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## Upcoming Events

### AGM

**The 2016 FCCPAS AGM** will be held on **Saturday April 23, 2016** beginning at 10:00 a.m. at the Dog Creek Community Gymnasium. A brief business session will be followed by a light lunch (\$10) and an afternoon hike into Churn Creek PA, assuming the weather cooperates! If you are a member or just interested, please come. Contact Ordell Steen ([oasteen@shaw.ca](mailto:oasteen@shaw.ca)) if you have questions or would like to become a director.

## Activities Update

### Hikes in 2015

#### Back Side of Clyde Mt.

On the last day of May, 15 members hiked from the calving barn campsite to the trail on the east side of Clyde Mountain. This relatively gentle trail provides spectacular



*Great views and grasslands along the Clyde Mt trail*



*Checking a native thistle on Clyde Mountain*

views of the Fraser River canyon and adjacent terrain and passes through the no-livestock-grazing benchmark (ecological reference) area. We explored evidence of a past prescribed fire and identified many bird and plant species.

## Activities Update continued

### Dry Farm to Grinder Creek.

On August 23, about ten people greatly enjoyed a hike from the Blackdome Mine road through the Dry Farm pasture to Grinder Creek and then along the creek to the ranch headquarters. This moderately short, downhill hike allowed time to explore the Dry Farm ecosystem restoration and search the riparian habitats along Grinder Creek. Old haying equipment and irrigation ditches near Grinder Field tell of earlier ranching. We also enjoyed impressive views of the Fraser River canyon while overlooking the ranch headquarters.



*Overlooking the ranch headquarters and the Fraser River Canyon*

**Hikes Planned for 2016.** At least two full day hikes will be offered in 2016 to explore other scenic and ecologically interesting corners of Churn Creek Protected Area. Our first **short hike will be on April 23**, in the afternoon following the AGM, to the north side of Churn Creek canyon. When dates and locations of other hikes have been confirmed, information will be sent to all members by email. If you have suggestions for hikes or questions, please do not hesitate to contact us (see [www.friendsofchurn.ca](http://www.friendsofchurn.ca) for contact information).

### Stswecem'c - Xgat'tem Open House Day

On June 23, the Friends of Churn Creek were invited to participate in an open house organized by the Stswecem'c - Xgat'tem (Canoe Creek - Dog Creek) First Nation (SXFN) and featuring displays by groups working with them. We set up a display board showing activities and projects by the Friends, distributed some Friends of Churn T-shirts and enjoyed a great salmon barbecue



*Helping a young student at our display*

### Representation on Cariboo-Chilcotin Ecosystem Restoration Committee

Friends of Churn Creek was invited last year to be a member of this committee which oversees, promotes, and supports restoration of grassland ecosystems in the Cariboo-Chilcotin. We received funding from them in 2015 in support of the High Lake restoration project (see Page 3). For further information, contact Peter Opie (see [www.friendsofchurn.ca](http://www.friendsofchurn.ca) for contact information).



# Project Updates

## Churn Creek Gateway Trail

The Churn Creek Gateway Trail was further improved in 2015. In mid June, Friends of Churn Creek volunteers worked with BC Parks staff to apply a coating of lignosulfonate to the trail. The binding properties of this environmentally friendly, naturally occurring polymer have hardened the trail surface to improve its accessibility for wheelchairs. In 2014, we discovered the surface to be too soft and loose for easy wheelchair travel.



## High Lake Grassland and Dry Forest Restoration Pilot Project Initiation.

This was the principal project of the the Friends of Churn Creek in 2015. The focus of our efforts this year was the establishment of pretreatment vegetation and wildlife use monitoring plots and the initiation of tree encroachment removal from the benchmark grassland. Tree felling, bucking, and piling was done by a contracted forestry crew from the Stswecem'c - Xgat'tem Development Corporation. Major funding for this project was provided by the Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation, the Cariboo-Chilcotin Ecosystem Restoration Program, and the BC Parks Park Enhancement Fund. See *Feature Article* for further information.



*An unusually large northern terrestrial gartersnake seen on the High Lake project site*

**New Projects.** Directors of the Friends of Churn Creek are always considering new projects that will help BC Parks achieve the goals outlined in the CCPA Management Plan (2000). Potential projects at varying stages of consideration include grassland restoration strategy development, riparian habitat monitoring, Dry Farm restoration monitoring, no-grazing benchmark fencing, trail marking and invasive plant removal. Volunteer efforts by members is essential for all of our projects and when volunteers are needed, requests will be sent to members by email. If you have any suggestions or questions regarding potential projects, please contact us.

## Membership and Donations

It is the time again to renew your membership. Consider encouraging a friend to join because without a strong membership base, FCCPAS cannot continue to conduct valuable projects within the protected area.

FCCPAS is a charitable society and receipts for income tax purposes can be provided for all donations other than membership. Individual membership fees remain at \$20 but this year we have initiated a family membership for \$30. Membership forms are available on our website ([www.friendsofchurn.ca](http://www.friendsofchurn.ca)).

## Feature Article

### High Lake Grassland and Open Forest Restoration Pilot Project

Churn Creek Protected Area (CCPA) is one of the most important areas in BC for conservation of grassland and dry forest ecosystems. However, large areas of open grassland and open Douglas-fir forest are disappearing as a result of tree encroachment of grasslands and ingrowth in forests. In addition to loss of critical habitat for many species, livestock grazing is concentrated on remaining grasslands, resulting in added impacts.



*Tree encroachment on High Lake Benchmark Grassland*

Some recent efforts by BC Parks to remove encroachment and ingrowth have relied solely on broadcast burning. Success has been limited because encroached and ingrown stems are often too large to be removed by fire alone. Manual or mechanical pre-burn treatments are needed to increase burn effectiveness and to manage ladder fuels to minimize undesired killing of large wildlife trees.

The principal objectives of this Friends of Churn Creek project are to implement, evaluate and demonstrate a restoration approach that includes felling followed by piling of encroachment and ingrowth stems for safe burning in winter. The High Lake area was chosen for this project because it has been heavily impacted by encroachment and because it is a designated long term ecological reference area (benchmark) for natural (no livestock grazing) Upper Grassland ecosystems. The project will provide useful information for restoration of other areas within CCPA.

Encroachment stems in the project area ranged from < 1 m to >5 m tall. Felling was done in two passes, the first with brushsaws to cut small (< 15 cm diameter at ground level) stems and the second with chainsaws to cut larger (up to 30 cm diameter at ground level) stems. Most stems were then bucked into shorter lengths and gathered into small piles for future burning. More time and effort than expected was required to buck and pile the slash. Compared to simply felling and then broadcast burning, this approach has a higher pre-burn cost but lower cost of slash burning and can be applied in areas where broadcast burning options are limited.



*Felled and bucked encroachment stems ready to be piled*

Felling, bucking, and piling is being done by a contracted crew from the Stswecem'c-Xgat'tem Development Corp. In 2015, first pass felling was completed on approximately 50 hectares (76% of area) and second pass on 43 ha. Slash was piled on about 33 ha. If requests for additional funding are successful, we hope to complete the slashing phase of the project next summer. Slash piles will be burned by BC Parks the following winter.

Prior to treatment, Friends of Churn volunteers established 18 vegetation and 72 ungulate pellet group plots for long term monitoring of treatment effects. Vegetation and ungulate use will be monitored following treatments.