



Volunteer Joe Richardson; holds up a coho fry believed to have been born in Colwood Creek. Together with Beth Mitchell, the pair have monitored fish populations in various local creeks for five years

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Colwood creek bears fish, reaps award

By Amy Dove - Goldstream News Gazette

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Volunteers prove waterway viable habitat

It only takes a few minutes to pull the trap out of Colwood Creek.

With water running through the mesh canister, volunteers Joe Richardson and Beth Mitchell hoist their catch into a bucket. Along with the smoked oysters they use as bait, there are three coho fry, two cutthroat trout and five sticklebacks.

“They are kind of gourmet fish,” Richardson says with a laugh of the bait.

There is no doubt anymore that there are fish in the creek, Mitchell says. They have trapped salmon, trout, sculpins, sticklebacks, crayfish and crabs in Colwood Creek over the years. The numbers remain pretty consistent overall, she adds.

Higher up in the waterway there are introduced land-locked trout populations, but further down they are believed to be native fish. Judging by the size of the coho in the trap they were born in the creek this January, she says.

The pair quickly get to work, counting, measuring and recording the catch just like they have done for almost five years. Both Colwood residents, the pair are members of the Esquimalt Lagoon Initiative. They trap the fish seven times a year for the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

The intent was first to see what fish, if any, were in the creek and also to determine if the creek would benefit from being stocked with hatchery salmon.

In total nine creeks pour into Esquimalt Lagoon — the majority of them fishbearing. Under the project, Richardson and Mitchell focus on Colwood and Bee creeks.

For their work the DFO recently presented ELSI with a five-year-recognition award. The reason they do it, rain or shine, isn't for themselves though, Mitchell says. The creeks were listed as non-fish bearing in the past, which just isn't the case, she says. Without that designation they aren't afforded the same protection from development.

“By raising awareness of what’s here we are trying to prevent the entire breakdown of the lagoon (ecosystem),” Mitchell says.

While not formally trained, the pair give their time so that more people will recognize where the fish are. Set out as a five-year project, they will soon met with the DFO to see if the work needs to continue. Whatever the outcome, it’s likely the pair will continue to watch the creek and count the fish, Richardson says.

With major property developments happening throughout the water system, people need to be aware of the creeks, Mitchell says. Recently a flood of silt has come down the creek, filling in places they normally set their traps. Where it came from is unclear, but stormwater runoff is suspected.

“All of this work is to establish a baseline because we know things are going to change,” Mitchell says.

“It’s just for that reason,” Richardson says. “Just to see if there is a change (in the creek).”

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