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## Upcoming Events

### 2025 AGM on April 25

The 2025 AGM is scheduled to begin at 6:00 pm on Friday, April 25 at the Scout Island Nature House in Williams Lake. The evening will begin with a pot luck dinner (please bring something if you can) followed by brief reports from the executive and the annual election of directors at 7:00 PM, and then a slide show of our activities. Details regarding how to participate in the meeting by zoom will be sent out to members via email in early April. Please contact Peter Opie at [peter&skye@telus.net](mailto:peter&skye@telus.net) for more information or if you are interested in becoming a director.

## Activities Update

### Hikes in 2024

#### Fire history Presentation and Hike: May 26

This event was well-attended by FCCPAS members, Williams Lake Field Naturalists, Thompson River University researchers, Park Rangers and Mike Dedels from the Grassland Conservation Council. TRU Professor Jill Harvey and her students led us through their research results on fire history and the role of wildfire in Douglas-fir and grassland ecosystems in Churn Creek P.A.. We discussed evidence of fire history from fire scars on old Douglas-fir trees. Research results included ecosystem recovery after the 2021 wildfire in areas of different levels of fire severity and discussions of forest encroachment cohorts onto grassland. After the presentation at the calving barn,



we quickly warmed up with a brisk hike uphill to Airport Flats. From the top, we had panoramic views of the mosaic of forest and grassland, the extent of forest encroachment as well as areas where the Friends of Churn Creek had removed encroachment and are attempting to restore grasslands and an open-forest landscape. There was good discussion and information sharing. Many thanks to Dr. Jill Harvey and her students.

The planned September 29 hike to the BC Lake area was cancelled due to rain and poor, wet road conditions. It is being rescheduled for Spring 2025.

### **Planned Hikes in 2025**

Two one-day hikes are planned for 2025 to explore scenic and ecologically interesting areas in the Protected Area. A spring hike, probably in late May, will provide good birding opportunities and a chance to check a variety of ecosystems from dry upland grasslands to riparian shrub and cottonwood communities and wetlands. We will visit Hairy Fish, BC and Grasshopper lakes. A fall hike has not yet been selected but when dates and locations have been confirmed, information will be forwarded to all members by email and facebook and described on our website.

### **Membership and Donations**

To keep our organization thriving we need to build on our membership so please considering asking a friend to join our society. Membership forms are available on our website at: [www.friendsofchurn.ca](http://www.friendsofchurn.ca) And it is that time of year to again renew your membership. Both individual (\$20.00) and family (\$30.00) memberships remain unchanged. Remember that FCCPAS is a registered charitable organization and that receipts for income tax purposes can be provided for any donations of twenty dollars or more.

## **Project Updates**

### **Grassland Restoration Efforts Continue**

The 2024 season was likely our most successful year to date for tree encroachment removal. We received funding from the Federal Priority Places initiative, the Cariboo Chilcotin Ecosystem Restoration Committee and Park Enhancement Fund, resulting in Friends of Churn volunteers overseeing the cutting of Douglas-fir encroachment and ingrowth within the Alkali Flats, Dry Farm South and Wycott exclosure project areas. Over 200 hectares of grassland and open forest were



treated. Stswecem'c Xgat'tem Development Limited Partnership (SXDLP) crews cut, limbed, bucked and piled several hundred piles of slash while this past fall the Vesta Unit Crew from the Cariboo Fire Center and Friends of Churn volunteers spent much of November burning slash piles.





## Churn Creek Wetlands Monitoring Project

The Friends of Churn Creek wetlands study is a joint project in partnership with the Ministry of Forests, Research Section and BC Parks. The principal objective of the project is to document the relationships of wetland hydrology and vegetation to varying weather and site factors and to use this information to better predict the likely impacts of a changing climate on wetland permanence and dynamics and to recommend wetland management practices to reduce these impacts.

The past year (2024) was the fourth year of monitoring weather, wetland hydrology and wetland vegetation in Churn Creek Protected Area. Thirteen wetlands which occur over a wide elevation range within the protected area are currently being monitored twice daily for above-soil water depths. Weather data are being collected from three stations, placed at low, mid, and high elevation. Preliminary results indicate a generalized pattern of rapid water depth increase during snow melt (usually in mid to late February as shown by time lapse cameras), followed by a steady decline in water levels until mid to late summer. The rate of water level decline is strongly affected by air temperature, solar radiation and other weather factors. Other factors which modify the summer decline include shallow ground water flow (indicated by measurements of hydraulic head in soils outside the wetlands) and size and attributes of wetland collection areas (local watersheds). Summer rainfall events slow the drop only slightly. Years of low snow-melt runoff and warm summers (such as 2024) lead to low early season water levels and surface drying by early to mid summer. These data indicate that the predicted changing climate will likely result in disappearance of many current wetlands, especially those at low elevations with small collection areas. These hydrological changes will change vegetation and wildlife habitat in riparian and wetland ecosystems.



A Churn Creek P.A. wetland dry by mid June in a low snowpack and warm year (2024). The wire fence in the background protects a water depth data logger in the black ABS pipe

## Feature Article

### How did Brown Lake get its name?



Brown Lake, lying along the current Empire Valley Road, is named after one of the early settler families in the present Churn Creek area.

Charlie Brown was born Samuel Leander Charles Brown on November 26 1826 in Kingston, Ontario. One source suggests that Charlie travelled west to the California gold fields in 1847 and then north to British Columbia in 1856. He had experience working as a flour miller and in 1861 it is reported that he had located at Dog Creek in partnership with Isadore Versepeuche in the operation of a flour mill.

# Feature Article (cont)

As was common among European men in the Cariboo at the time, Charlie took up with Agnes Teener, a First Nation woman probably born in the Lillooet area around 1840. Her indigenous name remains unknown and few records have been found for her and her life story remains fairly sketchy.

Charlie and Agnes had at least five children, all sons; Jim born in 1863, possibly in Lillooet, Johnny in 1866, William in 1873 at Dog Creek and Henry in 1874 and Andrew in 1882, both at Empire Valley. The birth of Henry and Andrew at Empire Valley is consistent with the belief that Charlie applied for pre-emption of 320 acres at the west end of Beaver Lake (now called Brown Lake) about 1875.

Their eldest son Jim was a fervent reader of books and newspapers and became passionate about the sport of scull racing. While living in Empire Valley he built his own boat shell and practiced rowing on the nearby Beaver Lake. His first regatta was in 1887, where he won the single sculls in his homemade boat.

Pioneer life was not always easy and serious accidents were not uncommon. In August of 1888, Charlie was crushed by a wagon and died at Empire Valley. Two days later his son William, at the age of fourteen, also died. After this tragic loss Agnes continued to make improvements to their land. The family apparently operated both a grist mill and saw mill near the outlet of China (now Koster) Lake. During the early 1890's access to Empire Valley was limited, and the boys would drive their cattle south along the west side of the Fraser River to Lillooet, where there was a new bridge across the river, which provided access to the railroad in Ashcroft.

Jim became an ardent rower and in 1896 traveled to Victoria to purchase a shell for \$200.00. Jim started home with the boat in June, first on the sidewheeler Princess Louise where he ended up at Port Hammond and then by train to Ashcroft. From there he hired Henry Herman at \$3.00 a day to help him carry the scull (32.5 feet long and with 32 pound oars) to Empire Valley, a distance of nearly 100 miles. They made 20 miles the first day to Twenty Mile House and then on to Clinton where they rested a few days. From Clinton they hiked to Kelly Lake, then to Big Bar Creek, on to Canoe Creek and finally to Empire Valley where the boat was launched. Later in life, Jim tallied many wins during his racing career.

Johnny applied to pre-empt a 320-acre parcel (DL 224, containing present BC Lake) further upstream from the family farm and in 1893 obtained title to that land for \$320.00. Then in early 1896 brothers Jim, Johnny, William and Henry finally received title to DL 225 at a cost of only \$5.00. Later in 1896, the ranch was advertised for sale and described as: 320 acres, crown grant complete, houses, stable, etc. It is only 2 miles from the post-office, climate of the finest, all vegetables mature to perfection. However, as William had died prior to the title being granted, it appears his share reverted back to the Crown and in 1900 the title for DL 225 was reissued to Jim, Johnny and Henry at an additional cost of \$80.00. Soon after, in 1901 the ranch was sold and title transferred to Anthony Bishop. Title of DL 224 does not appear to have been transferred from Johnny Brown's estate until 1927 when the BC Cattle Company obtained ownership. In the early 1900's Agnes and the Brown brothers left Empire Valley for other pursuits; however, their name has not been forgotten with the official naming of Brown Lake in 1954, in recognition of Samuel Leander Charles Brown.



Remains of Brown house near present BC Lake