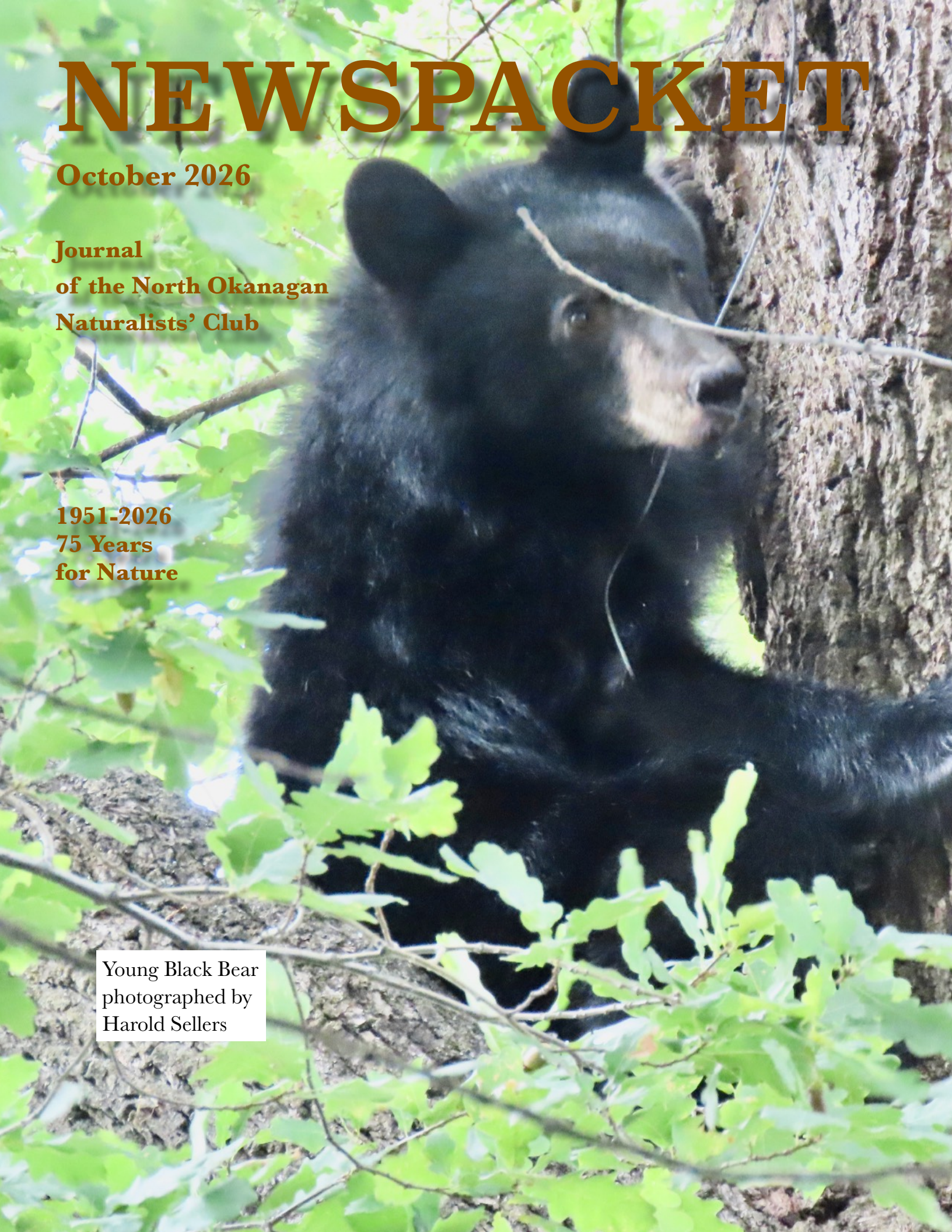


# NEWSPACKET

A young black bear cub is the central focus of the image. It has dark black fur and a distinctive light-colored, possibly white or cream, patch on its chest. The cub is positioned on a tree trunk, looking towards the right side of the frame. The background is filled with vibrant green leaves and branches, suggesting a forest setting. The lighting is natural, highlighting the texture of the bear's fur and the surrounding foliage.

**October 2026**

**Journal  
of the North Okanagan  
Naturalists' Club**

**1951-2026  
75 Years  
for Nature**

Young Black Bear  
photographed by  
Harold Sellers

**North Okanagan Naturalists' Club (NONC)****P.O. Box 473****Vernon, B.C. V1T 6M4****Website****www.nonc.ca****Email****naturevernon@gmail.com**

*NONC acknowledges the presence of the traditional, ancestral and unceded lands of the Syilx and Secwépemc peoples who have resided here since time immemorial. We recognize, honour, and respect the Syilx / Secwépemc lands upon which we live, work, and play.*

**EXECUTIVE**

|                |                                                                                                                                 |
|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| President      | Eric Kowalski<br>604-600-6725                                                                                                   |
| Vice-President | Michelle Gregoire<br>250-308-2838                                                                                               |
| Past President | Harold Sellers<br>250-307-3543                                                                                                  |
| Secretary      | Harold Sellers                                                                                                                  |
| Treasurer      | Marnie Williamson<br>250-545-4743                                                                                               |
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**LIFE MEMBERS**

Ray Arlt, Kay Bartholomew, Joan Heriot,  
Phil Jones, Peter Legg, Malcolm Martin,  
Frank & Mary Paul, Harold Sellers



Newspacket is printed by  
Wayside Printing in Vernon. Thank you Wayside!

**PROGRAMS & ACTIVITIES**

Contact the following if you have questions.

|                           |                                                                                                                                    |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| BC Nature                 | Eric Kowalski<br>604-600-6725                                                                                                      |
| Bluebird Trails           | Margaret Mackenzie<br>250-542-2712                                                                                                 |
| Botany                    | Margaret Mackenzie<br>250-542-2712                                                                                                 |
| Christmas Bird<br>Count   | Don Cecile                                                                                                                         |
| Conservation              | Harold Sellers<br>250-307-3543                                                                                                     |
| Cools Pond                | Rod Drennan<br>250-545-4999                                                                                                        |
| Hummingbird<br>Banding    | Louise Breneman<br>250-542-4050                                                                                                    |
| Nature Walks              | Coreen Jenner<br>250-306-8827                                                                                                      |
| Newsletter                | Harold Sellers<br>250-307-3543                                                                                                     |
| Speakers                  | Bruce Tattersall<br>778-874-4614                                                                                                   |
| Swan Lake                 | Michelle Gregoire, Joyce<br>Heard, Robert Hettler, Eric<br>Kowalski, Laurel MacDonald,<br>Margaret MacKenzie, Marnie<br>Williamson |
| Swan & Eagle<br>Count     | Rod Drennan<br>250-545-4999                                                                                                        |
| Watershed<br>Stewardship  | Eric Kowalski &<br>Marnie Williamson                                                                                               |
| Website &<br>Social Media | Laura Barker<br>519-532-6600                                                                                                       |

**Annual Membership Dues:**

|               |      |
|---------------|------|
| Couple/Family | \$55 |
| Single        | \$38 |

see nonc.ca

## NONC

## Club News & Notes

**Our latest new members** are Michele Blais, Janice Hoy, Mary-Ann Reid, and Bonnie Strotmann. Welcome to all of you!

### It's that time of year again to renew your NONC membership!

Online at [nonc.ca](http://nonc.ca). Single Membership \$38 Family Membership \$55

Add \$5 if you wish to receive a mailed copy of BC Nature Magazine

Other options: E-transfer to [nonc2021@telus.net](mailto:nonc2021@telus.net) (state your name and membership renewal) or mail to PO Box 473, Vernon BC V1T 6M4

Marnie will also be accepting memberships at the next general meetings in Oct and Nov. Contact her at [mpw660@telus.net](mailto:mpw660@telus.net) if you have any questions.

### Introducing another community group for the interest of naturalists

#### Cycling without Age Vernon-Coldstream Chapter

This volunteer service provides free trishaw bike rides for less-abled seniors, allowing them to participate actively in our community, experience nature up close, share stories, and visit places that they may otherwise be unable to.

Since its launch in 2025, the season runs 7 days a week, mid-May to October end.

Partnered with 15 seniors' and care facilities, passengers were from care homes, private citizens, Hospice House, visiting folks (England, Kamloops, Ontario etc.). We accommodated single, double and group rides, plus welcomed individuals bicycling in tandem accompanying CWA passengers

Local events and community engagements we participate in include Canada Day, Schubert Centre dance fundraiser, Go-By-Bike events, Sounds of Summer, Friday night Polson Market kick off, and we are planning for the Sleigh All Day Christmas Market.

All CWA members are volunteers: 35-40 as pilots (drivers) and 4 volunteers doing maintenance, website, storage room, and scheduling.

Donations: Grateful for all donations. Tax receipts when requested, are issued under Schubert Society for donations of \$20 or greater.

Erin Burgess CWA coordinator email: [cyclingwithoutage.venon.bc@gmail.com](mailto:cyclingwithoutage.venon.bc@gmail.com) 🌱



## NONC

## The Ways of Our Water

*Then, Now, and...stuff we don't know*

### PART 5 — Major Creeks: BX and Deep creeks

*by Harold Sellers*

*map courtesy of Jason Webster*

**THIS** time in our series we will take a closer look at two of the four major creeks of our area: BX Creek and Deep Creek. Note that we do not have any rivers in the Greater Vernon area.

#### BX Creek

BX Creek drains a watershed that includes part of Silver Star Mountain, as well as a portion of Vernon Hill.

We will examine the creek in two parts: Upper BX Creek and Lower BX Creek. Upper BX Creek runs from the upper reaches of the watershed to the inlet of Swan Lake.

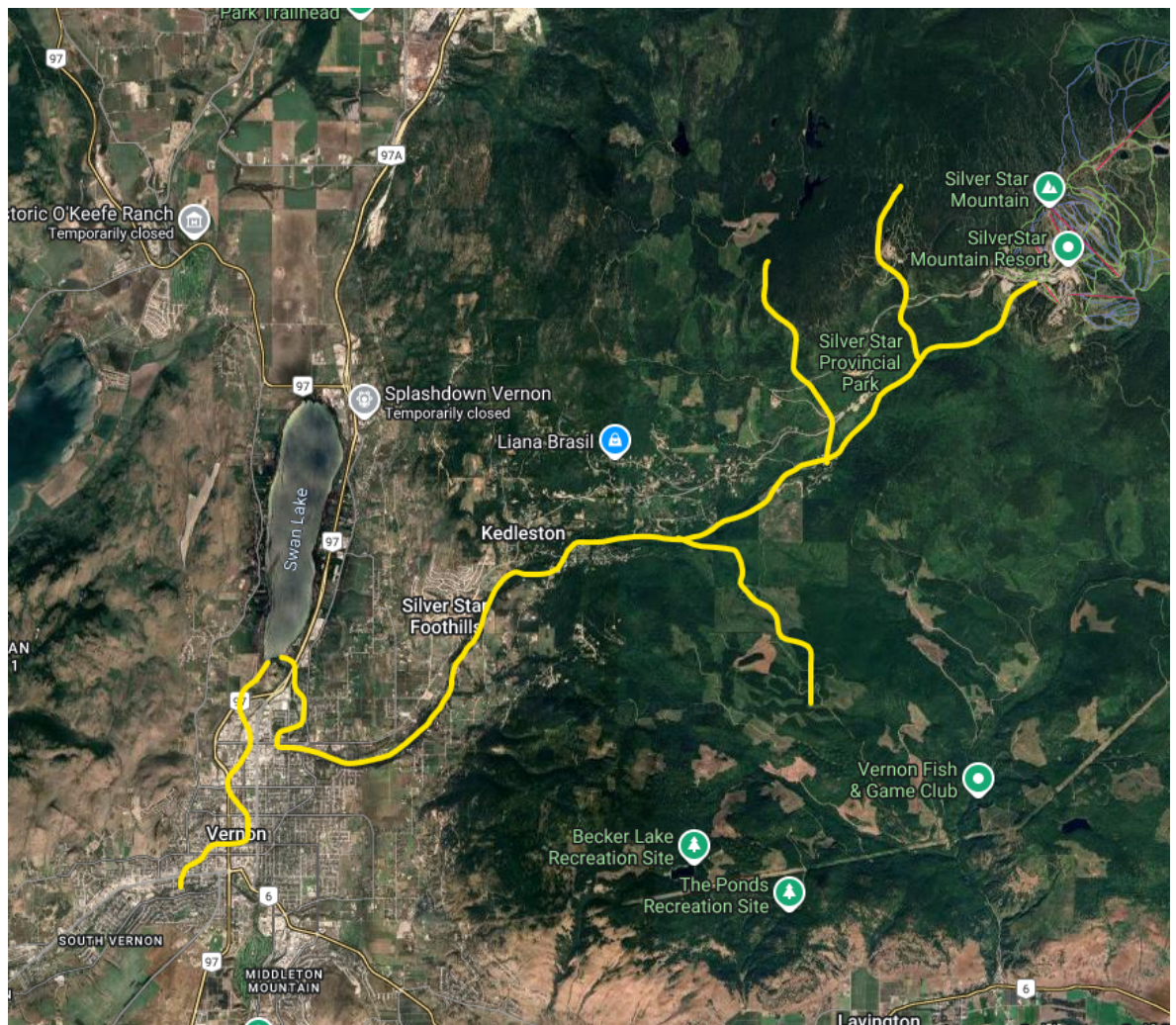
Lower BX Creek drains from the outlet of Swan Lake to the confluence with Vernon Creek, within the City of Vernon.

The map here

shows the route of BX Creek and some of the tributaries that flow into it. In the region of Haynes Road (BX Ranch Dog Park area), Bate Creek empties into BX Creek. Heading uphill there are many other small feeder creeks, including Brookside, Dixon, Kedleston, Abbott, and Pine creeks. Brewer's Pond at Silver Star Mountain Resort is part of the watershed.

In ancient times BX Creek built a series of alluvial fans into Lake Penticton (a massive post-glacial lake that once filled the entire Okanagan Valley) at successively lower levels. One of the more prominent of these, at about 454 m (1,490 feet), just

*continued on page 5*





# NONC

## *Major Creeks continued*

east of Butcher Boys store on Silver Star Road, seems to mark a temporary pause in the decline of the lake level that is also marked by a very faint beach line at the north end of Kalamalka Lake.<sup>1</sup>

Driving up Silver Star Road from Pleasant Valley Road you are ascending the BX Creek fan for the first three miles.<sup>1</sup>

Swan Lake was connected to Okanagan Lake in ancient times. Sediment carried by BX Creek fanned out, damming the southern end of Swan Lake.<sup>1</sup>

Sometime prior to 1892 Upper BX Creek was diverted to Swan Lake. The current alignment of Upper BX Creek bends to the north directly downstream of the first 20th Street crossing (south of 48th Ave.) to drain into Swan Lake. This is not likely a natural alignment as it closely follows the eastern edge of the alluvial fan. It is expected that around the above date, the creek was diverted.<sup>2</sup>

Before that time the area would have been very marshy, as the creek coming down from higher elevations would have fanned out across the landscape. There would have been a very large wetland at the south end of Swan Lake, extending into what is now the entire north end of Vernon. Where we now have Superstore, Walmart, Rona and other developments would have been marsh. It would have extended even into today's Harwood and East Hill neighbourhoods.

You can see today where dredging created channels for BX Creek. Follow the BX Creek Trail from 48th Avenue and 20th Street to Frontage Avenue, where the car dealerships begin. There are raised embankments made from excavated materials and some straight stretches of the creek.

Channelization was also done at some point on BX Creek as it exited Swan Lake. This was most likely done to drain the marshy area in aid of agricultural use of the land.

You have probably noticed how straight the creek is and the berms adjacent to the highway, made when the creek's course was excavated. This channelization is within view until BX Creek slips under the Vernon Square Shopping Centre at 32nd Street and 43rd Avenue.

From this point until BX Creek and Vernon Creek meet south of 25th Avenue, much of the creek has been placed in culverts and buried passageways. It is exposed in numerous locations, but the original course of the creek has been changed significantly.

## **Naturalists and BX Creek**

We naturalists have many places to go and observe BX Creek, or to at least contemplate its journey from the mountain to the city.

Brewer's Pond at the Silver Star village has already been mentioned. You can hike the Upper BX Creek Trail (also known as Spanky's), enjoying various ecosystems, between parking lots at Silver Star Road & Sovereign Lake Road and Forsberg Road. This trail touches the creek in several locations.

We frequently enjoy the BX Falls Trail between Tillicum Road and Star Road. Besides the falls and rushing water during Spring freshets, this trail offers opportunities to see wildlife and many wild plants.

Birds and plants can be enjoyed by the creek in the BX Ranch Dog Park. Then there is the BX Creek Trail from 48th Avenue to Frontage Road.

Kayaking naturalists follow the creek from the south  
*continued on page 6*

## NONC

*Major Creeks continued*

end of Swan Lake to the small weir within the Swan Lake Nature Reserve Park. Nature lovers often use this weir as a platform to look into the creek, as well as to observe birds flying amongst the trees, shrubs and marsh.

Going through the city, opportunities to see what the creek is hosting are limited, but you can pause on any of a number of sidewalk bridges.

**Deep Creek**

Deep Creek originates in a side valley east of Mount Ida and west of Enderby, and flows south in this valley to join the main Okanagan Valley near Armstrong. Heading south, it enters and exits Otter Lake. From there, Deep Creek flows southwest to the north end of Okanagan Lake.<sup>3</sup>

Going back to Armstrong, you will find Deep Creek on the west side of the I.P.E. Fairgrounds. From here it follows a course to Otter Lake. It is evident from aerial views that the creek's route has been channelized all the way from Armstrong to the Spallumcheen Golf Course at Highway 97. This would have been done for agricultural benefit; more workable land and fewer flooding issues.

From O'Keefe Ranch the creek flows through the golf course and past Desert Cove, entering Okanagan Lake in the Head of the Lake area, within OKIB IR. [see Part 2 of this series, in the May 2026 issue].

The name Deep Creek was in use at the time of the earliest settlers in the area. The name makes geographic sense: the creek runs through noticeably

incised/deep ravines and gullies in the Spallumcheen Valley.

The earliest written account with Otter Lake having that name is from Hudson's Bay Company explorer Alexander Caulfield Anderson in 1846. His journal already calls the feature "Otter Lake." Most likely the Indigenous tribes of the area called it Otter Lake before then, perhaps because of the presence of otters, but we have found no confirmation of this.

Otter Lake is a very popular spot for bird watchers. When the creek overflows its banks during some Spring freshets, this also brings in waterfowl and wading birds to many locations. 🌿



above: the north end of Otter Lake

*Footnotes:*

<sup>1</sup> *Vernon: A Geological Guide*, by Jamie Kidston. Self-published, 1993

<sup>2</sup> *Detailed Flood Mapping, Risk Analysis and Mitigation Part 1 - Upper B.X. Creek report*, City of Vernon, 2020

<sup>3</sup> *North Okanagan Aquifer Mapping Project*, Patrick A. Monahan Ph.D. P.Geo., 2006

## NONC

## Biological controls for invasive plants: some new initiatives

story & photos by Harold Sellers

### RUSH SKELETONWEED

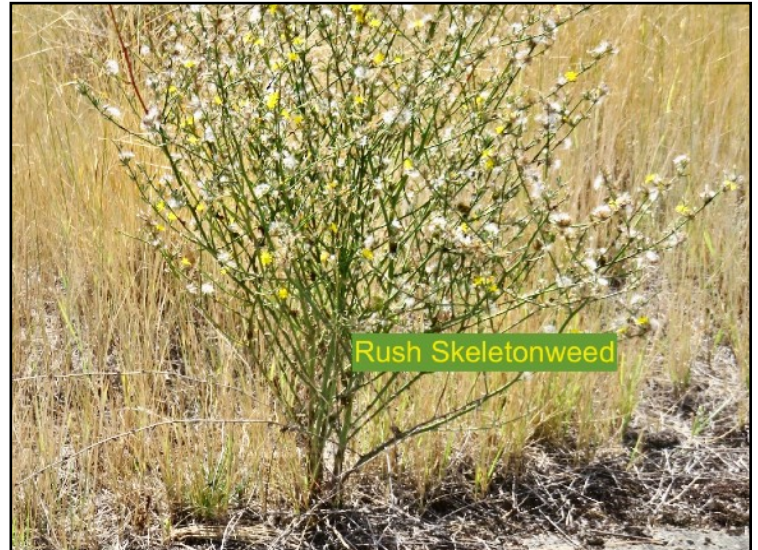
Two primary biological control agents have been released in British Columbia to target and manage rush skeletonweed (*Chondrilla juncea*):

- **Gall Mite** (*Aceria chondrillae*): This microscopic mite feeds on the plant's buds and leaves, forming galls that stunt growth, reduce seed viability, and weaken overall plant vigor.
- **Stem and Leaf Rust** (*Puccinia chondrillina*): This fungal rust infects the rosette leaves and stems, producing distinctive rusty-brown pustules that inhibit photosynthesis, drain plant nutrients, and can kill small seedlings or rosettes.

Both agents have experienced varying levels of success depending on local environmental conditions and the specific genetic strain (biotype) of the weed present in areas like the regional interior near Vernon, the Kootenays, and parts of the Okanagan.

### COMMON TANSY

Canada has released the first ever biological control agent to tackle invasive common tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*), an invasive plant that negatively impacts the country and wider region's livestock, rangeland, and native biodiversity. The release of the agent – a stem-mining weevil called *Microplontus millefolii* –



marks a major milestone in efforts to manage this invasive plant across North America, reducing its ecological and economic impacts.

In partnership with the British Columbia Ministry of Forests, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) conducted the first releases of 1,200 adult weevils in May this year at three sites in British Columbia (BC). AAFC conducted a further release of 400 weevils in Alberta in June, and plans additional releases for sites in BC, Alberta, and Saskatchewan this fall. These releases target areas experiencing significant,



negative impacts on agriculture and biodiversity. At the same time, they also allow AAFC scientists to study how different environments influence the success of the weevils' establishment in their new habitat, and quantify agent impacts on the tansy under different climatic conditions. (August 18, 2026 CABI News) 🌱

NONC

## Don't miss the extraordinary Adam's River Sockeye Salmon Run this October!

article & photos by Roseanne Van Ee

**MILLIONS** of four year olds are running to their beds. Seriously! We're talking about this year's massive quadrennial Pacific Sockeye Salmon spawning run up the Fraser watershed to Adam's River. These desperate Sockeye risk their lives in an unimaginable feat for a once in a lifetime chance to mate. Their struggle is so taxing that they succumb to their efforts only days after spawning. This is quite the show, so don't miss it!

This year's spectacular salmon run is an incredible natural event that will amaze thousands of spectators of all ages at the Adam's River in Tsutswecw (formerly

Salmon Society coordinates the "Salute To The Sockeye" festival on the dominant runs every four years with demonstrations and displays by BC Parks, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, and local First Nations daily Oct. 9-25. Activities include: interpretive guided tours, First Nations cultural presentations, artisan markets, food vendors, and educational displays.

below: Mature Sockeye Salmon coming up the Adam's River to spawn



left: Millions of Sockeye Salmon can be watched as they partner up and fight for position on the Adam's River



Roderick Haig-Brown) Provincial Park, northwest of Salmon Arm. This dominant four-year cycle event celebrates North America's largest Sockeye Salmon run. It's a world class event! The Adam's River

Everything's mysteriously extreme about this deadly, life-renewing ritual. These large, once silver Pacific salmon miraculously transform to brilliant red bodies with green heads and tails. Hormones make the males grow humps and snouts with teeth for fighting. By sniffing the water chemistry along their almost 500 km journey, they find their way to where they were laid as eggs only four years ago.

*continued on page 9*

## NONC

*Salmon Run continued*

At back-eddies they mass up in teaming pools waiting to restore their energy to surge up the river, at times even having to leap out of the water over rocks or fallen trees. They fight for their piece of the river and their chosen partner. Males bite and grab others, flinging them away. This creates lesions that infect with fungus. Even though they haven't eaten on this journey, they remain focused on fanning gravel redds (nests) with their tails to lay thousands of eggs and fertilize them. Once their deed is done, over the course of a few days, the adults succumb to their infections, starvation and exhaustion, then slip away with the current.

Eventually they land on gravel bars and river banks to become food for eagles, bears, weasels, flies and lots of other wildlife. Any remains enrich the riparian (habitats along the river's edge) soils or is washed downstream to feed fish and other aquatic wildlife. When the Sockeye fry emerge in the spring heading back to the ocean, they feed on the zooplankton that was enriched from the decomposed Sockeye bodies. How amazing to witness this cycle of life!

All visitors to the site will pay a minimal event fee which helps support the volunteer society's efforts.

See [salmonsociety.com](http://salmonsociety.com) for more details. Weekends are busiest, especially Thanksgiving. If you have to go then, dress warmly and go early. There's lots of viewing platforms and trails to follow. Please leave your dog at home! The fragrant rotting fish and splish-splashy commotion is instinctively too enticing for our canine friends.

Review the [Lifecycle of the Adams River Sockeye](#) and other details about these salmon online. Enjoy the show! 🌱



above: Kokanee are landlocked salmon that spawn on Coldstream Creek and Vernon Creek until about Thanksgiving

## NONC

## Flying Squirrel Discovery

by Margaret MacKenzie

**ON** our Bluebird Nest Box Trail at Lone Pine Ranch in early July, we added a new box in a forested area with the idea of attracting a chickadee or a nuthatch. The week after the box was installed, Joyce, Yvonne and Eric opened the box and found a strange looking little animal huddled in the corner. They took a photo and closed the box. They discovered it was a Flying Squirrel!

After a little research they found that Flying Squirrels are uncommon, secretive and nocturnal, hence not often seen. Their nests would normally be in a tree cavity but they will use boxes built for them, larger than our bluebird boxes and placed higher on trees. They build their nest using shredded bark and twigs as a base, then add dried grass, lichen, soft feathers or fur. They have young in May or June and usually have more than one nest site ready to move the young to if they are disturbed.

above right: Flying Squirrel in the nest box

right: Nest of Flying Squirrel

We decided to leave the nest and squirrel alone. We set up a trail cam and each week in anticipation of seeing the Flying Squirrel emerge from the box we would exchange the SID card and look at it at home on the



computer. Imagine our surprise when we saw a Highland Cow walking by the box!, It seemed we had put the box close to a cow trail! But, a further surprise was seeing Black Bears at the box. At least two different bears, one smaller than the other. Each week our trail cam showed a bear checking out the box, sniffing all around the box bottom but never knocking it down. As you can see in the photo, one bear even tried to put his paw into the nest hole!

Now, our story gets a little sad. for alas, we never saw that Flying Squirrel again. About 3 weeks after we had put up the trail cam, we were walking about 1/2 km away when we came across a dead Flying Squirrel.

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## NONC

*Flying Squirrel continued*

There were no marks or wounds on it and no indication of how it had died. When we finally opened the box we found it empty.

below, left: The dead Flying Squirrel - such a pretty little animal. Note the arm flaps which open cup like a kite when he flies!

below: Trail cam results



*The Northern Flying Squirrel is a seldom seen nocturnal, arboreal species of squirrel. It is one of two species of flying squirrels found in North America, the other is the Southern Flying Squirrel. This is a medium-sized, distinctive squirrel species in British Columbia, with its broad, flat tail and large eyes, large round sparsely-hairy ears, and the fold of skin that allows it to glide that extends from the wrist to the ankle on both sides (Nagorsen 2005). It is grey-brown to brown in colour with pale undersides and has a distinct black lateral line on each side (Nagorsen 2005).*

I got in touch with Rich Weir, who is a Wildlife Biologist in Victoria, specialising in mammals, to ask for more information about Flying Squirrels. Rich just happened to know a biologist currently doing government research on the genetic differences between northern and southern Flying Squirrels at the interface where they meet. He wanted a small skin specimen and so one week later, we found the Flying Squirrel that I had carefully moved into a more protected area. We then collected a piece of skin tissue after following Rich's directions, and mailed it to him. Rich says it will be a valuable sample for their Flying Squirrel research. 🌱



*Nagorsen (2005) indicates that 25 subspecies of the Northern Flying Squirrel are recognized, with seven found in BC.*

*(Thanks to E-Fauna, a website of the University of British Columbia)*

## NONC

**Grassland Blog Series***Allan Brooks Nature Centre's Grassland Blog Series**Published with permission. See the ABNC website for the original blog:*<https://abnc.ca/abncs-grassland-blog-series-ek1/3/>**The Uneasy Balance Between Ecological Preservation and Public Access***by Eric Kowalski*

Across parks, forests, and protected landscapes, a persistent tension shapes modern conservation: how to safeguard fragile ecosystems while still welcoming people into the natural spaces they cherish. This dilemma is not new, but it has grown sharper as climate pressures intensify, outdoor recreation surges in popularity and there is growing awareness of the benefits to human health of accessing nature.

At the heart of the issue lies a paradox. Public access helps build the constituency that protects nature. People who hike old-growth trails, paddle quiet lakes, or watch salmon return to their natal streams often become the strongest advocates for conservation. Yet the very act of visiting these places can degrade them. The relationship between recreation and impact isn't always linear; even low levels of use can have a significant impact. Foot traffic compacts soil, disturbs wildlife, spreads invasive species, and accelerates erosion. This becomes even more of an issue when people and bikes move off designated trails, creating what are often referred to as 'rogue' trails. Habitat becomes even further fragmented, erosion increases, delicate plants, ground-nesting birds and other species are disturbed or destroyed... the cumulative effects can be, and usually are, devastating. Add dogs to the mixture – even if on leash – and the problem gets much much worse. Even the most careful and well-meaning visitors can unintentionally harm the ecosystems they come to

admire. The human presence itself can alter wildlife patterns, even without significant trail or other construction. And the greater the number of people accessing an area, the greater their impact on the plants and animals that rely on undisturbed areas for their very survival.

Thus, those responsible for stewarding natural areas are left navigating a delicate middle ground. Too much restriction risks alienating the public and quite possibly weakening public support for long term protection. Too little oversight can undermine ecological integrity, sometimes irreversibly. Solutions often involve a mix of strategies: seasonal closures to protect sensitive species, trail design that channels use away from vulnerable areas, visitor quotas in high impact zones, and education campaigns that cultivate a culture of stewardship rather than consumption. Far too infrequently, highly sensitive areas can be designated as 'off-limits' to public access.

Ultimately, the tension between preservation and access is not a problem that can be 'solved' once – it's a relationship that needs to be continually managed. It requires that communities recognize that natural spaces are both shared treasures and living systems with limits. People's 'right' to access natural areas must be paired with the equal responsibility to view ecological health as the foundation for managing an area, rather than an afterthought. Thoughtfully and ethically managed, public enjoyment and preservation can thus reinforce rather than undermine each other.

So, by all means, get into the outdoors and experience all the mental and physical benefits the experience can bring! But the next time you step out into Nature, take a moment to pause and reflect on not just what you are seeing and experiencing but

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## NONC

*Grasslands Blog continued*

equally, what Nature herself may be experiencing – and, potentially, suffering – as a result of your presence.

**Not so “Fun” Facts about Humans and Wildlife**

- Prior to European contact, grizzly bears were not primarily mountain creatures but rather had a much wider distribution that included plains, valleys, and coastal areas. As human development expanded westward in the 1800s, the bears were driven into more isolated, mountainous, and rugged terrain. Today, what we consider “traditional” grizzly habitat is actually a reduced, remnant habitat resulting from over two centuries of being ‘squeezed out’ of their natural homes by human incursion.
- Wild animals that cannot tolerate human disturbance are generally shy, specialized, or apex predators that require large, undisturbed core habitats to survive. Human presence, noise, and infrastructure development—such as roads, hiking trails, or snowmobiling—can cause these species to abandon preferred feeding or breeding grounds, leading to increased stress, lower reproductive success, and potential starvation. Some of these species include: Grizzly Bears; Wolverines; Gray Wolves; Mountain Goats; Mountain Caribou (Woodland Caribou); Bighorn and Dall Sheep; Badgers; Bats (Maternity Colonies and Hibernacula); and, Cougars (Mountain Lions)

**Most Damaging Recreational Activities include:**

- Off-Road Vehicle Use: Identified as the most common recreational threat to species at risk.
- Hiking: While generally low-impact, the high volume of participants makes it a significant cause of trail widening and erosion.
- Boating and Water Sports: Causes severe shoreline erosion and aquatic habitat degradation;

- Camping: Results in concentrated damage to vegetation and soil in designated and undesignated sites.

**BC’s grasslands: a very special 1%**

by Heidi Wismath

**Quick takeaway:** BC’s native grasslands cover *less than 1% of the province, but they hold an outsized share of biodiversity, beauty, and story. The North Okanagan sits right in the middle of that living web.*

If you’ve ever stood on a sun-warmed hillside in the North Okanagan and watched the wind ripple through bunchgrasses, you already know grasslands are not “empty” places. They are living, irreplaceable ecosystems.

**How grasslands happen here**

BC’s interior grasslands mostly form in **rain shadows**. As moist air rises over mountain ranges, it cools and drops much of its moisture on the windward side. The air that descends into valleys like the Okanagan is warmer and drier. That’s what creates the low-precipitation conditions that favour drought-tolerant bunchgrasses over closed-canopy forests.

Grasslands are also shaped by **fire**. Historically, frequent, low-to-moderate intensity fires helped:

- keep grasslands open by limiting young conifers and shrubs
- recycle nutrients
- maintain the sunny conditions many grassland plants and animals depend on

When fire is excluded for long periods, grasslands can become overgrown and gradually shift toward shrubland or forest. That reduces native grassland biodiversity and can make ecosystems less resilient.

*continued on page 14*

## NONC

*Grasslands Blog continued***Why they matter (even though they're small)**

In British Columbia, native grasslands cover **less than one percent** of the provincial land base. Even so, they support an extraordinary range of plants and animals, including many species at risk.

Grasslands are also deeply important to people. They are part of the long-standing relationships that First Nations hold with these lands. They are working landscapes for ranchers and producers. They are research and learning places for scientists, educators, and land managers. They are places of joy and connection for hikers, birders, and anyone who relies on clean water, healthy soils, and resilient ecosystems.

**Okanagan grasslands: where conservation gets complicated**

The Okanagan is a biodiversity hotspot shaped by heat, drought, and steep elevation gradients across three connected valley systems: the Okanagan, Similkameen, and Kettle.

Because many grasslands occur at low elevations on warm, dry benches and valley bottoms, they overlap with some of the most sought-after places for:

- orchards and vineyards
- housing
- roads and transportation corridors

The result is a conservation challenge that is both ecological and cultural: how to care for small, scattered, highly productive habitats in a landscape where human use is intense, and land is heavily fragmented.

**The big tension**

The most biodiverse grasslands are often the most vulnerable.

In the South Okanagan, near-desert conditions support Great Basin–influenced plant

communities like antelope-brush grasslands. They are among Canada's most critically endangered ecosystems.

At the same time, those valley-bottom sites have been the fastest to convert to agriculture and urban development, and they recover slowly once disturbed.

Many sites also depend on living soil crusts and deep-rooted bunchgrasses that:

- stabilize soil
- store carbon
- help the land manage water

These benefits are easy to lose and hard to rebuild.

**Land ownership matters**

Conservation in the Okanagan happens in a complicated land-tenure reality.

Roughly a third of grassland area in the Okanagan Basin and Boundary has already been lost to development, and much of what remains is privately owned. Additional areas fall within First Nations Reserves, and only a very small portion is Crown Land.

That means progress often depends on relationship-based work: collaborating with landowners, ranchers, and local governments to support practical management, reduce pressures like invasive species and unmanaged recreation, and keep remaining patches connected.

**Connectivity is the other big story**

The Okanagan Valley is an essential corridor linking the Great Basin grasslands north toward the Thompson and Cariboo-Chilcotin regions. Keeping connected, low-elevation routes for wildlife movement is becoming even more important as the climate shifts. The last remaining connected

*continued on page 15*

## NONC

*Grasslands Blog continued*

pathways on parts of Okanagan Lake's east side are increasingly precious.

In that context, conservation is not only about saving special places.

It is about keeping a working, living network intact—one that supports birds, reptiles, insects, and mammals, and also supports the human communities who depend on clean water, resilient soils, and landscapes that can adapt.

### ***About the Grasslands Conservation Council of BC***

*The Grasslands Conservation Council of BC is a registered charity founded in 1999.*

*We bring together people who care about grasslands across the province, including ranchers and producers, Indigenous communities, scientists, educators, land managers, and conservation advocates.*

*Our work focuses on grassland conservation and restoration through education, outreach, and collaboration. We share practical resources and local stories, support community-led efforts, and help strengthen the relationships that make long-term grassland care possible.*

*Over more than 25 years, our work and our organization have grown and changed in response to what grasslands need, and what communities are asking for.*

*One of the best ways to understand grasslands is to see them up close and talk about what is working.*

*Our private land tours create space for honest, grounded conversations about grassland values, challenges, and innovative management approaches. These tours help us learn from one*

*another and build the trust that lasting conservation depends on.*

*We are grateful for the support of the Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship in this work. It reflects a shared understanding that BC's grasslands are precious, and that relationship-based collaboration is key.*

### **The Awakening of our Grasslands**

*by Harold Sellers*

With the arrival of Spring, the grasslands of British Columbia undergo a dramatic transformation.

Colour — other than the white of snow or the brown of dormant vegetation — returns to the land. First it is green and before long we see yellows, whites and blues, as various plants flower.

The yellow of the Arrow-leaved Balsamroot will be the first that our eyes take note of. Soon that will be followed by the white blossoms of Saskatoon bushes. Then in May we'll see the blue flowers of lupine added to the mix.

Sound and movement also return to the grasslands. Here in the North Okanagan we will hear the songs of many species of birds that have returned from their winter retreats. Meadowlarks, Savannah Sparrows, orioles, Lazuli Buntings, and many others. Moving about at ground level will be insects and reptiles that make their homes in our grasslands. Maybe we'll be fortunate enough to see the Yellow-bellied Racer or the Great Basin Gopher Snake.

Once awakened by Spring the grasslands will remain alive and full of fascinating discoveries for several months to come. Don't pass up any opportunity to look...pause for a while and enjoy. 🌱

## NONC

## NONC CALENDAR

## MONTHLY MEETINGS

**Thursday, October 1, 7:00 pm**, in the Emerald Room of the Schubert Centre for Seniors, 30th Ave., in downtown Vernon. Free admittance, visitors welcome. Our Speaker for the meeting will be Rob Buchanan talking about the Birdweather Monitoring System in Kal Park.

## SATURDAY NATURE WALKS

Join us Saturdays at 9:00 am. Visitors welcome. No dogs please.

## DR – DIFFICULTY RATINGS

The main factors that determine the degree of difficulty of a hiking trail are :

Roughness of the terrain

Steepness and length of hills

Trail length - distance or approximate time

**DR 1 Easy-** Suitable for most people. Mostly paved or good path, fairly level with some hills - up to 2 hours.

**DR 2 Moderate-** Suitable for most walkers and hikers with no mobility or endurance issues. Longer distance with steeper hills and switchbacks, some uneven and rough path.

**October 3 – 9am DR 2**

Join the North Okanagan Naturalists Club for a nature walk on Middleton Mountain Trails beginning at the Kal Beach parking lot, off Husband Road. Meet at the east end of the parking lot, by the trailhead sign. Walk to include Creed Loop and then return. Contact [nmaer10s@gmail.com](mailto:nmaer10s@gmail.com)

**October 10 – 9am DR1**

Join the North Okanagan Naturalists Club for a nature walk on the BX Ranch Trail at the

sneecmatqtn Agriculture Park. 5km loop. Meet at the parking lot on East Vernon Road. Contact Harold [hikerharold@gmail.com](mailto:hikerharold@gmail.com)

**October 17 – 9 am DR2**

Join the North Okanagan Naturalists Club for a walk on the Grey Canal Trail, Blue Jay to Turtle Mountain. Meet at the parking lot at the end of Blue Jay Road (Old Kamloops Road to Goose Lake Road then left on Blue Jay Road) Contact [nmaer10s@gmail.com](mailto:nmaer10s@gmail.com)

**October 24 - 9am DR1**

Join the North Okanagan Naturalists Club for a birding outing in Polson Park. Walking slowly, being quiet and observing. Bring binoculars. Meet by the Tennis Courts. Contact [mhubble@telus.net](mailto:mhubble@telus.net)

**October 31 – 9 am DR 2**

Join the North Okanagan Naturalists Club for a nature walk in Kalamalka Lake Provincial Park. Meet at Red Gate parking lot on Kidson Road. A long, several hour, hike from the Red Gate to Cosens Bay, including the waterfall, and back. Contact Sue [supepghat@hotmail.com](mailto:supepghat@hotmail.com)

**Walking Tips:**

- Fall is now here. Dress for the weather.
- Walking poles are helpful on many trails, especially those with rough ground and uphill and downhill sections.
- Good hiking shoes or boots support the ankles.
- Bring water; some hikes are 2 hours or more.
- Bring a snack.
- Bring an emergency contact number to provide to the walk leader when signing in.

**NOVEMBER**

**Monthly Meeting**, Thursday, November 5, 7:00 pm.