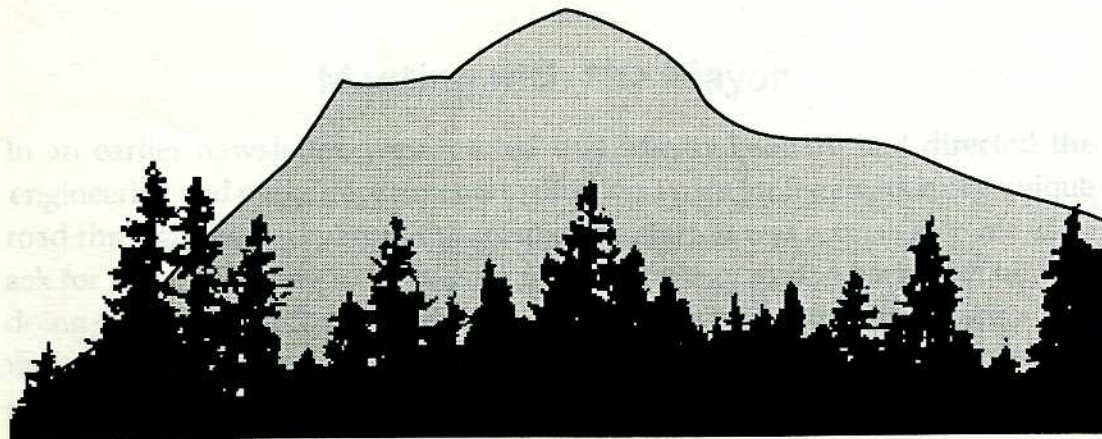

The Friends of Mount Douglas Park Society

NEWSLETTER

June 1997



Minutes of Directors 1997/98

The Friends of Mount Douglas Park Society

As of April this year, The Friends have 106 paid-up members. If you don't belong yet, there's no better time to join, and support a natural park close to home.

Name

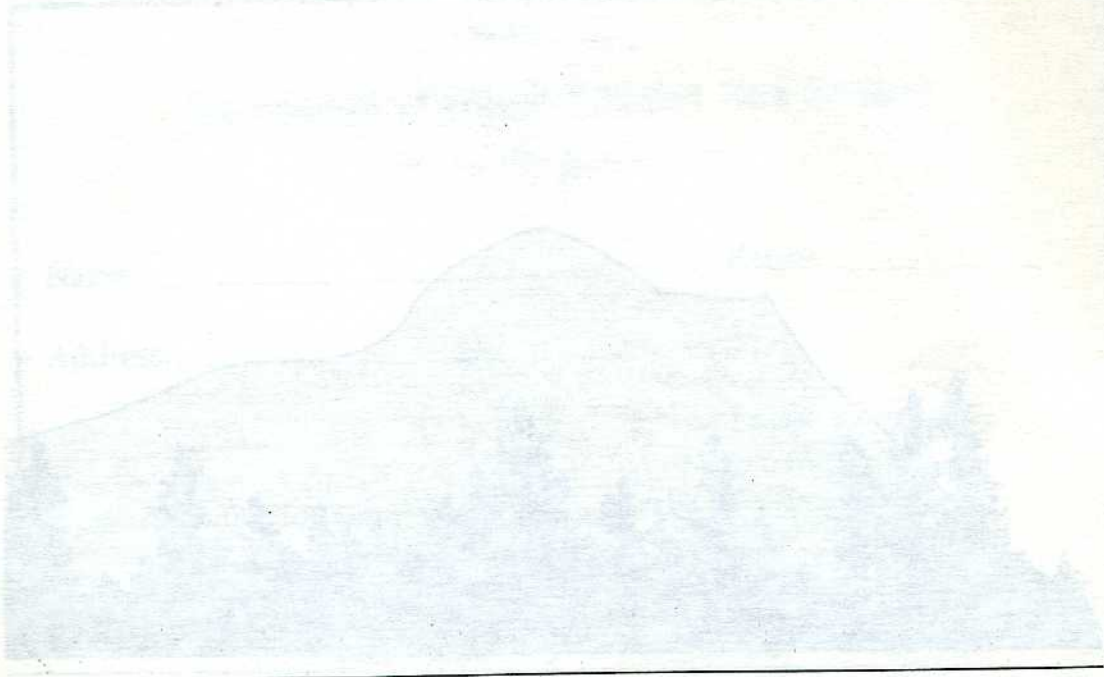
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President's Report

Feedback from members indicates that our newsletters are much appreciated, so from now on we will be issuing them more frequently-four times a year, we hope.

There will always, of course, be more to report about some of our previously-mentioned concerns and initiatives than about others. At the moment, funding for our work is one major issue. On the downside, the Habitat Conservation Fund has rejected our application for money that would go toward preparing Douglas Creek for the introduction of fish. However, an application for the same purpose to the Urban Salmonid Enhancement Fund is, at time of writing, still under consideration. As well, we have had provisional encouragement from the Provincial Capital Commission to apply for funding for the upgrading of the Mercer Trail at the Blenkinsop Road end. This would fit in with the PCC's general plan for greenways throughout the Saanich Peninsula. A report in detail is given in this issue of the newsletter.

Meeting with the Mayor

In an earlier newsletter, we reported that Mayor Leonard had directed the engineering and parks departments to develop a plan for the creation of a unique road through the park. From this auspicious start, it was a small step for us to ask for an opportunity to discuss an overall strategy for the park with him. In doing so, we hoped to repeat the success we have had with acquisitions along the western boundary; a process which began after a similar meeting with former Mayor, Murray Coell.

This time the topics were more complicated, so we started with a review of what had been achieved in terms of new parkland and how this process of acquisition can continue thanks to the clause in the Charter which allows for the addition of any land adjacent to the park once that land has been zoned for park use by the municipality. This discussion tied in nicely with the C.R.D. greenways plan in which the park is scheduled to play a major role as a "node" or regional focal point within the system. The Mayor suggested we look at a C.R.D. management plan for a particular park, for example Witty's Lagoon, and use it as a model for expressing what we want to achieve, in the long term, for Mount Douglas Park.

We then discussed the creek and what it has to offer as a fish-bearing stream and as a recreational walkway. The two problems which stand in the way of achieving the maximum benefits are the occasional oil leak from the storm sewer system and the uncontrolled discharge of water into the creek leading to erosion of the banks and the destruction of the fish habitat. The engineers have several designs they believe would solve the worst of these problems; in the first case, by using a small weir and in the second by using an energy-absorbing system through which the water would pass before it enters the creek. At the time of the meeting, there was a sum of \$50,000 in the budget for the construction of a weir near the storm sewer outfall, but given the constraints all local governments face, this is an item that could be cut. However, all is not lost, there is an application before the federal government for cost-sharing on this project and, in view of their renewed interest in fish, it has a very good chance of success. The second problem will be solved as part of the drainage project now nearing completion.

We then moved on to the topic of access to the park and went over the working definition we have been using for the road: two lanes of traffic with access for pedestrians, cyclists, horses and motorists.

The main issue at that time was the bicycle lane report due to come before Council on the following Monday. We were able to show that the \$600,000 price

tag mentioned in the report was misleading; we believe that figure referred to the total cost of construction of bike lanes from Blenkinsop to Shelbourne on both sides of the road. What we have in mind is very modest and the most expensive part has already been accomplished as part of the drainage project.

At the subsequent council meeting, Mayor Leonard proposed some changes to the wording in the report which cast its recommendations in a much more appealing light.

The Latest on Douglas Creek

Drainage and the weir

The new drainage system for Cordova Bay Road is very nearly complete: introducing stormwater runoff from the road into the creek will finish the job. At present, there is no final plan as to how this will be done. Draining Cordova Bay Road was reported to have cost three hundred thousand dollars.

Status of the construction of the weir is under review, because of budgetary considerations. There is a chance that the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans will match funds with the municipality to see this sixty-thousand-dollar project go ahead. We see the concept plan itself as a positive step.

In this watershed, our stormwater is not treated. Everything that flows into the storm drains goes straight into the creek and then onto the beach and into the ocean. If the weir functions effectively, we can eliminate some major pollutants virtually at source, before they blend into the open aquatic system. The actual construction will be a difficult job. The municipality is forced to work under regulations from Section 7 of the *Water Act*. The creek will have to be pumped around any green cement for seventy-two hours. Silt will also have to be controlled. We are confident that Saanich Department of Engineering will take every precaution in its power to see the job completed properly.

Release of coho fry

Before coho fry could be released into the creek, two major conditions had to be met. First, a transplant permit had to be put into place. This has been done. Many thanks to Tom Rutherford of Fisheries and Oceans for expediting the necessary paperwork and seeing it through to completion. The second condition was that a "challenge" had to be successfully met. The challenge in this case was—would coho smolts put into the creek survive for a 24-hour period? I am happy to report that they did.

With the prerequisites satisfied, the first release of 150 coho fry was scheduled for the 12th of May. Unhappily, 90% of the fry perished in their rearing tank the weekend before the release. Everybody involved with the project was keenly disappointed, but the school means to try again next year.

Mrs. Levey's class from Gordon Head Elementary released 150 coho fry on May 15. And the Friends of Mount Douglas Park will release 550 when the fry, now at Goldstream hatchery, are ready. The schools, teachers, students, as well as the hatchery and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans school rearing program deserve full marks for their community-centred commitment to education and the restoration of an important resource.

How important?

At a recent conference in Parksville, I was shown some startling statistics. Spawning coho and steelhead in Georgia Basin are returning from the ocean in ever-diminishing numbers. It would be absolutely honest and fair to say that stocks are reaching the point of no return. Two negative trends are at work in the drift towards extinction. One is the disappearance of coho from the ocean. The cause puzzles even the experts. The other can be mitigated by us. Many small streams that have been, or are now, coho nurseries, are being degraded until they cannot support life. Without some sort of action, the prospects for annual renewal of the salmon cycle are grim indeed.

Bearing this in mind, it is with great pleasure that we welcome the release of coho fry into Douglas Creek by schools in the community. Not only are they visible commitments to a natural cycle in a natural park, but also commitments to do what can be done to increase the number of coho in Georgia Basin.

There is a risk that construction of the weir may adversely affect the fish-stocking operation this summer. That, however, is a risk that must be run, since the weir is essential to the long-term health of the stream.

Grants in aid

Our request for a grant from the Habitat Conservation Fund was denied. We may find that some of the work planned for this season will be seriously curtailed. We may have to rethink our plan to put the clean stormwater message out into the watershed. Without funds, we are going to have to be creative. If you have any ideas in this line, we could certainly use them.

It appears the Department of Fisheries and Oceans will again provide three hundred dollars to carry out our monitoring program. That will pay for paper-work and some necessary equipment in:

- continuing to carry out basic water quality tests;
- conducting more benthic invertebrate surveys which may be an affordable way to pick out certain pollutants;
- live-trapping the released fish, taking nose-to-fork measurements, estimating weights and assessing general health by appearance.

Four students from Camosun College's Environmental Technology Program have finished a work assignment on the creek. We are promised a copy of their final report. It will be a welcome addition to the data we have already collected. Their study reaffirms the belief that educational institutions have much to offer stewardship projects in the community. Our creek project will stand or fall on how deeply the community becomes involved in the stewardship ethos.

How to Drain the Water from the Road into the Creek?

We are heading into the dry season now and so we will not see the full effect of the new drainage system until next winter's storms come rolling in one after another. The work is essentially finished and needs only acceptable discharge systems to complete the project.

If you walk along the edge of the cliff towards the motel, you will suddenly come upon an enormous black anaconda snaking down to the sea. This is the discharge pipe from the enclosed ditch on the opposite side of the road: it needs energy absorbing rocks installed at the exit so that flow of water does not mine the beach sand and then it is complete. Similarly, the old iron sluice, which carries the water to the creek near the car park, is rusted out and needs replacement.

Initially, the idea was to use gabian mats similar to the ones used at Doumac Ravine in Cordova Bay. When we went to see this example, we found that the shape of the creek bed had been drastically changed, the rock was held in place by cages of heavy-gauge chicken wire, the water flowed through the mesh and nothing grew over the rock and wire even though it has been in place for an number of years: the overall impression was of one artificiality and sterility. The engineers seemed to half-expect our negative response and produced a revised version in pretty short order. It was a definite improvement on the original, with the caged rock covered with large loose rock and the whole fitting into the channel cut by the discharging water. However, the means required to install the mats and rock call for the use of an enormous crane on the edge of the cliff, lowering machinery down the cliff and the tumbling of rock along the old sluice, all of which would cause enormous amounts of long-term damage. To their credit, the engineers gave us this graphic description so we would be under no illusions about what would happen.

After careful consideration, the Executive proposed several alternatives. For minimum cost and low environmental impact, just replacing the old sluice with

a new sluice has much to recommend it. For a little more money and better aesthetics, the system used near the motel would be acceptable, provided the pipe was buried. Our favourite is a series of cascading rock pools but it must be admitted that this is rather expensive. We have asked the engineers to consider all of the options, and we can support the one that does little damage and is cost effective. With this dual requirement the gabian mat concept is not the first choice.

Where are the Bike Lanes?

We have been talking about bike lanes through the park for a very long time. Where are they? The short answer is that, like Christmas, they are coming: the delay is due to uncertainties about road stabilization program. Now that the drainage work is near completion, we have a much clearer idea of what can be accomplished.

With this in mind, we walked the route with the engineers (Messrs. MacKay, Doyle, and Lloyd), together with Dave DeShane the parks manager. The recent work has produced a black-topped surface approximately eight metres wide and (according to Colin Doyle the traffic engineer) a bike lane plus a traffic lane require 4.5 metres. So there is space for two traffic lanes and one bike lane at the moment. There is also another metre + on the sea side of the road which could be added if funds were available to pave it. This would allow bike lanes in both directions, something Dave DeShane wants to see. However, with the budgets the way they are, we are not so optimistic and we favour moving the centre line over to produce a bike lane on the up-hill section of the road.

There was a discussion concerning the problems at the junction of Ash Road and Cordova Bay Road, and these should be resolved as part of the overall plan now being prepared. There was a mixed response to idea of an additional bike route through the picnic area but it does have great potential for attracting cyclists who are scared of the traffic on the main road. The key to making such a route a

success lies in the introduction of a left-turn lane for "cyclists only" at the top of the old view road near the gravel pit, which has been transformed by the drainage project. In addition to the left-turn lane for southbound cyclists, this area could form a new entrance to the park with an excellent view over the water.

The last major items discussed were the connections for cyclists to Royal Oak Drive, and for pedestrians to the park trail system. Since the walk, the road has been surveyed and a traffic volume study is underway using the counters strapped to the road. The next step is for the engineers to produce the results of the new survey and traffic volume study, and for all the parties to discuss what can be achieved within the framework of the budget and the space available.

The minimum achievable goals seem to be a pedestrian access to the park, one bike lane on the uphill sections, an additional route through the car park and a new park entrance. This time we will hold our breath and hope for the best.

Trails

In March, we made a preliminary application to the Provincial Capital Commission's Greenways Grant program for money to fund a multi-phase project that will properly connect the Blenkinsop side of the mountain with the regional trail on the Lochside right-of-way (and thus join the greenways of Gordon Head, through the park, to the trail that heads up the Peninsula).

After a good deal of hard going, the Mercer Trail emerges on Blenkinsop Road via a very steep section. From where the park boundary touches Blenkinsop Road, it's only about 100 metres to Loehbrunner Road, and from there hardly more to Lochside Trail.

We are hoping (and working) to improve the greenway connection to Lochside Trail—the route made clear by means of signage, and easier of access by providing adequate parking for cars.

The first step in this project is the repair of the Mercer Trail, and that is what this year's application to the Provincial Capital Commission is for. The final 350 metres or so of the trail is broken up and washed out in places, difficult for hikers and particularly difficult for horses.

Saanich Parks and Recreation is interested in sharing the cost of the repair with us. They estimate that it will cost \$30,000, so our preliminary application asked the PCC to fund us to the tune of \$15,000. Saanich will provide the other \$15,000, and the work will largely be done by municipal crews. If we get the funding, the work will begin in November.

The PCC has now advised us that they are interested in hearing more about our project, so we are sending in a full application by the end of May.

Garry Oak Enhancement

Last year we planted seedlings near the firegate off Cedar Hill Road, where the blackberry patch used to be before it was removed by the Parks Department. This spring, as expected, the blackberries began to reshoot. Accordingly, on Saturday, April 27, a party of five volunteers from the Society spent a morning lopping them down. Since blackberries are an obstinate species, you are invited on an individual basis to spend a spare hour now and then during the next few months keeping them under control. But look for the Garry Oak seedlings and spare them!

HELP!

WE NEED SOMEONE WHO KNOWS THAT MAKING
TELEPHONE CALLS IS AN ART.

IS THAT YOU?

PLEASE CALL KEN RANKIN, 477-8007

Board of Directors 1997/98

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Membership

The Friends of Mount Douglas Park Society

\$5.00/person

Name: _____ Phone: _____

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Please fill in this form and mail it to: Graham Shorthill
4623 Cordova Bay Road
Victoria, BC V8X 3V6