BCIT's STUDENT NEWSMAGAZINE

THE INK

PARDON ME THOU BLEEDING PIECE OF EARTH THAT I AM MEEK AND GENTLE WITH THESE BUTCHERS.

—SHAKESPEARE

INSIDE:
An Interview with
JOE FOY
Western Canada
Wilderness Committee

Make a statement, BCIT!

BCIT—is it environmentally friendly or environmentally destructive? We collect paper, bottles, and cans and then put paper towels in the washrooms. We teach fish and wildlife conservation and propose destroying a natural wetland that exists right on our own campus.

BCIT was built on a swamp and the natural waterways were made to flow through underground pipes except for one stretch of Kyle Creek on the back campus. Nature has slowly reclaimed this wetland and over the years I have enjoyed watching the swallows, blackbirds, and ducks return and nest amongst the tall grasses and rushes and raise their young through the summer months. Occasionally a heron can be seen standing calmly in the shallow waters.

Today I witnessed a busload of SFU biology students being brought to Como Lake to study the plant and wildlife. Our wildlife students need only walk to our back campus. We criticize the loggers who strip our old growth forests as we smugly pave over and bulldoze our own local forests and wetlands. Let's leave Kyle Creek in its natural state. I oppose the annual cutting of the bullrushes as they are the natural habitat of the wildfowl. If BCIT is concerned with flooding a simple cleaning of the floodgates at the lower end of the creek would be sufficient as debris tends to collect there.

Make a statement BCIT. Show we are truly friendly to the environment!

Judy Moroso
BCIT Library

Lifeforce opposes destruction of Kyle Creek

Open Letter to BCIT Board of Governors

Re: Destruction of Wildlife Habitat

Recently, at an international Earth Summit in Brazil, countries throughout the world recognized the grave threat to the survival of the planet Earth. In order to protect ecosystems for all life, scarce time and money must be spent on preserving natural habitats.

I have been advised that there are plans to destroy Kyle Creek with man-made landscapes and structures which would not maintain the present habitat that provides homes for numerous wildlife species such as swallows and ducks. The Kyle Creek habitat is a rare oasis of life which is flourishing within a concrete desert.

One of the most urgent concerns is the protection of the ducks and their goslings. The water level which was recently lowered by removing part of the dam's gate should be immediately restored to its normal level. Also, the August 1st date set for dredging should be reviewed.

Lifeforce recommends that a BCIT Environment Committee be formed in order to look at alternatives to the proposed Kyle Creek development and to create a BCIT Eco Policy to protect such precious, threatened ecosystems as sanctuaries for all life—both wildlife and humans.

In respect for all life,
Peter Hamilton
Director, LIFEFORCE

Kyle Creek Upgrade Project

Since the May 11 issue of Update, many members of the BCIT community have raised concerns about the "bird habitat" which will be cleared as part of our planned work in the Kyle Creek area. I share their concerns for the welfare of wildlife in the urban setting and the gradual and constant encroachment of humans on natural habitat. However, I think that there are certain points which should be addressed.

First, the pond is not a natural habitat. It was artificially created to address the siltation problems in the stream before the waters pass over the weir and flow underground. This pond should be dredged regularly to ensure that debris does not dam the stream and cause flooding throughout the campus and contribute to significant environmental problems downstream. For a number of reasons, dredging has not been carried out for more than a decade. This has left the pond clogged with silt, weeds and debris, and has resulted in several minor floods during the past year.

As with any work which will affect a water course and a potential wildlife refuge, Environment Canada has been fully consulted. A permit has been issue by Greg George of the Habitat Section, Fish and Wildlife Management, to enter the stream and dredge to return it to its intended state. This permit takes effect July 1, 1992. Full documentation is available in our office for you to review. We have maintained constant liaison with Mark Angelo, and Gary Rosburg of Renewable Resources on this matter. At their request, we have delayed the dredging to August 1, to ensure that the birds currently nesting there are mature enough to survive away from the pond. Mark and Gary will monitor the pond to ensure that we don't start prematurely.

Finally, in addition to the technical issues, this project will provide a comfortable and relaxing refuge for the human animal on campus.

I hope that I have been able to put to rest any concerns that we are not acting in the best interest of our environment. If you have any further questions please call me at local 8480 or drop by 2T and we can discuss them.

Garry McCracken
Physical Plant

BCIT Evicts Wildlife
Is Kyle Creek Project really "upgrading?"

By S. Spence & L. Merson

Whatever befalls the earth befalls the children of the earth. If human beings spit on the earth, they spit on themselves. This we know: the Earth does not belong to humankind. Humankind belongs to the Earth. This we know: all things are connected, like the blood that unites one family. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the citizens of the Earth. Human beings did not weave this web of life. We are merely one strand in it. Whatever we do to the Earth, we do to ourselves. This we know.
—Chief Seattle, *Duamish tribe* (1851)

They are paving paradise.

It seems that everywhere you go they are tearing down blackberry bushes in order to pave back alleys, replacing grass with neat and orderly sidewalks, and removing whole forests to build suburban subdivisions. And here at BCIT they are paving the pathway that runs alongside Kyle Creek. The path will form part of the Burnaby trail system for cyclists and pedestrians. Perhaps more importantly they are dredging the creek itself which will destroy the bird habitat, and this has upset some of the BCIT community.

Kyle Creek is home to swallows, red winged black-birds, and ducks which nest and raise their young amongst the grasses and rushes in the pond. Although the pond is not a natural habitat, it has slowly been transformed into a wetland comparable to any other.

Garry McCracken, Manager—Facilities Development, argues that the "pond should be dredged regularly to ensure that debris does not dam the stream and cause flooding throughout the campus and contribute to significant environmental problems downstream."

But Librarian Judy Moroso says that it is ironic that "we teach fish and wildlife conservation [at BCIT] and then propose destroying a natural wetland that exists right on our own campus."

One wonders if dredging the Creek and destroying a natural habitat is the only solution *or if it is simply the least expensive solution.* Surely an Institute of Technology can find other ways "to ensure that debris does not dam the stream and cause flooding throughout the campus."

Robert Roy, a concerned BCIT community member, feels that the dredging is an unnecessary step that could be solved if measures are taken to clean away the debris—the branches, leaves and garbage—further up the creek.

Roy also worries that dredging could release toxic sediment that would find it's way to Burnaby Lake, a wetland with it's own problems. "It seems contradictory that Burnaby is trying to upgrade Burnaby Lake while at the same time they are downgrading a stream that runs into it. I think they need to realize it's all interconnected."

And given the state of the environment in Canada, the fact that Environment Canada has been fully consulted is not particularly consoling. And speaking of consultation—why was it that the BCIT community (a contradiction in terms it seems) was not consulted in any substantive fashion? Once again some faceless and unaccountable bureaucrat has decided that "this project will provide a comfortable and relaxing refuge for the human animal on campus." Speak for yourself. What provided a relaxing refuge for many of us in this too often cold and sterile Institute of Technology was the baby ducklings and their families swimming in the Creek.

It is not good enough that BCIT will wait until "the birds currently nesting there are mature enough to survive away from the pond" before dredging. Where are they to go next year?

Perhaps the real problem is that too many of BCIT's administration adhere to the Ronald Reagan school of environmentalism—"if you've seen one redwood you've seen them all." *We've all seen ducks, and hell, some of us have even eaten them.* Or perhaps they are adherents to the Bill Vander Zalm school of technology—"Let's cut down the trees and create jobs." Whatever the case, it seems apparent that in this particular instance they are not committed to the environment.

If the BCIT administration do not want to be seen as the George Bush's of the post-secondary community, it is important that they recognize the regressive nature of the Kyle Creek "Upgrade" and stop the project immediately. Furthermore, it is important that they affirm that technology and the environment must work together if our planet is to survive. ❖

An Interview with Mark Angelo

Associate Dean

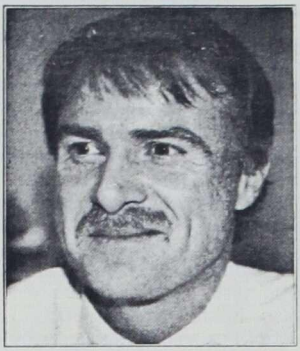
Renewable Resources & BioSciences Technologies

&

Gary Rosberg

Program Head

Fish Wildlife & Recreation



Mark Angelo

The Link spoke with Mark Angelo, Associate Dean of Renewable Resources and BioSciences Technologies and Gary Rosberg, Program Head, Fish Wildlife & Recreation on Monday June 22nd, 1992.

Link: What are your feelings about the present project? Is it simply a case for full dredging and returning it to the way it looked in the seventies, basically a rock-lined pond with no vegetation of any kind...

Angelo: We've been asked about impact associated with dredging. To date we've offered advice and comment as to what some of the impacts might be if full dredging were to occur. We have not been asked to support or agree with the project *per se*. Whether the project goes ahead is an administrative position, but I do feel we have the responsibility to comment on what some of the proposed impacts might be and some of things that can be done to mitigate those impacts.

I certainly have my own personal thoughts about the project, in that I know that pond probably as well as anybody and I've had the advantage of seeing it on a daily basis—I walk by it on the way to work and on the way home—for pretty much seventeen straight years. I've seen the changes that have occurred and it's interesting... Looking at the full dredging that was done before, there's no question that to some people that is a more scenic environment but there's no question that it's a more sterile environment in terms of the ability of that pond and the surrounding area to support bird life and even aquatic life for that matter. But I want to be clear that it's not our job *per se* to approve the project. To date our function has simply been to comment on what some of the impacts might be. Right now it seems like the action has been full dredging or no dredging. Whether there is some option in the middle and to what extent that has been considered I don't know.

> ***Some of the activity that's already occurred and that I looked at today—the clearing of trees and the draining of water—could have a bearing on the environment and the very nests that we were trying to protect.***
>
> **—Mark Angelo**

We have also commented on the fact that when it was dredged before you had more of a lake environment that wasn't used a lot by birds probably until three or four years after dredging, until some sediment had collected on the edges and some bullrushes or cattails had become re-established. If in fact we were ever to go to that I don't know if that in itself is an appropriate response. As I mentioned to you earlier, from a landscaping perspective a lot can be done to make altered areas more attractive to wildlife and birds in a shorter time frame—from plantings along the edge to the kinds of trees that you place in there. But there's no question, I fully appreciate the perspective that a number of staff on campus that see a lot of value associated with the area as it now exists. I mean they're right. It's one of the few areas on campus that's like that and it's a real refuge for some of my own staff. They wander over there with their sandwiches and park themselves by the pond and look at the swallows and the blackbirds and everything else. I fully appreciate that.

Link: If they go to full dredging as they've proposed, I understand that your position has been to ensure that the birds presently residing there have matured prior to dredging?

Angelo: The response they got from the Ministry of the Environment was only fisheries related. It was strictly a window of opportunity as to when the sedimentation that would go along with any dredging activity would have the least amount of impact on the fish downstream. To my knowledge nobody from the Ministry of Environment came out and assessed the area from a wildlife perspective. When we heard about the target date we knew right away that the area hadn't really been assessed in terms of its wildlife usage so we approached the Institute.

Red winged blackbirds normally fledge by the middle of July. The Literature will

tell you anywhere between the first and second week in July. Knowing that everything is a little bit off weatherwise this year—more often on the early side—we thought better to be safe than sorry and add to that time frame. Keith Walker then told us that the Institute could start the project as late as August 1st. I also volunteered to check the area quite closely to make sure there were no birds in there.

Some of the activity that's already occurred and that I looked at today—the clearing of trees and the draining of water—could have a bearing on the environment and the very nests that we were trying to protect. The microclimate of the area has been affected now to some degree by the removal of the trees. It remains to be seen to what extent that will affect the bird population but nevertheless that could have a possible impact. I'm a little more concerned about the drawing down of the water level because as we saw today the silt is a lot drier and those nests are certainly more accessible in terms of predators.

Link:Has the Institute, and particularly Physical Plant, maintained constant liaison with both of you?

Angelo: We were approached about the concern that was raised by some of the staff in library. We confirmed the fact that there were red winged blackbirds in there and that the date of dredging—if dredging were to occur—should be moved back to ensure that the birds had fledged and were gone. I don't know how many times over the last ten or fifteen years, we've pulled out little ducklings that have gone over the lip [of the dam], and that after dredging that would, in all likelihood, increase. We talked about running a line of floats along [to contain the ducklings.] But once again I want to reiterate that in terms of approving or not approving the project we have not been asked. That's not our decision nor have been asked our thoughts about that. We've just been asked about what's there and what can be done to soften the impact. So in that regard we've been consulted but that shouldn't be interpreted as our department automatically approving of the project. There's an important distinction there. And once again we're cognizant of the fact that not only staff but our own students have mixed views about the project.

Link:I'm concerned with the term "constant liaison" because that suggests something other than has in fact been the case. When I walked out there on Friday and saw them radically altering the environment around the pond, ie, taking down numerous trees and affecting the shade and also lowering the water level in the creek, it seemed to me that at the same time that they are asking you to monitor the birds they should have also sought your opinion on how those two actions might affect the nesting birds.

Angelo: We were not consulted in that regard. Had we been I think we would have made note of the fact that by drawing down the water some of those very nests we are concerned about are more accessible now than they might have been otherwise at a higher water level. And also removing the trees does change the microclimate of the area somewhat, there's no question about that. We have been contacted primarily about the birds in there, and the advisability of delaying the work.

Link:The short term implications of the project.

Angelo: Yes. And to this extent that's been pretty much the department's involvement. I will say that we have suggested some type of compensation approach trying to replace some of the habitat that will be lost. But I think it is important to distinguish the fact that approving the project is neither our responsibility nor our job.

Link:Can we talk philosophically for a moment? Aren't we in an age when compensation is a last-ditch response? Aren't there other options that should be investigated before one talks about compensation?

Angelo: Well I do think that we should have a policy on campus that any kind of work we do should be assessed in advance for existing environmental values and possible impacts that may occur as a result. And you're right, compensation is a last ditch effort but sometimes that's all that can be done.

Link:But if there's a problem with siltation aren't there other options?

Angelo: In other areas people have looked at things like sink ponds which act as bit of a filter in terms of filtering out pollutants or reducing the sediment that might occur downstream. There are options like that I'm sure can be explored in terms of this situation.

Rosberg: Settling basins have worked in dropping the silt load and as long as they're maintained and cleaned regularly they work fine.

Angelo: The advantage of a settling pond is that as long as they're maintained regularly while there's a need to clean out a very small area it limits or reduces the frequency by which you'd have to deal with the big pond itself. So there's things like that that can be looked at. We've given some thought to how those might apply to Deer Lake and Burnaby Lake and some of the streams that flow into there and they might have some application here as well.

Link:Sometimes it may be difficult to comment on an issue that is controversial and has people's egos on the line but if someone was to say with your expertise in Fish and Wildlife what would you suggest be done that would solve the problems of flooding, be aesthetically pleasing to the "human animal," and also address the environmental concerns?

Rosberg: Somebody's made a decision that the way to alleviate the flooding is to widen and increase the channel capacity. Whether that can be done in a more "environmentally acceptable" method hasn't been explored with us.

Link:What if siltation was collected further upstream?

Rosberg: That won't solve the problem that is there now that the channel doesn't have the capacity to handle high winter flows. But yes, it will help in future.

Link:What about a partial dredging?

Rosberg: I'm not an engineer. I can't answer that.

Angelo: I do think it's always worthwhile looking at the range of approaches. It could mean anything from full dredging to partial dredging to no dredging at all. Like Gary I'm not an engineer and from a flooding point of view of the problem that's there right now it's hard for us to make a definite comment but I always think it's important to look at the whole range of options first of all and to know, to everyone's satisfaction, that that's occurred. And if many of those options are not feasible I think everybody has a right to be told why.

Secondly, if the work has to be done I think that the principle of compensation—while it is a last ditch kind of thing—and at least try to establish through a landscaping plan some immediate habitat that replaces some of what's lost. I'm not saying we pretend that it's going to replace it all but at least the principle of compensation in terms of a new landscaping plan that is "wildlife friendly" should be explored. There's lots of literature in that regard and great potential and that's something that traditionally most places like BCIT haven't given a lot of thought to but it's something that I think is warranted in this case.

Link:And that's not the type of landscaping that you get from ABC Gardening and Landscaping, but rather a specialized type of landscaping that isn't primarily intended for the "human animal."

Angelo: Yes, though often you'll find that kind of landscaping can be attractive for the human animal but it is also functional in terms of wildlife. Once again there's lots of literature and lots of people with expertise which can provide, in the short term, some of that lost nesting habitat that will go if full-blown dredging occurs. Anything from food to roosting, whatever, there's things we can do.

Once again, while this whole idea about sediment and sink ponds is quite viable, Gary's point is well taken. The damage has been done and if the pond has gotten to a point that from a flooding perspective perhaps something has to be done. But in future the idea of doing something that will minimize the work that has to be done, or lessen the frequency of work that has to be done on the pond itself is something that should be part and parcel of the whole plan.

Link:But would you say there should be further discussions about this?

Angelo: Well I always think that it's a good idea to provide people with the opportunity to express their feelings. I know that their are people from both schools of thought and some that are in the middle. This is typical of issues we deal with on a larger scale throughout the province so it's one we understand. I certainly think that people should have the opportunity to put forward their feelings and make the kind of presentation that you're going to make tomorrow.

Link:Joe Foy makes the argument that you don't have a problem with siltation if you resurrect the stream.

Angelo: If we were building BCIT twenty-five years ago and could start all over it would be lovely if, in terms of the longterm layout and plan for the Institute, they could have thought of a way to keep that stream open. If that stream had been kept open there would be incredible potential in terms of what we do, in terms of what Gary does on the Fisheries side there would be all kinds of neat things we could do. I would very much love to go back to that but I can see that given the fact that over a kilometre of creek is covered over you're looking at a very expensive proposition.

Link:How about reclaiming a couple of feet a year? I mean we're going to be around here for a long time.

Angelo: We're not saying that that approach isn't possible. I would love to see it. I recognize it's a matter of cost. If a way could be found to do it over the long term where it could be done in small pieces that would be great. All I'm saying is that we both recognize that it's a costly undertaking.

Link:Foy's point is that if the melding of technology and the environment doesn't happen at Institutions like BCIT where do they happen? I think that's in keeping with the Administration's consideration of an environmental/ecological policy for BCIT.

Angelo: I couldn't agree more. I think that such a policy is needed. Clayton McKinley mentioned to me today that at the next Board meeting he's indicated a desire to start work on that. Certainly it's too bad that a policy is not in place right now but Clayton's indicated an understanding for the need.

Link:If there's a need though isn't it also fair to say that decisions such as Kyle Creek shouldn't be made until such a policy is in place?

Angelo: From a habitat and a wildlife perspective I agree with you. I can't answer that question as to the immediacy of work that has to be done from a flooding or engineering perspective. It's not my field or area of expertise. I think that's something you'd have to talk to Garry McCracken about.

Certainly from a habitat and wildlife perspective I'd like to think that those decisions are always made in the context of an environmental or ecological policy, and that they're made with opportunities for public input and that people are given an adequate chance to express their views. I fully support those kinds of things in principle and it's unfortunate that this project has perhaps developed without some of those things being able to occur to the extent that they could. But if this decision is being made from an engineering perspective and there is concern about flooding or other things, they are really not our area of expertise...

Link:Except that maybe that's a little too generous. The engineers are no more responsible for our future than you or me. We're all in this together and if everything comes down to what's the simplest or most cost effective method, that's what's got us in this mess [the global environment]. That's why they covered over creeks in the first place. To continue on the path of "that's the way we've been doing it and it's the way we'll continue to do it" is suicide. No slight on anyone at the Institute but I'm not convinced that engineers have brought us to the best possible place in terms of the environment. So let's not give them all the responsibility for making the decision. Let's say "No! Let's work this out together."

Angelo: Well, let's put it this way. As a department we recognize the uniqueness of Kyle Creek as a wetland area. It is unique in terms of the campus and the immediate area. We recognize the values that are there from a wildlife perspective. We recognize that to many people—including some of our students—the existing environment is as pleasant or more pleasant than the present alternative. We fully appreciate that and recognize that.

I know that I probably have as much of a feeling for that pond as anybody else—only because I've walked across it and I've seen all the changes it's undergone—and to me it's much more pleasant when there's lots of vegetation around that pond and lots of birds in there. So I would love to see some middle ground myself. I'd love to think too that if we do anything that detracts from the habitat of that creek that we try to be a role model and do everything possible to rehabilitate that habitat and to be aggressive in terms of the plantings and everything else that we do and not to focus on or work towards some type of rock and garden environment that is perhaps sterile from the wildlife

perspective. I mean I'm sensitive to all those things. It's unfortunate that this issue has gotten to where it is and it's something we've got to deal with now. All I'm saying is that we can express our views and do what we can to ensure the impacts on wildlife and other natural values are mitigated as much as possible. The engineering perspective is a side of the equation that we don't have a lot of expertise in but certainly we're fully sensitive to people like yourself and some of the staff society members in the library that see a lot of natural value in what's there.

Link:Gary, how exciting a prospect do you see in making attempts to improve the water quality and reintroduce fish to the creek?

Rosberg: It's a very distinct possibility. Experiments and designs have been completed now that work and that can increase water quality and make it more suitable for fish habitat. There's no doubt about it. Activated charcoal has been used successfully to take out heavy metals and other contaminants in the water.

One of the problems with an urban watershed is that there is violent fluctuations in water volume. And when that happens there tends to be downstream displacement. In the situation we're in now, if we transplanted fish or outplanted fish upstream of the barrier:

1. we don't have much in the way of available habitat;
2. it's subject to extremes in flow, both in winter with high flows and summer with low flows.

Both would impose definite limitations on marine habitat quantity. And then with mid-winter freshets you'd have downstream displacements and any fish that got displaced over that barrier wouldn't be able to make it back to the marine habitat. So there are some very distinct problems, some very major problems that would have to be alleviated before anything successful could be attempted.

Link:But for BCIT to have the dream and the longterm commitment to resurrect that stream and to return fish population to the streams has some merit?

Rosberg: Well, the problem with streams is a problem with any stream in that it does not belong to any one particular entity. There are headwaters that we have no control over and downstream areas that we have no control over. And even if you enhance habitat in your particular locus it may not have any affect on the overall picture because there's limitations that you can't control. But yes it's possible.

Link:And I take it that it's not outside the realm of the type of work that you're already doing?

Rosberg: Well rehabilitation of urban streams is being done elsewhere and it could be applied in Kyle Creek. Yes.

Angelo: There's no reason why our students and our staff couldn't work in projects related to that kind of thing.

The other thing I want to mention too is just that you asked if the Institute had maintained constant liaison with us and I said that in terms of some specifics, ie., the red wing blackbird as an example that that is true but I also want to reiterate the fact that in terms of drawing down water levels or taking out the trees on the west side of the pond that decision is something we had no input on.

Link:One last question. It has been suggested that removing the habitat will not affect the wildlife because they'll just go somewhere else. It is my understanding that each ecosystem can only support so much wildlife and if you remove one ecosystem it puts a greater burden on other ecosystems. Simply put, there's no more room at the inn and the loss of this habitat means that wildlife will be displaced and wildlife will die.

Angelo: To say that the birds will automatically go someplace else and find similar habitat nearby is not always appropriate, especially in an urban setting. It assumes suitable and available habitat nearby and that's not always the case. I mean there is some good wetland habitat in and around Burnaby and Deer Lake but that's not to say that these birds will necessarily all be displaced and find room there or find their way there.

Hence the principle of compensation—the idea that we do everything possible to replace some of the habitat that's lost if in fact dredging goes ahead—is important, especially in an urban environment. As we said earlier that's a principle that's both in place and often practiced on the fisheries side of the equation and I'd like to think that there's no reason from a wildlife perspective that that same principle couldn't apply. ❖

EDITORIAL

The Board of Governors must stop the upgrade of Kyle Creek immediately.

This request is in keeping with Clayton McKinley's suggestion that BCIT develop an environmental policy at BCIT. He and the Institute should be applauded for this initiative. However, if such a policy is to be more than rhetoric no work that potentially impacts on the environment at BCIT should be allowed to proceed until an environmental policy is firmly in place. Such of policy must address the practice and the ethics of projects like this one.

An environmental policy at BCIT should affirm BCIT's commitment to the environment in our surroundings and in our classrooms.

And if Facilities Management argues that the risk of flooding this winter necessitates some immediate measures they should look for other more wildlife-friendly options. What about implementing flood channels as they have in Matsqui? In fact, rather than dredging the Creek they should dredge the parking lot beside the Creek and build an overflow flood channel under the parking lot.

Or they could certainly modify the project by maintaining the lateral marsh area and dredging in the middle on an as-needed basis.

I'm not an engineer but I'm sure there are far more creative solutions to the siltation and flooding problems that Kyle Creek faces. It does not appear that alternatives have been sufficiently explored. Solutions will not be found in the backrooms of Facilities Managment but rather by liaising with all our technological experts in an open and cooperative manner that includes public meetings to discuss the future implications of such projects.

Because when it comes to the environment it belongs equally to all of us. There is no hierarchy, there are no managers. Please don't let convenience or a lack of imagination dictate the legacy we shall leave for our children.

Dream big, and maybe during Burnaby's next Centennial there will be fish leaping in Kyle Creek.

Les Merson
Managing Editor

An Interview with Joe Foy

Western Canada Wilderness Committee

The Link interviewed Western Canada Wilderness Committee member Joe Foy at Kyle Creek on Sunday June 21, 1992.

Link:As we walk the Creek what are your first impressions?

Foy: It would appear that the Institute is less concerned about the creek plugging up than they are about the pipe [plugging up]. That points to two problems. One is the problem that they have with plugging up pipes and the other is the problem that I have with burying streams.

Here's the solution (and given the number of buried streams in the Greater Vancouver area it would be quite an exciting solution): to begin a project over the entire length of the BCIT property to resurrect the stream. It would be a really exciting project. What I'm talking about is digging it up from underneath that parking lot. Now I don't know if you've reached the situation where your stream is going under buildings now but even if that's the case that's probably a situation we have in a number of places in Vancouver. It's going to be—I would think—a century or two project to revive the streams of Vancouver so that we get the salmon runs back into the city.

Link:Are people committed to doing that?

Foy: This is less about science and more about philosophy or core beliefs. Our core beliefs have brought us to the situation where there's a hole in the sky, where you've got to tell your children now to be careful when they go out of doors lest they get skin cancer, where global food production is going down, and where fisheries are collapsing... That same central core belief has caused us in this little part of the world to bury our salmon rivers, to bury them under tarmac. What better place than a school of technology to be a place where historians two hundred years from now will look back on and say, "in this school they unburied a stream."

If humans are going to survive, their core beliefs as societies are going to have to change. I believe that one of those changes is getting back to the idea that there was once a living stream under this cement and by God—I don't care how long it takes—that stream should live again. You won't have your problem with debris plugging up because you won't have a damn pipe under this.

Link:The other thing that they are pointing to is the aesthetics of the siltation. Would you call that a wetland?

Foy: Well, that's what it is now—a little wetland.

Link:And they want to totally remove the wetland. At present several families of ducks nest there...

Foy: Well, aesthetics is funny you know. Depending on how you think, certain people can go out and look at a beautiful sunset and say, "that's a beautiful thing. " Others may look out there and think, "Good God, that's from a million and half cars poisoning us." [laughs] I find an abundance of bird life and this ribbon of life that you just can't keep down way more aesthetically pleasing than some rock-lined artificial "tidy bowl."

Link:But are you seriously suggesting that they not only stop the "Upgrade project" but that they resurrect the stream?

Foy: There's other scientists in other places trying to close the hole in the sky, and scientists and technologists scratching their heads over the collapsed Newfoundland fishery... The students are going to build the society of the next century and it just might be projects like this that they cut their teeth on.

Link:But it seems that technology at BCIT is directed towards the "human animal"—like our covered walkways...

Foy: Well everything I've talked about is directed towards the human animal too. These covered walkways aren't much good if you don't have clean air to breathe, good food to eat, and you can't walk under the blue sky on a sunny day like this. So, everything I'm talking about—like tearing up the pipes and realizing that we're starting down a very different path than the one that brought us here—is all about human beings. The kind of thing that we've got ourselves into is a suicide cult and a suicide cult leads to one place—death. And I don't think that's what people are really about.

Link:But what about people that say, "well we're really not that bad off and these Joe Foy's of the world are just part of a very small group." For example an Institute manager referred to my article, "BCIT Evicts Wildlife—*Is Kyle Creek Project really upgrading?*" as "minor paranoia run amuck."

Foy: [laughs] Well it boils down to this. You can cement over that reconstructed marshland there and nothing would happen. But you can't deny the fact that there's more human beings alive now than have ever died in all of history, there's a hole in the sky, and we're all in trouble. So what you really have to do is talk about change. At least admit on the global scene that change is necessary.

You have to look at the mechanics of change. And there's really only one kind of change and that's individual change. So that massive global change only happens one way and that's with a billion small changes. Unless they happen, nothing happens in a global sense.

Rio. The recent gathering at Rio doesn't change anything. There is no magic trigger that you control but what you can do is start in your neighborhoods, your own life and you can change.

Link:And our Institutes.

Foy: And our Institutes. Just in your own little corner.

And as far as paranoia, paranoia is connected to fear as far as I understand it. It's a little bit like a story I heard once about a fellow who went up to Churchill and saw this Polar Bear pacing in little four-foot lengths in the tundra. He said to his buddy, "what's that Polar Bear doing?"

And his buddy said, "well, we had to put that Polar Bear in a cage because last winter he was trying to get into people's houses. But we've let him out of the cage now.

"Yeah, but why's he doing that?"

"Well, he's still afraid. He thinks the caged wall is still there."

And I think that people are basically afraid of what's happening to the planet. Some people are so afraid that they click into denial and get very angry if you put in their face what's going on. Other people don't deny it but they're afraid that whatever they do can't possibly help something as huge and horrible as what appears to be happening. And what I would say that you have to do to get rid of that fear is to understand the mechanics of change. The little things, the things that you do personally are the only things that change the world.

Link:In their defence the Institute claims that they've done all the right things. "We've got a permit from Environment Canada and we're working with our Renewable Resources people. We're doing everything we can but we can't consult with every fringe environment group. We can't have town hall meetings to discuss how this is going to impact on the environment.

Foy: Well, what I've got to say to the Institute is this. "Look Institute, whatever the hell the Institute is, this is the way it is—all the existing structures and ways of doing things are killing us. The Fraser River is still going down the tubes. We've got a system that actually purposely puts all our garbage dumps, our heavy industries, and our toxic industries on the banks of the bloody Fraser River. It's an insane system..."

Now look—the Institutes, the governments, the police, the armies of this country don't lead. The people lead and the government's follow, including the government of this Institute. The old ways of doing things are part of the suicide cult. Who knows what the future holds but I would hope that this little situation would mushroom and that the people of BCIT and the surrounding neighbourhoods will take back and own that Creek. Walk the Creek to know it. Get the garbage out of the Creek. Demand that the Creek be dug up and made living again. Make it a century project if it takes that long. If that happens it doesn't matter what the Institute thinks.

Link:But it does. You talked about fear and the need to acknowledge that things need to change. It doesn't appear to me that the Institute is willing to acknowledge that perhaps they haven't thought this thing through sufficiently enough and it certainly doesn't seem that they're prepared to change the present decisions that they've made. I talked to two members of the Board of Governors on Wednesday about this situation and was invited to make a presentation the following week. Yet on Friday, in the midst of Convocation, they started removing the trees. I phoned up Physical Plant and asked if this was a coincidence. Of course they said that it was and that the time frame had been set. And maybe it was... But to me they're saying, "we don't want to rethink this thing. We don't want to hear from anybody else. We've heard from Environment Canada, we've heard from our Renewable Resources people and that's it. End of story.

Look Institute, whatever the hell the Institute is, this is the way it is—all the existing structures and ways of doing things are killing us. The Fraser River is still going down the tubes. We've got a system that actually purposely puts all our garbage dumps, our heavy industries, and our toxic industries on the banks of the bloody Fraser River. It's an insane system...

—Joe Foy

Foy: Well that's because the Polar Bear thinks he's still in the cage. What I'm telling you is that the people who are making those decisions to cut down those trees and bury these streams, are a very very small group of people within this general community. And when the community wakes up... If the community wants something and acts to get it they will. Just about every kind of thing like this that I've ever seen it's a small group of people that are determined until suddenly you look around and have a huge group of people. It'll be this stream or it'll be another stream...

All that matters is that you fight as hard as you can. That you speak from the heart. And in the end it almost doesn't matter going into it whether you think it is winnable or not. What matters is that you speak from the heart, that you fight as hard as you can, and that you organize. And that you believe in your heart that no matter what they do to this stream that you'll see it free-flowing along with all the other streams in the area.

Link:But you know, I guess most people are in that cage. Even people who are strongly committed to the environment. We're all in cages, we're blocked in by what we can imagine.

When you said it would be wonderful if there were salmon going up this stream, I thought "that'll never happen." I mean, My God, salmon in the midst of BCIT. What an incredible occurrence that would be.

Foy: It would be fantastic and it's way more possible now than if we allow another fifty years of this suicide cult to go on. (If we have fifty years of survival left the way we are going.)

Now is the absolute best time to begin turning around something like this. And what a project!

We've just been walking and walking past buildings and over cement crossroads, and you know, the harder it would be to dig up this puny little stream the bigger the statement it would make. It would be like the Pyramids of Egypt. It would be a very loud statement.

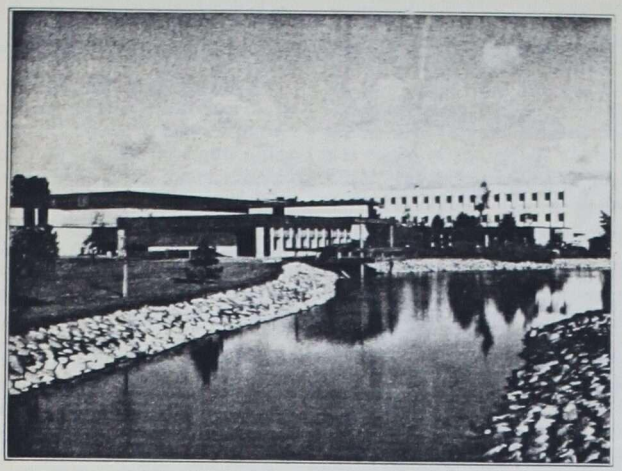
Link:But who's going to make that statement?

Foy: People. The people that live here.

Link:Is the municipality of Burnaby going to make that statement?

Foy: If the people want it there's not a force on earth that can stand in its way.

Link: But do they want it? Take clearcut logging for example. For every person who's opposed to it there's people saying, "look, I just want to work. I either want to keep my job or get a job and that's where it's at for me."



Kyle Creek in the 70's—the "Tidy-bowl effect."

Foy: I compare it to the Civil Rights Movement in the Southern States during the nineteen sixties. What people are saying now in the environmental movement that may be considered radical or off-the-wall now is going to be considered awfully wimpy in the future. I don't worry about that sort of thing. I can see us heading towards a collision course with disaster because of the increased destruction of the environment. What we need to be doing now amongst all the population is talking about the politics of survival now so that when the shit really starts to hit the fan we've got a head start on this. If or when we get into a situation like they just experienced this year south of the border where they had to close the Coho and Spring salmon fishing we've already begun talking about the massive destruction of the Coho streams in the entire Georgia depression due to urban developments like this.

And if we've had two, three, or five years of controversy like the great BCIT controversy we've got a chance of survival because those kinds of issues are going to come at us harder and harder. We've got a million and a half people now in the Lower Mainland right. And the more that we argue and fight and bitch about air quality now the better able we'll be to keep our children away from permanent lung disabilities if our population hits three, four, six, and ten million as they're telling us.

You've got to talk about these things now. And it's not just talk. I think we really have to get down to what would it cost to tear up this stream.

Link:And think about it. Our students are not only the technologists of today but of the future. Many of these students are going to be working for the next forty years and they're going to be here in 2032 when there might be a population of eight million in the Lower Mainland.

Foy: Well we've always talked about the nineties as the turnaround or the terminal decade and whichever way she goes these are the folks that are going to be dealing with some very quickly changing times. So what often starts off as "we need another landfill" gradually boils down to overconsumption and what can we do about that. And what starts off as some bullrushes out your backdoor eventually ends up as literally all the streams that have been buried in this area, declining wildlife populations, and right down to the core survival beliefs for the twenty-first century.

Link:So you've talked about this wonderful committment that BCIT has the opportunity to be a part of in terms of opening up a Creek—letting it run freely and not constrained by pipes—and working towards restocking it with salmon. What about the other aspects of the development which are more immediate such as the removal of the grasses, the bullrushes, and the nesting areas which Physical Plant is quick to tell us are not natural.

Foy: Ducks look pretty natural to me and so do the bullrushes [laughs] but I know what you mean. I say leave them.

I think that the stream needs a group of friends to come together and set their sights on unburying this stream and I think that a group of committed people from BCIT should work on small mitigating projects such as getting the debris out of the stream, getting to know how that stream works, and to keep that marsh and wetland there.

Link:Now I'm not a technologist but even the way they've dammed it, from a technological point of view, doesn't appear to be the best way to do it. Every year dozens of little ducklings fall over the lip. I'm sure that technologically they can approach the various problems they face in the short term in more creative ways than simply removal of the problem.

Foy: I think so too. And I think the positive thing would be to get more of the staff and students involved in this living entity that lives on the BCIT campus. It would be a tremendous project, rather than killing it because it's a bit of a nuisance. In the short term more people involved, more talk.

Link:So put the project on hold, talk about it, and investigate other options. Talk about what type of environmental philosophy BCIT adheres to.

Foy: And not just talk. Of all the post-secondary institutions in the province this should be the one with particularly creative solutions. I see little contests like building machines out of egg crates for Christ's sake, I'd like to see a similar kind of contest—from both entrepreneurial and technological perspectives—about the Creek. It's just a perfect project. And it begins to get people thinking about what every community is up against—how to keep it alive.

Link:Yeah, you can play with the fish tank or you can get out into the Creek and play with the real thing.

Foy: Yes, and that brings up another point. Another part of the bedrock philosophy that I think we have to build amongst places of learning is how we view ecosystems. What does an ecosystem do? The temperature of the planet, the air mixture, all the things that humans depend on to survive are regulated by living processes. So that every part of the biosphere—all those billions of ecospheres—all do something. And most of what they do we don't know. But they all do something.

This little marsh here does something. In an institute of learning—which is like a big seedpod ready to burst and all these people are going from here to Timbuktu and sprout and grow—you've got the opportunity to turn this into a ditch or into something a lot bigger.

Link:When we were talking on the phone you mentioned that it is not as simple as to say that whatever we do here won't impact on the wildlife because they'll just go somewhere else. Any removal of trees or any upset to that ecosystem will just mean that the red wing blackbirds will go to Deer Lake. None of the wildlife will die, they'll simply go someplace else. Is that the case?

Foy: No, it's kind of brain dead, and it distresses me to hear that kind of an argument used at an institute of learning. If you think of the Farside cartoon and the way Larson always looks through the eyes of animals. If you are a particular kind of bird and you look through the eyes of that bird for a minute, the whole landscape as far as you can see is fully developed for that species. Now every piece of habitat that can be utilized is filled up. So, if all of a sudden you create a bunch of refugees out of here, one of two things is going to happen. They'll go to someone else's habitat and get kicked out and eventually croak or they'll go to somebody's habitat and start a billiard ball effect until some bird croaks. The bottom line is if you have less habitat for a particular species, you will have less numbers of that species.

Link:So there's no room at the inn.

Foy: No, it's fully developed.

Link:So in other words this decision will have an immediate impact on the species that are here right now.

Foy: Yes.

Link:And what about the statement that in a couple of years they'll come back.

Foy: Well, it depends on what kind of habitat you're going to be building.

Link:They're not going to come back to the Tidy-bowl as you called it?

Foy: Well that's the thing!

But I think the whole value of this thing is that there'd be no value if people didn't stand up and fight it. Because if you didn't stand up and fight it nobody would think. The whole part of this is thinking and changed human behaviour. That's what this is all about. And you don't get changed human behaviour without thinking.

I would say fight this thing like hell. And see if you can get to the point where you can work together and not only keep that habitat there but also tearing a swathe through this bloody parking lot and building something that's alive again. The world needs big dreams.

There'll come a day when this would seem small because the next is the fifty or sixty or one hundred streams that are buried in the city of Vancouver.

Link:There is an irony here too, I suspect. Many of the people here blindly accept what happens within the city—everything from coloform counts to development—yet they'll donate money to your organization or they'll fight for the Stein or the Carmannah but they don't think about what's happening in their own backyard.

Foy: Well I had a marvellous, marvellous conversation with a fellow environmentalist from a group called the Women's Environmental Network in London, England. And she told me something that rang true for me because this happens to me too with regard to Vancouver. She said that "whenever I go around England people are always down on London. How can you stand to live in London—the traffic jams, the people, the dirtiness, no nature, no this, no that." And she said, "You know I love London. I just think it's important to love the place where you live. I've even gone so far as to do research and have found that where my office there used to be a stream in Roman times." She has a similar dream in London to one day see that stream, after two thousand years, come back.

And I think that that's the new survival culture that we have to build. People think you have to do a thing the way it was done and that's pretty hard to change. I think we've reached a point now where we've made some fundamental mistakes—some would say a whole bunch of centuries back and some would say only a few since the start of industrial revolution. But wherever we made the mistaken turn it's becoming clear that we did take a wrong turn somewhere back. We're running out of time as far as generations who are going to have opportunity to change directions. And I think taking back the cities is where we must focus because that's where the majority of the people live and that's where the political power is. All these problems are human-caused problems so all the solutions are going to come from changed human behaviours. And that means cities here and around the planet are key areas where that's going to happen.

But I can fully understand the individual who drives into work and sees someone screaming that if you put a ditch in that bullrush it's going to be the end of the world and says, "you're off your goddamned rocker." But he's wrong. Change has to start somewhere. And it only starts in your own backyard.

Link:So to summarize: as we look out over the Creek, the silt, the nesting areas, the bullrushes, and the trees that they haven't removed in the last couple of days, what would your short term recommendation be to the powers that be from an environmental perspective ?

Foy: Stop now. Hold some public forums on the issue. I would encourage people on whatever side of the issue they stand to walk the Creek, get to know it. I would encourage the powers that be to actually start a process similar to the kinds of processes we're now seeing coming out of the forestry debates. And I would encourage those people who see my point of view to organize and to dream big and to work like we intend to live here forever.

THE LINK IS...

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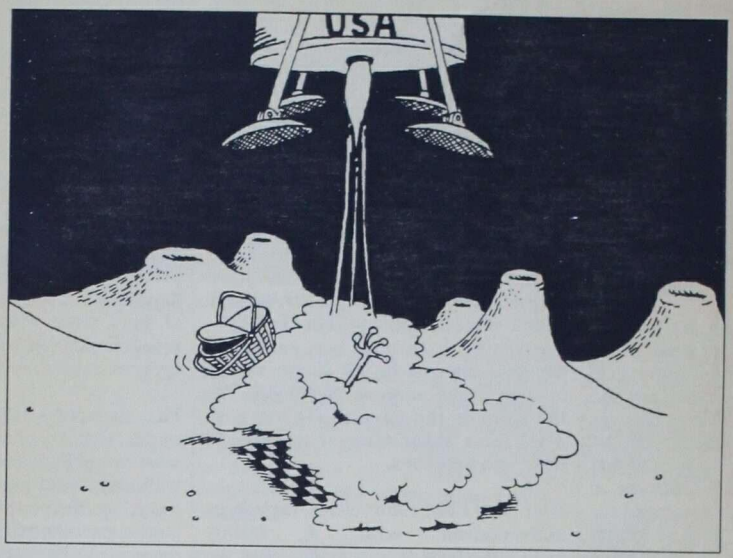
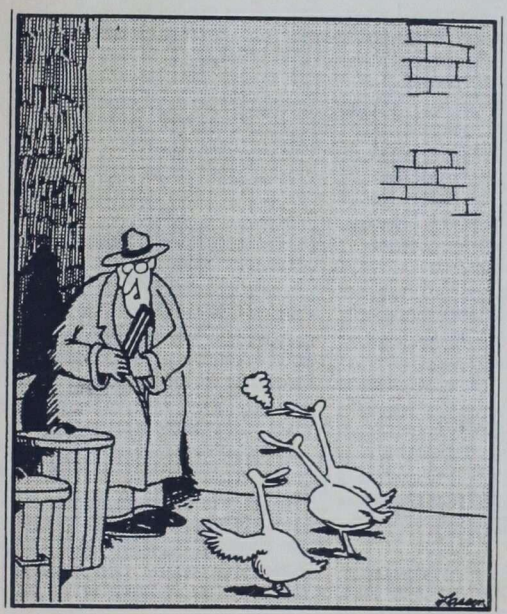
An Engineering Perspective

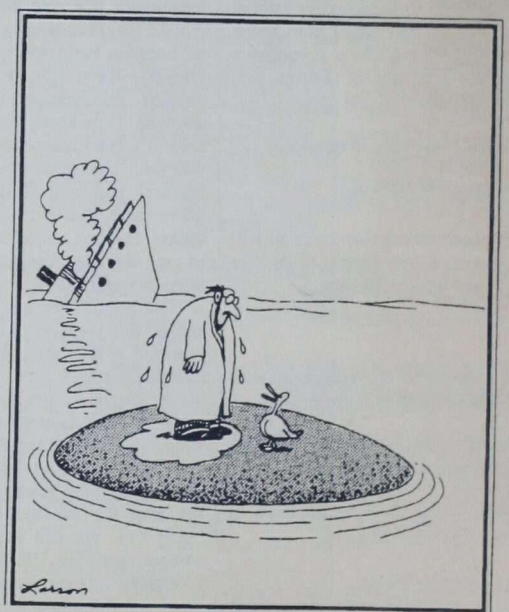
The Link contacted Garry McCracken, Manager of Facilities Management, but he wanted nothing to do with our publication which he said had no credibility and suffered from "minor paranoia run amuck."



The Wildlife's Perspective



Cornered by the street ducks, Phil wasn't exactly sure what to do — and then he remembered his 12-gauge.



"So, Professor Jenkins! . . . My old nemesis! . . . We meet again, but this time the advantage is mine!