

World Wetlands Day 2007

Annual Report

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3.0 INTRODUCTION

Around the world, countries celebrate the anniversary for the signing of the *Convention on Wetlands*, which took place in Ramsar, Iran on February 2, 1971. This convention initiated the process of protecting and conserving wetland systems and their biological, ecological and sociological values worldwide. There are 1,636 designated Ramsar sites throughout the world, 37 of which are located within Canada.

British Columbia contains three internationally significant wetlands designated by Ramsar: Alaskan National Wildlife Area (June 24, 1982), Creston Valley Wildlife Management Area (WMA) (February 21, 1994), and most recently, Columbia Wetlands WMA (CWWMA) (July 5, 2005).

The Columbia Wetlands WMA contains one of the largest connected wetland ecosystems found in North America. Encompassing approximately 15,070 hectares, this area stretches 180 km in length from Fairmont, BC to Donald, BC, and includes the only reaches of the Columbia River in Canada remaining in their natural state. It is also one of the few sections of any river system in North America conserved specifically for wildlife. The wetlands found in this WMA contain complex ecosystems, with an incredible array of biological diversity, providing habitats for over 216 varied species of plants and wildlife.

4.0 WORLD WETLANDS DAY 2007 IN THE EAST KOOTENAY

On February 2, 2007, World Wetlands Day was celebrated for the first time in the East Kootenay Region. The British Columbia Ministry of Environment (M.O.E) initiated an educational outreach campaign to raise awareness of wetland ecosystems in this region. Creating a broad scope of awareness and education among the local populace was a priority, in order to establish a foundation for achieving success in future activities. The outreach strategy for 2007 consisted of three major components: an advertising campaign, educational outreach to local elementary students and efforts to increase shared stewardship.

Due to the international and regional significance of the Columbia Wetlands WMA and its recent Ramsar designation, the outreach project for 2007 focused primarily on the Columbia Wetlands WMA (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Columbia Wetlands WMA 2006



4.1 Advertising

Through the participation and support from the Public Affairs Bureau (P.A.B.) in Victoria, BC, a radio broadcast commercial was aired five times a day for one week on two East Kootenay radio stations prior to February 2. Marketing the two major urban areas within the East Kootenay (Cranbrook/Kimberley and Fernie/Sparwood), over 35,715 people were exposed to the advertisement. This advertisement portrayed the international recognition and unique values of the CWWMA. "The Columbia Wetlands Wildlife Management Area is an internationally significant wetland situated in our backyard. These marshlands provide rearing and nesting sites for over 180 species of birds including sandhill cranes, white pelicans and trumpeter swans. Several endangered species also reside here, including the red listed badger. The Columbia Wetlands is a priceless legacy to celebrate on February 2, World Wetlands Day." (Aired on The Drive 102.9fm and B104.7fm)

The “Kootenay News Advertiser” newspaper played a key role in creating awareness for a large number of people on World Wetlands Day. The Kootenay Advertiser distributes to 44 cities in the East Kootenay, reaching approximately 66,589 people. One full page was dedicated to this special date. An editorial and photograph of the Columbia Wetlands WMA were displayed along the top of the page, and a cut-out colouring contest for elementary students was offered in the lower portion (Figure 4).

Celebrating this anniversary date with the community served as an ideal avenue to educate the public. Many within the East Kootenay Region were unaware of World Wetlands Day and the fact that there are three internationally significant recognized wetlands within British Columbia. In efforts to create a broad awareness in the surrounding communities, celebratory posters were mailed to approximately 30 local businesses (Figure 2).

Figure 2. World Wetlands Day poster for CWWMA

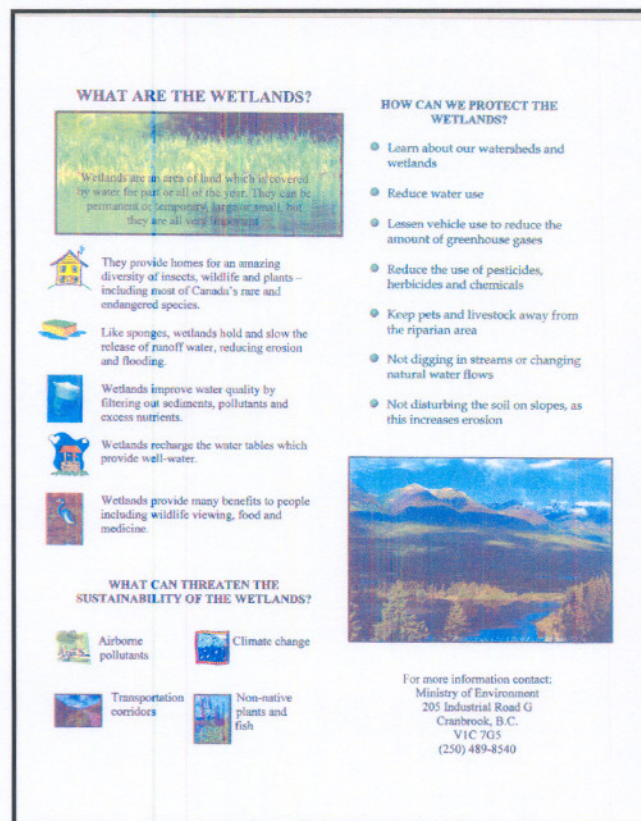


Letters were also sent to these businesses drawing attention to endangered species like the painted turtle (blue listed), peregrine falcon (blue listed) and badger (red listed), which reside within the varied habitats of these ecosystems. Also noted were burbot (red listed), bull trout (blue listed), and numerous additional fish species, which spend all or part of their life cycles in these reaches of the Columbia River and its spectacular headwaters at Columbia Lake. Another vital component addressed was the Pacific Flyway, which provides rearing and nesting sites for over 180 species of birds including; turkey vultures, great blue herons, prairie falcons, bald and golden eagles. Communities were eager to take part in supporting and learning more about our wetlands.

4.2 Educational outreach to local elementary students

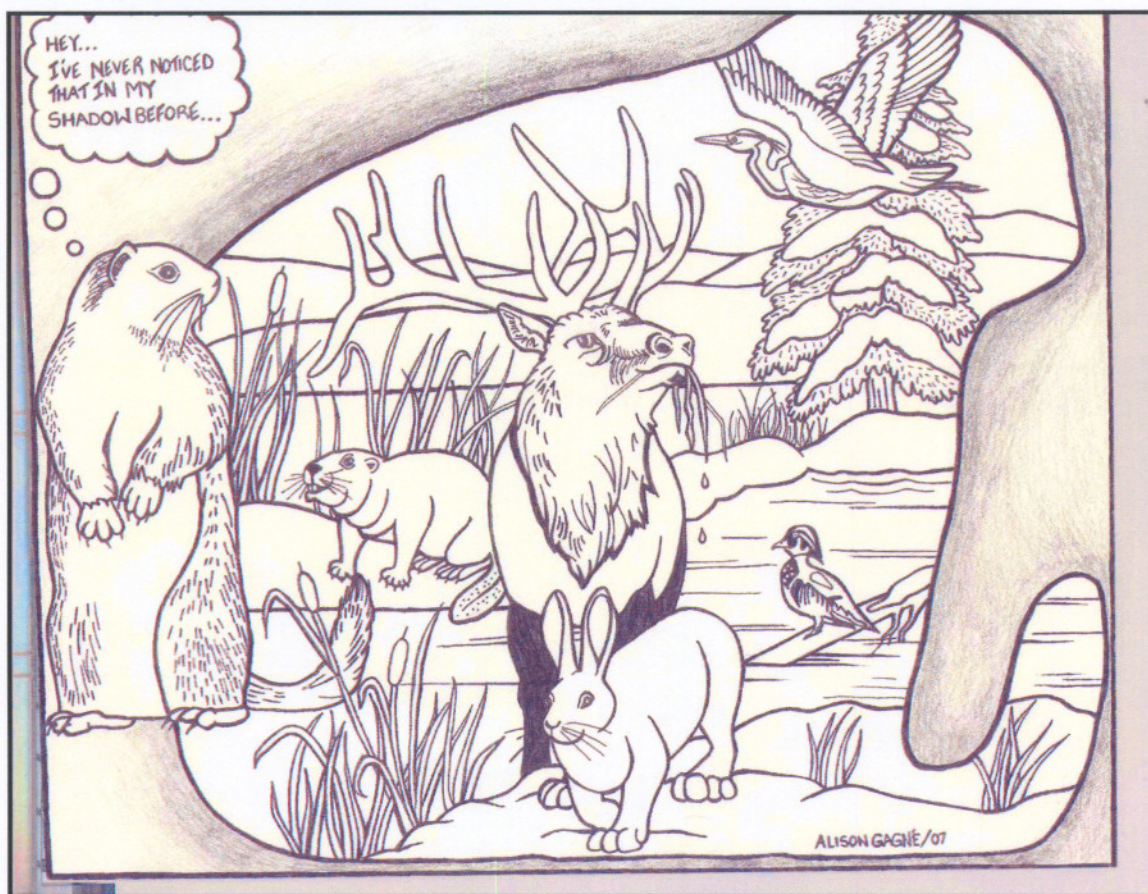
Education components aimed at elementary students included distributing an informational sheet describing what wetlands are, threats to the sustainability of wetland ecosystems and steps to protect them (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Informational sheet



A colouring contest was also promoted and proved a fun and efficient way to both educate and include students in the World Wetlands Day celebration. This contest was posted in the Kootenay News Advertiser and also offered to several schools in the Region. Over 450 children from 10 different East Kootenay schools participated in the friendly educational challenge. Playing off the date of Ground Hog's Day (Feb 2), a local artist creatively designed a colouring sheet wildlife illustration. In the shadows of the ground hog, wildlife such as elk, beaver, snowshoe hare and the great blue heron, were illustrated wintering in the Columbia Wetlands (Figure 4). Prizes, such as backpacks with the embroidered WWD 2007 logo and books on wetland animals were awarded to the most creative entries.

Figure 4. Wildlife illustration colouring sheet



On February 2, the Columbia Wetlands WMA Park Ranger and Creston Valley WMA Education Manager performed four school visitations in Creston, BC. At this time, the students who won the colouring contest were met in their classrooms by the two

coordinators, and the prizes were awarded to the winners. A brief presentation was given explaining the features and functions of wetlands, such as their role in the storing and replenishing of groundwater. After the presentations, students participated in an enthusiastic game of wildlife pictionary. Informative, colour illustrated books on Canadian wetland animals were given to the winning teams.

4.3 Shared stewardship

Due to its extraordinary features, there are numerous organizations and interest groups concerned with the protection and sustainability of the CWWMA. A shared stewardship model is applied in the management of the CWWMA through establishing and maintaining relationships with these diverse groups. Achieving a cooperative management strategy and preserving the unique values within these lands is the targeted objective. Informative posters celebrating World Wetlands Day (WWD), along with letters of appreciation were designed and delivered to approximately 25 of these organizations (see Figure 2).

As an additional component of shared stewardship, it is paramount to increase awareness among all levels of government to the values and significance of the wetland ecosystems within the East Kootenays. As such, a framed photograph of the Columbia Wetlands WMA was sent to municipal, provincial and federal government representatives within the Region. It is hoped that displaying this photograph within local government offices will serve as a reminder of the invaluable internationally significant natural treasure that exists here. The cooperation of all levels of government is needed to ensure these sensitive ecosystems are maintained for future generations.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The aim of the 2007 educational outreach campaign was to raise awareness and draw attention to the phenomenal attributes of the internationally significant wetlands in the East Kootenay Region. Through the various means of advertising, student involvement, and shared stewardship interaction, the objective for this project was achieved. This endeavour proved to be successful, reaching over 70,500 people. Wetlands are a legacy to celebrate, sustain and preserve.