

Esquimalt Lagoon no-go areas under discussion

By Amy Dove - Goldstream News Gazette

Published: December 14, 2009 11:00 AM

Wildlife refuge areas will be dedicated in Esquimalt Lagoon next year, but people are invited to learn more about them this week.

Esquimalt Lagoon Stewardship Initiative and Canadian Wildlife Services are hosting an information session Dec. 16 on the no-go zones in the lagoon, a migratory bird sanctuary.

"People should come out to learn more about why these measures are being taken by the Canadian Wildlife Service," said ELSI co-ordinator Kitty Lloyd. "And to learn more about the birds."

The voluntary no-go zones mean people cannot wade, paddle or walk in areas where birds naturally congregate. The idea there is to limit disturbing or startling the birds. A report commissioned by ELSI states such events can prompt birds to stop eating or temporarily leave any area, taking away from their reserve strength for migration.

Esquimalt Lagoon is one of the few areas left in Victoria offering birds a sheltered environment and diverse feeding options, Lloyd said. The off-limit areas encompass land and water access to the east and west ends of the lagoon, including the waterway entrance under the bridge. Areas at the north side, near Royal Roads University and the mouth of Colwood Creek are also included.

Members of the rowing community, which practice on the lagoon, have expressed concern over a lack of broad public consultation. Stakeholder meetings were held in September, but this is the first official public session, Lloyd said, noting creating refuge areas is within CWS's mandate.

Community members have also voiced worry that the move is the first step toward a complete ban of boats from the lagoon. That is not the case, Lloyd said, noting the refuge areas are voluntary.

"Nobody is trying to ban boating on the lagoon," she said. "It's just trying to strike a balance — to protect the birds while keeping a lid on certain activities."

The information session is Wednesday, Dec. 16 from 7 to 8:30 p.m. CWS staff and local bird expert Ann Nightingale will present in room 110 of the Mews Conference Centre at RRU. For more information call 250-360-3299.