Sargeant Bay Society
P.O. Box 1486
Sechelt, BC V0N 3A0
srgntbay.soc@gmail.com
www.sargbay.ca

Special Newsletter # 111
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Editor: Rand Rudland

I thought that there should be a Newsletter dedicated to the fishladder story, that in reality, is the story of the Park to a large extent. It was the decision to proceed with the installation of the original wooden fish ladder structure in 1991 that has allowed the Park to develop the all-important wetlands, and Colvin Lake, that are such an integral part of the visitors' experience to the berm area of Sargeant Bay Provincial Park. So here's my take on what was, and what is now. Original era photos from Joop Bergerjon archives.

March 1991 saw the official dedication of Sargeant Bay Provincial Park. You may recognize some of the attendees at this occasion. Joop Bergerjon (arms folded in the centre) must have been very proud of his and the Society's successful efforts from 1977-89 to save the area from development. Next to him (with binoculars of course) was then-president of the SBS, Tony Greenfield & daughter Marnie. Gordon Wilson, Harold Long, Eric Cardinall and other local and provincial political dignitaries witnessed this historic event.

In the beginning - well, up until 1991 at least - the area behind the berm had firstly become quite degraded by prior logging activities, followed by the previous owners' attempt to dredge the berm (red arrow) to form a freshwater marina behind the berm. The photo shows the degree of ruin that has since been transformed into what is now Colvin Lake and "Colvin Island".

August 1991 was the time window for the construction and installation of the wooden structure, at a cost of under $1,000. It has stood the test of time, including two atmospheric rivers that nearly forced the ladder into the Bay. The entire mass of the beaver dam was literally lifted off its base and thrown into the top of the fish ladder, blocking all water flow, and causing major erosion around the edges. Quick action by SBS volunteers and Daiton Craig to replace the washout area with rock and fill saved the day. Otherwise the Lake would have been drained to the sea and the wetland devastated.

Once the ladder was in place the lake level began to rise, reaching its final level during the winter of 1992 - at least until the beavers arrived. The photo left shows how the island, built by the dredging operation to deepen the area that would become the lake, was left untouched, with no native vegetation planting. All the plant life we see today has arrived naturally. After only 12 years the photo below (by Chris Yeske) shows how quickly the island vegetation growth had progressed.

This 2004 photo was taken prior to the upper beaver dam being built to the elevation it is today. You can see the large grove of Red Alder that was above the wetland water level at the time. These large trees eventually were flooded and died, leaving, for a decade or so, natural cavity trees for woodpeckers, and later, swallows. All remnants of these large alder are now gone. The beginning of the upper pond is barely visible where Colvin Creek courses through the wetland.

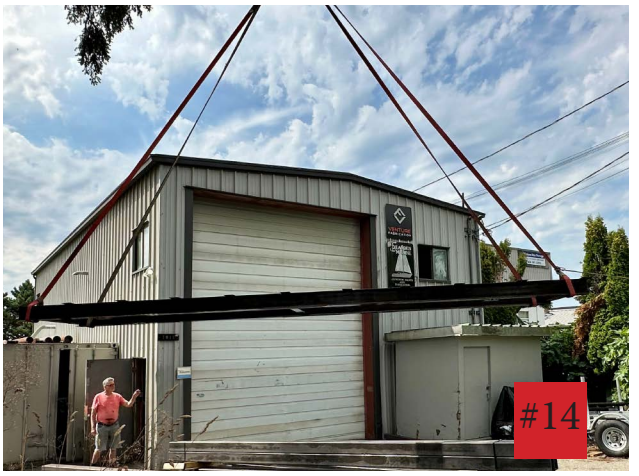
And that brings us (almost) to the present. About four years ago the Directors of the SBS began to have discussions about how we would manage to replace the aging fish ladder, given our declining membership (down from well over 125 to 80 or so) and the anticipated high cost of materials, equipment rentals, etc. We had planned to simply replace the aging structure with another similar wood design. That would likely have fit within our budget, with a little help from the local community and businesses. It was during discussions with BC Parks and DFO on that design that the idea of a replacement with a more durable material would be better in the long run, and hence the present -day plan of a marine aluminum structure began to take shape.

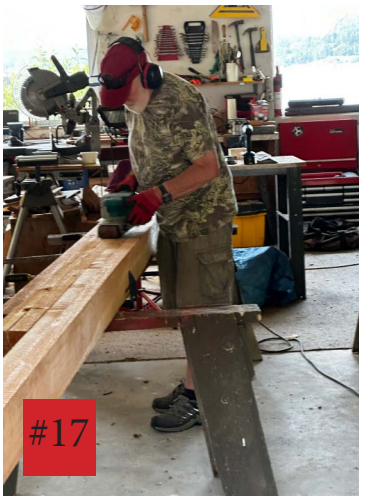
Director Dave Spicer, our SBS Stream Keeper coordinator, joined in on many of our Zoom planning sessions with Rod Dalziel and Elyse Guzek from BC Parks, DFO engineering staff in Nanaimo, and Jim Wilson, our local DFO Community Advisor. After numerous site visits, plan revisions, permitting questions, archaeological issues, and - oh yes - funding concerns, we were ready to proceed last fall. Check out the detailed “Thank-you” at the end of this summary for full details of the broad-based support we were able to enlist to bring the ladder project, and the new wheelchair-accessible viewing platform, to fruition. The photos to follow show the sequence for both the new ladder and viewing platform.

Fish ladder installation:
Large & small excavators arrive (#1, #2) - Mike Husband and crew onsite.
”Beaver Baffler” (#3) & Fish ladder (#4) arrive. The Beaver Baffler needed some revision so will be brought back soon for final installation.

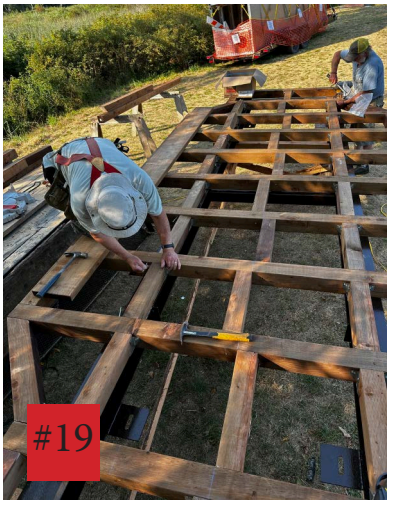
#5 - Old bridge removed
#6 - Materials arrive
#7 - Old ladder removed - beaver dam reinforced with sandbags
#8 - Ladder installed in 2 sections
#9 - Stabilizing concrete blocks arranged along side of installed ladder
#10 - It works!!! - Dave Key - water is flowing
#11 - First fish navigates the ladder - night #1
#12 - Jim Wilson and the Pink Salmon

Viewing platform construction & installation:
#13 - Steel sub-frame from Jeremy @ Venture Fabrication, Gibsons.
#14 - Lon's Contracting picking up the rust-proofed frame.
#15 - Delivering frame to Sargeant Bay.
#16 - Jeff and I picking up the SC Community Forest cedar from Warren and Sarah.
#17 - Rick Walters planing and sanding the railings
#18 - 4 x4 wooden subframe secured to steel frame.





#19 - 4 x4 wooden subframe nearly completed.
#20 - Deck level completed



#21 - Posts nearly done.
#22 - Rand & Jeff - construction completed
#23 - Lifting the platform for transport to fish ladder
#24 - Positioning on the concrete blocks
#25 - Jeff, Rick and Rand celebrating a job well done.
#26 - The clean-up crew after the heavy machinery was finished on the fully operational, wheelchair-accessible platform, with four seats to enjoy the solitude of the running water and the singing birds.

A huge thank-you is in order to all who assisted with the fish ladder replacement and the construction of the new wheelchair-accessible viewing platform, soon to be connected to the lower parking lot by a wheelchair-accessible pathway once all archaeological concerns are addressed.

- To the Sargeant Bay Society (SBS) volunteer flaggers on Redrooffs who took flak from some uninformed residents, but controlled the entrance gate while the construction was happening: Peter Hews, Richard/Ilene Rowberry, Dan Sklazeski, Terry Knight, Denise Lagasse, Rose Leung, Elise Rudland, Nicola Main-Thompson and Jeff/Val Marus.
- To directors Jeff Muckle and Rick Walters, without whom we would not have been able to complete the viewing platform construction and placement. Six days of hard labour!
- To Jeremy at Venture Fabrication Ltd. for expediting the welding of the metal mainframe.
- To Mike Husband and crew for their expert ladder installation, despite the heat and lack of shade.
- To Jim Wilson, our local DFO Community Advisor, for his on-the-ground coordination of the ladder installation process.
- To the DFO staff based in Nanaimo - Brandon Kirby, Kirby Reitze & Peter Kirillo – for the engineering of the new fish ladder and the onsite survey work to make certain the ladder is positioned properly.
- To Nanaimo's Dave Key, who fabricated the new fish ladder, including the "beaver baffler", which will be installed in the coming weeks once some adjustments are made to the final design.
- To our local BC Parks staff Rod Dalziel and Elyse Guzek for their ongoing support for the projects.
- To Dave Spicer for his input into the planning process and the many Zoom conferences with DFO and BC Parks.
- To all the Sargeant Bay Society Directors and members who supported the project from the beginning – three years ago at least.
- To the Sunshine Coast Community Forest for the supply of local red cedar for the decking and railings of the platform, milled professionally by Strait Timber, Tuwanek.
- To Bill Stockwell, Central Coast Concrete, for his donation of concrete lock blocks to secure the fish ladder and to support the new viewing platform.
- To Lance, Randy and John at RONA Coast Builders for giving us a break on the costs of the construction materials.
- To RentalEquip, Sechelt, for providing, when we need it, all the equipment for the completion of the long wheelchair-accessible pathway to the new viewing platform.
- To the local truckers, some committed already, others whom we hope will commit, to donate one or two dump truck runs to deliver the aggregate from Heidelberg when we begin the pathway project.
- To anyone I may have forgotten—my apologies—but you know who you are.

Special thanks to Joachim Pierre at Heidelberg Materials for coordinating the donation of all the aggregate materials that we will need to complete the wheelchair-accessible pathway.

Financial support should also be recognized as coming from the SCRD, the Pacific Salmon Foundation, DFO, Rotary Club of Sechelt, and numerous private donations from the SBS membership.

Funding for the pending accessible pathway borders has been provided by the Sunshine Coast Foundation.

And finally, for making all our day on the first morning after the new ladder was installed, to the lone adult Pink Salmon that tested the ladder on the overnight rising tide and was still there for us to see on our arriving for work the next morning.

The SBS Directors, and myself personally, thank all those involved in bringing this community-benefit project to completion. It is our hope that many visitors—infants to elders—both from on- and off-coast, will enjoy the serenity and biodiversity of Colvin Lake and wetlands from the new platform, and that viewing migrating Chum and Coho – and maybe now Pink – Salmon, will instill a better understanding of the importance of the genetic diversity represented by the numerous salmon runs, no matter how large or small, to our local creeks and rivers.

Rand Rudland, pres.
Sargeant Bay Society