

Meet the stewards of Miami River

By Erin Knutson and The Miami River Streamkeepers Society

The Miami River Streamkeepers Society met up with *The Observer* at the heart of the Miami River to discuss the ecology and preservation of the river in the heart of Harrison Hot Springs.

The Society members work tirelessly to improve habitat, encourage stewardship of the river, and to monitor water quality.

“We go out once a week weather permitting for a couple of hours and we choose an area of the trail to remove the plants that are over growing,” said Perrin.

The group participates in Walk and Weed every Tuesday, a Streamkeeper’s initiative, to keep the Miami River overgrowth of invasives to a minimum.

Their mission is to enhance the Miami River through increasing the profile of the waterway and to educate the public on the benefits of riparian buffers along the streamsides.

A riparian buffer is a vegetated area (a buffer strip) near a stream, usually forested, which helps shade while partially protecting a stream from the impact of neighbouring land activity.

Volunteers can often be seen planting trees, which in turn helps the watershed, along with the riparian vegetation benefits that increase feeding opportunities and nesting habitat for fish and fauna by using native plants.

This practice improves water quality by providing cooling shade and reducing runoff of sediments and pesticides. It also allows percolation to occur.

“You can think globally, but it’s important to work locally, and it’s good way to meet people,” said Streamkeepers volunteer Mary Baxter, on why she volunteers with the organization.

The environmentally conscious group has tackled issues such as encroachment by landowners and illegal dumping of garden waste, as well as the monumental task of dealing with the invasive species that reduce the biodiversity and available habitat for wildlife in the area.

Contentious species in the area are: Bindweed, English Ivy, Himalayan Blackberry, Japanese Knotweed, Lamium, Periwinkle, Policeman’s Helmet, Reed Canary Grass, Scotch Broom, Tansy Ragwort and Yellow Flag Iris.

Without the help of the volunteers the river would quickly become over run with noxious plants.

Water quality surveys where the Streamkeepers test temperature, pH, and dissolved oxygen at three sites, and report any findings on their website are part of the organizations many tasks. If the problem is of significant concern they have a community advisor who works in the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to report to.

According to Perrin the Streamkeepers officially started out in 2009, and were a result of the Miami River Committee, which was a village committee that started in 2006.

The group currently has 18 members.

“We have a core group with about six of us that are strong supporters who come out to educational events for the public” said Perrin.”I’ve been an environmentalist since the 1960s and I’ve always been concerned about preserving the environment for the future, basically, I’m working for my grandchildren.”

The industrious group works with several organizations including Wildsafe B.C., South Coast Conservation Society, Fraser Valley Invasive Weed Council (Invasive Species Council) and Fraser Valley Conservancy on educational initiatives like Healthy Environment Day, which is a public outreach to the community on healthy waterways.

The dedicated bunch also hosts events like the Canadian shoreline clean up, which involves the clean up of the shoreline from Rendall Park, all the way down to the Hot Springs Resort.

“I think it’s the responsibility of the residents of Harrison to keep the river clean and visibly beautiful and healthy, so we feel we’re doing our part by keeping the invasives under control,” said Streamkeeper member Jane Kivett. “Residents may not realize what we do but I think they all appreciate a clean river.”