

GREEN SCENE

Don't move streams – It only causes problems

by Elaine Golds

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What could be more delightful than a small stream flowing gently through your yard? *Bruce Brandhorst photo.*

Last Sunday, stream stewards all over BC were celebrating World Rivers Day. Rivers Day was first celebrated in BC thirty six years ago and has now spread to over 60 countries around the world. Rivers Day remains especially significant in BC where we have many volunteers actively engaged in raising salmon and protecting local streams. In the Tri-Cities area, we are fortunate to have several urban streams with their own group of volunteers dedicated to keeping pollution out of their streams, enhancing the riparian forests which protect them and undertaking other initiatives to sustain the salmon in them.

One of the lesser known urban streams is Maple Creek which runs through Port Coquitlam and Coquitlam on the west side of the Coquitlam River. It empties into the Coquitlam River slightly upstream from the mouth of Hoy Creek. In many places, such as along Kingsway Avenue, Maple Creek flows in an artificially

straight channel which, sadly, resembles a drainage ditch more than a living stream. Despite such impacts from inappropriate urban development done decades ago, Maple Creek has a passionate group of volunteers who have worked tremendously hard to enhance this stream over the past quarter century. They were aghast this summer to learn the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) had approved a proposal to move a tributary of Maple Creek to make room for a house proposed to be well over 10,000 square feet in size.

Moving streams out of the way to make room for development is never a wise thing to do. Furthermore, such an action would have not been allowed before the Harper government eliminated protection of fish habitat from the federal Fisheries Act in 2012. To the grave disappointment of stream stewards, the Trudeau government has, to date, failed to restore fish habitat protection. Decades ago, fish habitat was also not protected so, back then, streams were commonly redirected, ostensibly, to make room for new development. However, streams are not so easily shifted from their course. Some of the water in a stream flows beneath the surface. It's always a mistake to move a stream because the portion flowing beneath the surface tends to keep its original course. People who move streams to make way for houses often end up with very wet basements especially after a heavy rainfall.

There can be other problems with moving streams, too. Back in 1958 both Hyde and Smiling Creeks which drain the western and southern slopes of Burke Mountain were perceived to be in the way of development as they flowed across the more gentle terrain of Port Coquitlam towards the Pitt River. As a consequence, both of these creeks were redirected to a channel dug eastwards to discharge into DeBoville Slough. Partington Creek (once called Yule Creek) which flows from the eastern slopes of Burke Mountain once discharged directly to the Pitt River near the present day mouth of DeBoville Slough. To gain more farmland, Partington Creek was redirected westwards along the north side of Cedar Drive to also discharge into the upper end of DeBoville Slough.

There have been problems with these creeks ever since. After diversion, Partington Creek was forced to make a sharp right turn at Cedar Drive. At this turn, gravel tends to accumulate in the stream bed and, as a consequence, the creek is prone to overflowing its banks here. The gravel which builds up at this turn needs to be regularly removed to keep the creek flowing around this bend. It's a shame to have to remove so much good spawning gravel from the creek simply to prevent flooding. Ever since it was diverted, engineers from the City of Coquitlam have faced costly challenges to "manage" its flows. Surely, it would have been far more prudent to let Partington Creek follow its natural course to the Pitt River.

The situation with Hyde Creek is almost worse. Right where the hatchery and educational facilities have been built, the Creek strangely goes dry every summer. It turns out that this is exactly the spot where the creek was redirected from its original course. Presumably the subsurface flow is still following its original course. Dealing with a dry creek bed every summer has created many problems for the Hyde Creek Watershed Society as they require water in which to rear their juvenile coho all summer long.

I hope the city staff in Port Coquitlam are wiser these days and will prohibit the moving of this spring-fed tributary of Maple Creek which is full of juvenile coho and wild cutthroat trout. The other residents in this neighborhood are doing a lovely job of caring for this beautiful little stream. It would be a travesty to destroy it and replace it with a monster house.