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Upcoming Events

AGM on April 28

Due to the ongoing Covid situation, this year's AGM is again being planned as a virtual Zoom meeting. It is scheduled for Thursday, April 28th, 2022 at 7:00 PM with brief reports from the Executive and the annual election of directors. Details regarding how to participate in the meeting will be sent out to members via email in early April. Please contact Peter Opie at peter&skye@telus.net for more information or if you are interested in becoming a director.

Activities Update

2021 hikes and those planned for 2022



In the Goose Lakes chain

No hikes were organized in 2021 due to Covid related restrictions. Because restrictions are being relaxed, we anticipate offering two hikes for members in 2022. We expect these will include a walk through areas effected by last year's wildfire. Another would explore either the Goose Lakes or Blackwater Lakes chains. If there is a part of the Protected Area that you are interested in exploring, please let us know, as at this time we have not

firmed up the hike itineraries. When dates

and locations have been confirmed, information will be forwarded to all members by email and facebook.

There are many amazing places to explore in Churn Creek Protected Area. Those of us who have hiked there for many years continue to find new places, interesting ecosystems and wildlife. We really look forward to sharing those places and observations with more members.

Membership and Donations

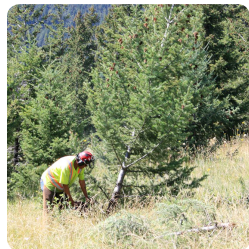
Society membership continues to be stable but low in number. Dedicated directors and other members continue to successfully complete a number of projects within the Protected Area each year but there is much more work that could be done. Consider encouraging a friend to join our organization as without a new and younger volunteer base, the Friends of Churn Creek Protected Area Society will be unable to continue undertaking valuable projects within the Protected Area. Both individual (\$20.00) and family (\$30.00) memberships are available. Membership forms are available on our website at: www.friendsofchurn.ca Remember that FCCPAS is a registered charitable organization and that receipts for income tax purposes can be provided for any donations other than membership, for more than \$20.

Project Updates

Dry Farm Northwest and Lease Pasture Restoration Projects



Pretreatment band of encroachment



Post treatment with many encroachment stems removed



Ingrowth cutting treatment prior to bucking, piling, or burning

Churn volunteers oversaw the cutting of Douglas-fir encroachment and ingrowth on approximately 90 hectares within Lease Pasture and 65 hectares within the Dry Farm Northwest project areas. In 2022 we hope to secure additional funding to complete the cutting in Lease Pasture and buck, pile and burn areas of heavy slash situated in both project areas.

Wetland Assessment and Monitoring

Friends of Churn Creek P.A. is continuing our long-term multi-phase project to document and monitor the wetlands of Churn Creek Protected Area. The purpose of the project is to 1) monitor wetland hydrology and vegetation changes and relate to variations in weather and landscape factors, and 2) recommend management practices to achieve BC Parks conservation goals for wetlands in the Protected Area. The project has been financially supported by BC Parks; BC Min Forests, Lands, and Natural Resource Operations; and the Friends of Churn Creek.

The first phase of the project, completed in 2020, included an inventory, mapping, and initial description of all wetlands within the Protected Area. Approximately 65 wetlands were mapped and included 21 different wetland ecosystem types. Vegetation monitoring plots were established at four wetlands in 2020.



Checking a water depth sensor located deep in a well

In 2021, an additional eight wetlands, for a total of 12, were selected for detailed assessment and monitoring. Permanent vegetation monitoring transects were established from the dry uplands into each of the wetlands. A comparison of vegetation in 2020 and 2021 indicated relatively large vegetation shifts. The transects will continue to be monitored annually to assess annual trends in vegetation and habitat.

Wetland water depth and duration are being measured manually and by instrumentation. Water depth sensors connected to data loggers were placed in shallow wells

within four selected wetlands. These sensors monitor daily water levels above ground and up to approximately 1 m below ground. We are planning to establish water depth sensors in additional wetlands in 2022. In addition, shallow ground water movement into wetlands may be monitored by sensors in 2022.

A weather station was purchased by the Friends of Churn Creek and located near the lowest elevation wetland in the Protected Area. An existing fire weather station occurs at higher elevations. Weather data from both stations will be compared to wetland hydrological data.

Additional data collected in this project include snow depth and water equivalent and time-lapse ground-level photography of snow cover.

2021 Wildfire Transforms Protected Area



Fire on Clyde Mountain

On July 2nd a lightning strike started a wildfire on the east side of Clyde Mt in Churn Creek Protected Area. Using back burns and with the aid of air support, wildfire crews were initially able to contain the fire to Clyde Mountain and by mid July the fire was thought to be under control.

However, on August 4th the wildfire unexpectedly crossed the Empire Valley Road just north of Brown Lake and, due to windy conditions, quickly expanded in northerly and westerly directions. By mid August the wildfire had burned over 12,000 hectares and affected most of the protected area between Churn Creek in the north, Koster Creek in the south, the Fraser River in the east, and Little Churn Creek in the west. The fire did not affect the kiosk near the mouth of Churn Creek.



Burned area near Onion Lakes

Effects of the fire appear to be quite variable with some positive effects, especially for the long-term, as well as some short-term negative effects. Within weeks of the fire, grasses and forbs were beginning to grow, many blackened areas were gaining a green tinge, and wildlife were present. We hope to provide a fuller documentation of fire effects over the coming years.

Feature Article

Grassland Restoration Efforts Making a Difference

For much of the land within the BC Parks protected area system, maintaining conservation values often focuses on passive ecosystem management. For protected areas such as Churn Creek where historically, open grasslands and low density Douglas-fir forests were renewed in the past by frequent, low-intensity surface fires, more active management is often required to restore and maintain representation of these ecosystems.



Grassland restoration near High Lake, pre- and post-treatment

In these areas, tree encroachment and ingrowth usually includes many trees more than 2 m tall which are generally not removed by low intensity fire alone. As a result manual treatments, such as felling, are usually required prior to burning where fires have typically not occurred for decades.

Since initiating our first project at High Lake in 2015, Friends of Churn Creek volunteers, working in partnership with BC Parks and local forestry crews from Stswecem'c Xgat'tem Development Ltd Partnership, have manually treated over 700 hectares of tree encroachment and ingrowth. Treatments are designed to improve the condition of sites for future prescribed burning and to reduce ladder fuels to protect larger wildlife trees. Small to medium sized encroachment and ingrowth is cut by SXDLP slashing crews while generated slash is often left scattered on the ground or is limbed, bucked, piled and burned.

Removing encroachment and ingrowth and reintroducing fire is intended to promote the traditional plant communities and wildlife native to the area. Areas of heavy slash are piled and burnt to reduce fire hazard, improve movement of wildlife and livestock and to accelerate the decomposition of larger slash.

Funding to undertake this work has been obtained from the Provincial Land Based Investment Strategy, Federal Priority Places initiative, Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation, BC Parks Park Enhancement Fund and local BC Parks funding. Examples of recently treated areas can be seen along the Black Dome Road, near High Lake, Airport Flats and Sheep Flats. To date, Friends of Churn Creek have secured and expended almost \$300,000 on these projects and contributed 2600 volunteer hours. As additional funding is secured Friends of Churn volunteers hope to continue to expand the program to other priority areas that have been identified by BC Parks.