

Cowichan Community Land Trust Receives HCTF Silver Award

The Cowichan Community Land Trust Society's eelgrass restoration project has received the newly created Silver Award for Stewardship and Education from the Habitat Conservation Trust Fund.

To mark their 25th anniversary the Habitat Conservation Trust Fund (HCTF) has created the 'Silver Award' in honour of long-time manager Rod Silver who retired in 2003. Supported by fish and game licenses and permits, HCTF in turn funds projects that make a difference to fish and wildlife habitat, biological diversity and furthering conservation knowledge and awareness. The Silver Award is given to proponents who clearly define and achieve benefits to species, habitat and ecosystems and who have a well thought-out communication and evaluation component.

Over the past two years, restoring eelgrass habitat in the Cowichan Estuary has been the main focus of the Cowichan Community Land Trust Society (CCLT) with funding from the Pacific Salmon Commission, Habitat Conservation Trust Fund and Fisheries and Oceans Canada. Many areas of the Cowichan estuary traditionally supported eelgrass but over the years, and with heavy use of the estuary, eelgrass meadows have been significantly reduced or eliminated. Successful eelgrass transplants will help to restore eelgrass habitat in these areas and will increase estuarine habitat for pacific salmon and other marine life.



In 2005 CCLT staff surveyed the estuary for suitable transplant sites and then went to work to organize some test transplants using proven transplanting methodology developed by Cynthia Durance of Precision Identification. With Cynthia's expertise, the support of the Seagrass Conservation Working Group, Nikki Wright's team at SeaChange Marine Conservation Society and many wonderful community volunteers including local students, divers, Cowichan Tribes members, local government and members of the Naturalists' Society, 400 test transplants were planted in 2005.



The following spring those test transplants had increased in number by 70-80 percent in two of the four test plots. This fantastic increase meant that the larger transplant of nearly 6000 eelgrass shoots could proceed.

Transplanting 6000 eelgrass shoots is no small feat of coordination. All the transplants needed to be harvested individually by divers and then brought to shore for volunteers to carefully twist-tie each shoot with a non-galvanized washer and then be taken out by boat to divers who planted each shoot along a designated transect.



CCLT Executive Director, Ann Archibald noted that "this Silver Award from the Habitat Conservation Trust Fund really belongs to all the volunteers and community members who came out to help and supported this effort." To show the level of support that this project has received, Archibald thanked a long list of community supporters while Bob Morse of the Habitat Conservation Trust Fund presented the award.