decisions on this tenure application" cautioned Jeremy McCall, President of FBCN. "At stake is the survival of the most viable population of mountain caribou left on the planet."

For more information contact:

Jeremy McCall, FBCN President, in Vancouver, BC at (604) 876-3313

Bev Ramey, FBCN Conservation Chair in Vancouver, BC at (604) 224-7689

Dave King, RPBio (retired Habitat Biologist for BC Ministry of Environment) in Prince George, BC at (250) 564-8887.

Harold King, OSPS Director

FOREST INDUSTRY RECEIVES SUBSIDIES

Dear Editor

The Liberal government is trying to buy votes with their recent announcement to provide an additional \$50 million to the forestry sector to compensate for the tenure take-back. This tenure

change was needed to make the stumpage determination more accurate and thus help solve the softwood dispute.

However, the take-back so far on the coast has resulted in low stumpage (by \$7) not higher because the increased concentration of companies has allowed them to work together to insure their auction bids on standing timber are minimized to reduce the stumpage.

And the hardships facing forestry workers are not caused by the softwood war, but instead are a result of automation and industry consolidation fuelled by higher profits.

The forest industry has been on the take for years.

Under the previous provincial government, FRBC channelled millions to help the poor laid off forestry workers, supposedly to offset the impact of park creation.

Now the Campbell Liberals are spending even more taxpayer dollars to help an industry that is booming despite the tariffs!

These companies have even been paid for this timber when it was taken back at 25 cents a cubic metre under the \$200 million subsidy program the Liberals allocated for compensation.

Clearly, this \$325 million of public money flowing to the forest industry that has been making good profits despite the tariffs is a major subsidy that should be proof that their tariffs are needed to level the playing field.

Jim Cooperman President, Shuswap Environmental Action Society Chase

(Another one of Bill Johnston's contributions)

GIVING A HOOT

A large sign stating This is Not a Zoo is mounted at the entrance to the Eagle Bluff property located at the north end of Vaseux Lake on Highway 97.

The land is home to the South Okanagan Rehabilitation Centre for Owls (SORCO), and although several rare bird species are present, they are not there for public viewing. OSPS made a \$500. donation to SORCO to help preserve the good work of the centre.

Okanagan, Jan. 23/05



Sherri Klein, founder of the South Okanagan Rehabilitation Centre for Owls, shows off Houdini, the center's great horned owl. The centre and the property it's located on were recently purchased by the Land Conservancy of B.C.

COAST FOREST EXPANDS MANDATE, REBRANDS IN JAPAN TO BUILD MARKET SHARE FOR BC WOOD PRODUCTS

B.C. Minister of Forests Michael de Jong and Rick Jeffery, President and CEO of the newly named Coast Forest Products Association, (formerly known as the Coast Forest and Lumber Association), unveiled their new logo and product initiatives today during a government/industry trade mission in Tokyo, Japan.

The new name of Coast Forest Products Association reflects an update in the mandate of the 12-year-old organization. "Coast Forest will now be the driving force for all B.C. coastal forest products," says Jeffery. "Our association will brand coastal products worldwide as the best products in the industry, using the best environmental harvesting practices, while providing the most consistent and reliable supply in the global marketplace."

Coast Forest will also be the industry's singular voice for communities, government and other stakeholders to consult on issues, policy and concerns.

OSPS has found they can communicate with local firms when there are concerns and worries about difficulties dealing with a much larger concern! – *Editor*

DESERTS COULD SOON CLAIM A THIRD OF EARTH'S SURFACE

UNITED NATIONS – Increasingly vast areas of the world are being turned into desert wasteland every year and the problem threatens to send millions of people fleeing to greener countries to survive, the United Nations says.

One-third of the earth's surface is at risk, driving people into cities and destroying agriculture in vast swaths of Africa. Thirty-one percent of Spain is threatened, while China has lost 92,100 square kilometres to desert – an area 20 percent larger than New Brunswick – since the 1950's.

"It's a creeping catastrophe," said Michel Smitall, a spokesman for the UN secretariat that oversees the 1994 accord, "Entire parts of the world might become uninhabitable."

Slash-and-burn agriculture, sloppy conservation, overtaxed water supplies and soaring populations are mostly to blame. But global warming is taking its toll, too.

Most at risk are dry regions on the edges of deserts – places like sub-Saharan Africa or the Gobi Desert in China,

where people are already struggling to eke out a living.

As populations expand, those regions have become more stressed. Trees are cut for firewood, grasslands are overgrazed, fields are over-farmed and lose their nutrients, water becomes scarcer and dirtier.



A Chinese primary student surveys barren fields after taking part in a forestation project northwest of Beijing in April.

Technology can make the problem worse. In parts of Australia, irrigation systems are pumping up salty water and slowly poisoning farms. In Saudi Arabia, herdsman can use water trucks instead of taking their animals from oasis to oasis – but by staying in one place, the herds are getting bigger and eating all the grass.

The trend is speeding up, but it has been going on for centuries, scientists say. Fossilized pollen and seeds, along with ancient tools like grinding stones, show that much of the Middle East, the Mediterranean and North Africa were once green. The Sahara itself was a savanna and rock paintings show giraffes, elephants and cows once lived there.

Global warming contributes to the problem, making many dry areas drier, scientists say.

Vancouver Sun, Wed., June 16, 2004



The Red Bridge over the Similkameen River west of Keremeos was reopened to traffic Thursday, one day after being threatened by a massive ice jam that flooded nearby properties. At least 20 properties suffered damage.

Herald, Jan 21st, 2005

Photo courtesy of Village of Keremeos

DWINDLING GLACIERS COULD LEAD TO WATER SHORTAGES

We used to say the freshwater held in ice in the Rocky Mountains is about the equivalent of the Great Lakes. Used to anyway.

This warning was repeated last week by water ecologist David Schindler of the University of Alberta. He said we need to plan now for the time when our rivers might dry to a trickle by the end of every summer. With the loss of glacier mass comes a loss in annual river flow.

The less glacier there is on the mountain, the faster what's left of it disappears.

Penticton Herald ~ Jan. 31st, 2005