

Waterweed infestation prompts formation of Bowron Society

A pesky weed that has gone forth and multiplied in the waters of Bowron Lake has galvanized the area's stakeholders into forming the Bowron Lake Enhancement Society, whose first task will be to learn more about the infestation, and determine if there are possibilities for its control.

Known as Canadian waterweed or *Elodea canadensis*, the plant was first observed in the fall of 2000 to be forming large mats in and along Bowron Lake. Its presence has property owners, commercial operators, naturalists, and recreational users concerned the world-renowned waterway may see its water quality and reputation on a downhill slide.

Though non-toxic, waterweed is unsightly, at-times stinky, and its rapid proliferation has produced large accumulations in the lake, and along Bowron's beaches where wave action has thrown it ashore in large deposits not unlike bales of hay. Earlier this year, Bowron Lake's public boat launch was choked with the masses of weed, and cabin owners were dismayed to see rotting mats of the plant along their water accesses. Paddlers, boaters, anglers, swimmers and shore birds have all been negatively impacted by the weed, and even the color of some lakewater samples has changed, from crystal clear to tinged with green.

The plant was first identified in 2004 by Beth Collingwood of Quesnel's Nature Education & Resource Centre, from samples collected at Bowron by longtime cabin owner Eileen Seale. The identification was then brought to the attention of Chris Swan, government biologist based in Williams Lake.

Another Bowron cabin owner, Rod Graham of Quesnel, carried out extensive internet research about the weed. Graham's Bowron property is near the lake's outlet, where it was feared an accumulation of the weed could conceivably impede the continuous flushing of the lake. Graham successfully lobbied government officials to visit Bowron to observe the infestation, as well as collect samples and photographs.

Then in July, an open meeting was held at Bowron Lake Lodge, with 33 people in attendance, representing business owners, year-round residents, cabin owners and other interested persons. A basic agenda had been prepared by Graham, who chaired the session. The only government representative in attendance was the CRD's (Cariboo Regional District)



Canadian Waterweed mats, washed ashore by the spring winds on the western shore of Bowron Lake, May, 2005.

Ronda Wilkins, who was able to help guide the ad hoc group through some of the redtape muddle associated with society formation. A majority of those present indicated their preference for a registered society, since its potential for input into government plans and decisions is far greater than that of a non-registered group. It was felt that the funds necessary for the registration fees could be raised through membership sales.

A steering committee was struck that afternoon, with six nominees agreeing to serve throughout the organizational phase and make recommendations at the next gathering. Graham told those present that Chris Swan had in fact visited Bowron, and would be preparing a waterweed report, hopefully to be available in time for the next meeting.

That meeting was held at the Wells Curling Club on the afternoon of September 17, with Cariboo North MLA Bob Simpson accepting an invitation to facilitate. Copies of Ms. Swan's report were made available.

Simpson suggested that the most expeditious way to form a registered society would be to follow the province's existing constitutional template, and add the details when a first executive was selected. This process called for a minimum of nine people to volunteer as direc-

tors, who would then choose from their own ranks their first executive.

Unlike many meetings of community groups looking for people to serve, the nine-person minimum was quickly surpassed and in a couple of minutes, there were 14 names on the list. They included (in alphabetical order): Tracey Carson, Alison Galbraith, Rod Graham, Eva Grandell, Dave Hendrixson, Reg LeBlanc, Arnold McCarthy, Jim McKitrick, Carol Phillips, Sandy Phillips, Brent Powell, Bob Salmons, Eileen Seale, Con Steneker and Margaret Taylor.

At yet another meeting – this one the first official directors' meeting of the Bowron Lake Enhancement Society – the directors chose the following people to serve as the first executive: Rod Graham, president; Sandy Phillips, vice-president; Tracey Carson, secretary; Carol Phillips, treasurer. The remaining persons all agreed to continue as directors.

Sandy Phillips and Eileen Seale have been named to a committee just to deal with the weed situation. Other committees are expected to be formed later.

Monthly executive meetings will be held on Saturday afternoons throughout the winter, alternating between Wells and Quesnel.

And while the Canadian waterweed may be the catalyst that has led to the society's formation, it is certainly not the only issue. Members are confident the existence of a registered society will be extremely valuable in bringing other Bowron concerns to the future attention of planners and regulators.



Directors of the newly-formed Bowron Lake Enhancement Society met October 15 in Wells to choose their first executive.

From left: Dave Hendrixson, Jim McKitrick, Carol Phillips (treasurer), Tracey Carson (secretary), Bob Salmons, Alison Galbraith, Rod Graham (president), Brent Powell, Sandy Phillips (vice president), Reg LeBlanc, and Arnold McCarthy.

MISSING:

Eva Grandell, Eileen Seale, Con Steneker, Marg Taylor