

# Stewarding Into The Future.....

Since 2007, the Slocan Lake Stewardship Society (SLSS) has actively promoted the conservation and protection of the Slocan Lake ecosystems. Through science, education and advocacy, SLSS has developed and continues to develop an extensive knowledge of the ecosystems, wildlife habitats, wetlands and water courses within the Slocan Valley Watershed. This depth of collective knowledge has laid the foundation for the Society to move forward with targeted conservation plans based on existing stewardship strategies.

## ***The Science of Conservation***

The ecological health of the Slocan Lake Watershed is of critical importance, locally and regionally. It is the only remaining major watershed in the Canadian Columbia Basin that is not dammed. Conservation planning is a crucial step that communities and organizations are developing to ensure that resources are expended wisely, conservation actions are efficient, effective and appropriately coordinated across the stakeholder base.

There is no question that the Slocan Lake Watershed faces the same ecological threats that lakes, wetlands and watersheds all across Canada are facing, as follows:

- Loss/Impairment of Critical Habitat (re: forest, aquatic, riparian, wetlands)
- Climate Change Uncertainty (re: weather extremes, hydrological changes, wildfires)
- Introduction of Invasive Species (re: wildlife, vegetation, aquatic, fungal)
- Increased Recreational Pressure (re: accessibility, multi-use trails)

As a result of all these interrelated threats to the ecological integrity of our watershed and its forests, organizations are starting to work on water and conservation management plans tailored to their specific environment and community needs. SLSS recognized that need and over the past two years have been conducting a review of their own strategic and tactical plans, resulting in identifying conservation priorities that will be acted upon over the next few years. The methodology used, results and conclusions of that strategic review are presented in this summary.

## ***Our Approach***

Kicking off in 2015, the SLSS undertook a two-year project to identify priorities and specific courses of action for SLSS to take that leverages its watershed knowledge and delivers further value to our lakeshore communities. As articulated in the Imagine Slocan Lake study of 2012; clean water, healthy ecosystems, biodiversity, wilderness and conservation areas were all clearly identified as key community values. Those values still persist today. A scientific approach was taken to develop an ecosystem-based Conservation Action Framework, consistent with SLSS's strategic plans and mandate.

This strategy review was conducted in three phases, as follows:

- *Phase 1 - Resource Analysis (2015 - 2016)* – Identifying and compiling current scientific research and subject area expertise with respect to vulnerable and critical aspects of the Slocan Lake Watershed.
- *Phase 2 - Science Forum (Feb 2017)* – Day-long workshop with scientists, resource managers, local government and conservationists to build consensus amongst the participants regarding priority actions.
- *Phase 3 – Conservation Action Framework (July 2017)* – Compilation of Science Forum results, detailed analysis and ranking of identified priority actions, evaluation of potential SLSS role, partners and collaborators.

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## ***Our Science Forum Contributors***

Critical to the success of this review was the need for a broad spectrum of experts to ensure that all ecosystems and key stakeholders (within the scope of the Slocan Valley Watershed) were represented at the Science Forum. Overall, participants at the Science Forum were encouraged and impressed that the SLSS was taking on the challenge of developing a Conservation Action Framework that will guide them into the future. Our contributors and their field of endeavor are summarized as follows:

- Research Scientists – Biologists and Ecologists including plant, aquatic, fish, bird, bat, wolverine and grizzly specialists.
- Government – Regional District of Central Kootenay, Village of New Denver, Silverton and Slocan.
- Resources Managers – Slocan Integral Forest Cooperative (SIFCO), BC Timber Sales, Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program Columbia Basin, BC Parks, BC Forestry, Lands and Natural Resources (FLNRO - Selkirk and Kootenay-Cranbrook Resource Districts).
- Conservancy Organizations – Kootenay Conservation Program, Nature Conservancy of Canada.
- Other – Galena Trails Commission, Selkirk Geospatial Research Centre.

## ***Conservation Planning - Priorities***

From the Science Forum and development of the Conservation Action Framework, the SLSS Board of Directors now had a focused understanding of the key priorities for protecting the Slocan Lake Watershed. After considerable review and discussion, the Board has now identified the top 4 conservation priorities. Each priority can be seen as a conservation target that is guided by a set of scientific criteria that will provide a benchmark or indicator as to the ongoing health of that conservation target. A brief description and ranking of those identified priorities, is summarized as follows:

- Maintaining Healthy Foreshore Habitat – a cornerstone of any conservation and lake management plan.
- Connectivity and Corridors – ongoing protection of the Bonanza Biodiversity Corridor as a critical and fundamental ecosystem within the Watershed.
- Important Habitat - continue identifying critical habitats and the species they support to provide a deeper understanding of specific protection strategies.
- Climate Change Adaptation – continue promoting initiatives and understanding of climate change impacts in collaboration with other organizations.

## ***Going Forward***

The Conservation Action Framework is now a working and living document that the SLSS will continue to utilize as a planning tool. Over the next few months, further details for each priority identified above will be flushed out and published on the SLSS website. In particular, SLSS's role with respect to each of the identified conservation targets will be articulated. SLSS's relationships to our communities, residents, various governing bodies and conservancy organizations will continue to evolve. In the long run, ongoing collaboration with a wide variety of organizations will greatly contribute to maintaining the intrinsic value of the Slocan Valley Watershed, now and into the future.

In closing, we sincerely thank all those who participated in the Science Forum, to all those who donated funds and to our facilitators who made sense of a complex subject!