Wetland Restoration in the Comox Valley

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Within weeks of the 1991 discovery of purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria)* in the Courtenay River estuary, Comox Valley Naturalists Society (CVNS) members and volunteers armed with shovels began the task of removing it. By the summer of 1995 it became apparent that even a bio-control release of predatory beetles in 1994 was to prove unsuccessful. The Courtenay River estuary was now infested with loosestrife and the nearby source of contamination, a wetland was a sea of pink and. CVNS member and director Betty Lunam solicited funds from donor organizations and the public to hire workers to replace volunteers suffering from burnout. In 1998 the continued efforts of Ms Lunam and the CVNS were recognized by Eco-Action with a crew and supervisor in 1998-99 seasons. With the demise of Eco-Action in 2000, funding was sought from other sources with limited success. A major breakthrough came in 2001 when an accountability strategy was adopted to help with fundraising efforts for loosestrife removal. This new strategy involved counting the roots of all loosestrife plants removed and mapping locations. With the recorded hours worked in 1999 & 2000 an estimate of plants removed for these years could be derived from the 2001 plants-removed/hours worked ratio. Through this approach, real numbers showing a decline in purple loosestrife gave potential funders a legitimate reason to support the project.

Since 2001 the CVNS has moved to a holistic approach of estuary/wetland management that includes removal of other invasives, planting of native species, and working with the local sawmill to solve bark debris problems in the Courtenay River estuary. Purple loosestrife numbers have declined from a high of 24,520 in 1999 to 6,931 in 2003. Over the 2002 & 2003 field seasons, 28,100kg of sawmill debris, 10,200kg of yellow flag iris and 2,080kg of Japanese knotweed was removed from the Courtenay River estuary. The extent of Himalayan blackberry dominance has been mapped at 7150 m^2 with 1300m^2 removed in 2003. Additionally, the eleven plant communities of the estuary were mapped in 2003 along with identification of over 150 species of vascular plants.