

2017 FTCCIS Streamkeeper Report – November 21, 2017

Youth streamkeepers, through FTCCIS, have had a fishy year and been active in several projects. Each successive year, youth streamkeepers become more fish savvy and stream aware as they develop greater knowledge of our native salmonids (chum, cutthroat, coho), and healthy stream and riparian environments.

Youth streamkeepers were active in the spring 2017 BioBlitz on April 28, operating three live minnow trapping stations in James Creek. Following an evening setting of live G-traps and a midnight flying squirrel sit, 25 hardy youth and 14 adults were organized into 3 groups to check six traps. Youth were given instruction on: baiting traps, choosing stream conditions and location, handling of live fish, and measurement, documentation, and identification of species. The total juvenile fish collected and released were 8 cutthroat (*Oncorhynchus clarki*) fry, 2 chum (*Oncorhynchus keta*), and 3 sculpin .

The FTCCIS collaborated with Friends of Cortes Island Society to offer a new school programme, ‘Gently Down the Creek’ on May 12. Imagine, 20 children, each disappearing into chest waders pulled up to their chins and giant boots, stumbling around on the stream bank. They looked like a family of creek hobbits. ‘Gently Down the Creek’ is offered to schools on Vancouver Island by Dave Clough, a professional fish biologist, or ‘Fish Man’ as he is affectionately known. The programme helps children get inside the skin of a fish – where are the best hiding places & what markings help fish hide, where are the tastiest bugs, how does a stream work with pools & riffles, how do we know a stream is healthy through measuring dissolved oxygen & PH. Best of all, who can get the wettest? And how do you get up after sitting in the creek and filling your chest waders? The Children’s Forest youth and the Grade 3-5 class from the Cortes School each participated for a half-day.

Children’s Forest youth streamkeepers continued to participate in the annual Department of Fisheries & Oceans (DFO) spawner counts on Cortes Island. Last year (2016) was a record chum year, while 2017 appears to have low counts of returning chum to all Cortes creeks. Youth streamkeepers have been walking the banks of James Creek from Carrington Lagoon upstream along an identified spawner segment of the creek. Our November Nature Study Days (November 5) focused on doing a spawner count with 10 youth and 4 adults participating. A cooperative female chum caught everyone’s attention just as we were organizing into 4 groups, and offered a timely teachable moment – what were her markings, how was she moving, where was she holding in the creek, and many other questions about spawning behavior. On that day, 4 live chum and 5 dead chum were observed. Interestingly, more fish presence has been noted in James Creek than any other Cortes creeks this year, with a total of 8 live chum and 10 dead chum counted.

Two major road culvert and stream restoration projects were conducted on 2 Cortes streams this fall through Ministry of Highways & Infrastructure. Five intrepid, hard-working youth spent a chilly, snowy morning helping with streamside planting along the banks of Whaletown Creek. The youth transplanted a number of native plants along the riparian area, using pick-axes and crowbars to help soften the ground. Conifer seedlings of cedar, spruce, douglas fir & hemlock were dug in on higher ground, while salal, oregon grape, snowberry, ferns and ocean spray were planted closer to the creek for bank stabilization and important creek cover.

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