

## Green Scene: Celebrate Rivers Day...and our Stream Stewards

by Elaine Golds

(published in the *TriCity News* – September 26 2014)



**Long-standing Noons Creek volunteer, President Dave Bennie (right) with Brian Wormald, Vice President and Doug Calder, Hatchery Manager (left) worry that a lack of new volunteers could put their efforts in jeopardy. *Bruce Brandhorst photo.***

The last Sunday in September has been officially designated as World Rivers Day for the last ten years. However, the history of Rivers Day goes much further back in BC and dates from the time when Mark Angelo, then teaching at BCIT and volunteering with the Outdoor Recreation Council had the inspiring idea to declare a BC Rivers Day in 1980. With a growing public awareness of the need to protect habitat in our rivers, since then, people in BC have developed an increasing passion for celebrating our rivers and streams. Blessed with abundant coastal rainfall and a challenging topography which gathers this rainfall into a myriad of watercourses, we have some of the most spectacular and productive salmon rivers

in the world. However, the restoration of local streams has mostly been accomplished through the efforts of a number of volunteers. These important people are our so-called stream stewards.

A major feature in the Tri-Cities is the beautiful Coquitlam River along with a number of smaller streams. Almost all of these watercourses have salmon runs in them thanks in large part to many hours of effort from volunteers who have enhanced fish habitat in local streams and raised public awareness. The Port Coquitlam and District Hunting and Fishing Club was first on the scene in the 1950s. Back then, some of the Coquitlam River's salmon runs had been needlessly damaged by urban development, gravel extraction and loss of braided channels in the lower River. Members of this club have worked for years with great dedication to restore salmon runs. With considerable support from BC Hydro over the past two decades, their efforts have been hugely successful. Some of the early leadership for this came from people like Bill Otway and Al Grist both now deceased. Thanks to their efforts and many others, the Coquitlam River now has healthy runs of pink, chinook, coho, chum and steelhead. BC Hydro continues to support the efforts of Kwikwetlem First Nation and other stream stewards to restore sockeye to Coquitlam Lake. For the past few years, the Coquitlam River Watershed Round Table, with support from local government, has also become a champion of efforts to protect the River.

Back in 1976, Rod MacVicar and Ruth Foster, teachers at Centennial Secondary School in Coquitlam wanted to provide their biology students some boots-on-the-ground experience of BC's biodiversity. Rod, with an attraction to all things aquatic, felt Mossom Creek on Port Moody's north shore had much to offer their students in terms of a natural stream that would benefit from a little study and attention. Rod and Ruth thus started the Mossom Creek Hatchery where innovative programs were developed to teach students how to rear salmon and restore their habitat. An impressive number of their students have gone on to productive careers in fisheries and related fields. Last year, a devastating fire destroyed the much-cherished Mossom Creek Hatchery. But, thanks to countless hours of volunteer labour over the last few months, the Mossom Creek rebuild is well underway.

By the early 1990s, people in the Tri-Cities were beginning to discover there were a number of neglected urban streams - often right in their own neighborhood. This new-found awareness was especially timely as a rapid increase in urban development was associated with the culverting of coho-producing tributaries and loss of the riparian forests which protect water quality. The volunteer-run Noons Creek Hatchery in Port Moody started in 1990, followed soon after by hatcheries at Hyde Creek in Port Coquitlam and Hoy Creek in Coquitlam. Today these three societies offer annual festivals that celebrate our salmon. On October 24, residents are invited to attend the annual Salmon Come Home festival at Hoy Creek while, on November 16, the Hyde Creek volunteers host the annual Hyde Creek Salmon Festival. These fall events offer fantastic opportunities to view the large adult salmon that return to spawn in these small creeks.

While artificial salmon production is not actually the main goal of these volunteer-run hatcheries, the production of reared juveniles provides some back-up insurance that restored salmon runs in these creeks will not be accidentally eliminated by polluting spills or erosive landslides. Other volunteers on creeks such as Maple and Como Creeks have thoughtfully chosen to focus on stream restoration and public education instead of hatchery production. Regardless of what approach is taken, it all relies on the ongoing efforts of a large number of volunteers in our community. However, one issue that is often raised by these seemingly tireless volunteers is a concern that new volunteers do not appear to be coming forward to help ensure these programs will continue into the future. When we celebrate our rivers on BC Rivers Day, we should also be celebrating these volunteers and thinking about what we can do to ensure their impressive accomplishments will carry forward into the future.