

Cat Stream and You

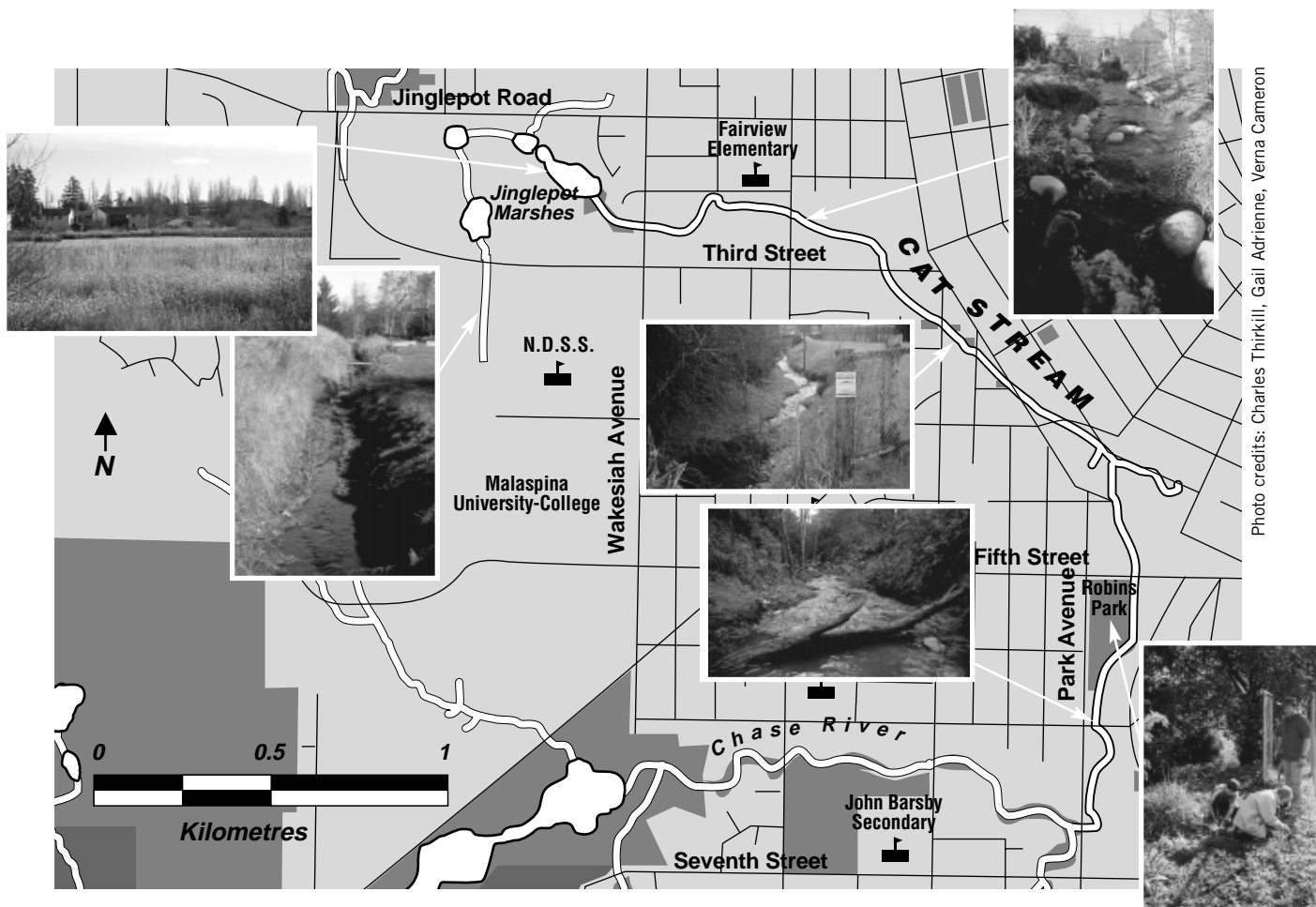


Photo credits: Charles Thirkill, Gail Adrienne, Verna Cameron

Where is the Cat Stream?

The Cat Stream flows through the Harewood area of central Nanaimo. It begins as drainage from the Malaspina University College area, forming a series of marshes between Jingle Pot Road and Wakesiah Avenue. The stream then runs southeast for about 4.5 km, passing through many back yards before discharging into the Chase River near the intersection of Park Avenue and 7th Street. In total, the Cat Stream watershed (the area drained by the Stream) covers about 640 acres or 2.6 km².

Stream Inhabitants

The Cat Stream is an important tributary to one of Nanaimo's most productive waterways, the Chase River. The stream supports cutthroat and steelhead trout, coho salmon, stickleback and crayfish as well as amphibians and reptiles. In addition to aquatic life, the Cat Stream is home to a variety of song birds and water birds as well as raccoons, beavers, and mink.



However, habitat in the Cat Stream is in danger. Low summer flows, silting in of pools, and loss of streamside vegetation are just some of the reasons why fish populations are declining. The Cat Stream needs our help.

Friends of the Cat Stream

There is a lot of community support for this important little stream. "Friends of the Cat Stream" from Fairview Community School have planted seedlings and removed garbage along the Cat Stream for the past two years and have released 200 juvenile coho into the marshes. In 1994, with help from the Habitat Conservation Trust Fund, College students enhanced the stream by placing large logs and boulders to create pools and adding gravel for spawning beds. In September 1997, as part of B.C. Rivers Day, over 30 volunteers planted trees and removed garbage from the stream.

Now, the Nanaimo Area Land Trust, in partnership with the City of Nanaimo and other community organizations, is sponsoring Project 2000, a program that encourages landowners along city watercourses to take an active role in caring for their stream.

What's Happening to the Cat Stream and How Can I Help?

Like many urban streams, the Cat Stream is subject to impacts from all types of human activities. The following actions can help make the Cat Stream a better place for fish, wildlife and people.



LOSS OF STREAMBANK VEGETATION:

Streamside vegetation and root systems filter out contaminants and stabilize banks. Trees and shrubs also provide, shade, shelter and food sources for fish and wildlife. When vegetation is removed, banks erode, temperatures increase, water levels fluctuate and fish habitat is lost.

ACTION: Preserve existing natural streamside vegetation and replant degraded areas.



REMOVAL OF WOOD:

Large pieces of downed wood provide shelter and food for fish, animals and birds. Wood ducks nest in dead trees, woodpeckers feed on bugs in rotten wood, and logs in the stream create pools and provide refuge for fish and other aquatic creatures.

ACTION: Avoid removing stumps and dead trees in or along the stream when they do not create a fish barrier or a hazard to people.



CHANGES IN DRAINAGE PATTERNS:

Water quantity and quality are often reduced when the surrounding neighbourhood replaces natural vegetation with pavement, houses and other hard surfaces. Surface water no longer filters slowly through the soil and vegetation, but instead, runs off these surfaces very quickly into storm drains, ditches and streams.

ACTION: Use gravel, loose bricks or flagstones instead of impermeable surfaces like pavement and concrete whenever possible. Let rainwater from roofs drain into the soil or use it in gardens.



POLLUTED WATER: Clean water with high levels of oxygen is essential to a healthy stream, but fertilizers, pesticides, car oil, and other wastes can end up in storm drains and then streams.

ACTION: Keep fuel spills, paint products and detergents away from storm drains. Reduce the use of pesticides and fertilizers and control soil erosion, manure and septic runoff so it doesn't flow into streams.



SOIL EROSION: Sediment from land clearing and construction in pools and smothers the creek bottom, damaging habitat for fish and other water life. Activities too close to the stream can cause the bank to erode.

ACTION: Contain water and sediment on-site when doing any type of building activity. Limit access to the stream to prevent bank erosion.



GARBAGE ACCUMULATION:

Plastic containers, tires, newspapers, batteries, metal scraps etc. can reduce water quality, damage habitat and make the stream unattractive.

ACTION: Remove garbage from the streams and rivers but leave woody debris in place.



UNNATURAL BARRIERS:

Some structures such as culverts, foot bridges, retaining walls and dams can block fish movement or disturb stream habitat if not installed properly.

ACTION: Modify or remove those structures which threaten water flow, fish access or bank stability.

CREATING OUR FUTURE

It's a rainy November morning, the year is 2020. A bus load of students from Fairview School has arrived at Robins Park to attend the grand opening of the new stream interpretive center. The children scatter from the bus, excited to see the salmon in the Cat Stream. They gather around and peer over the edge of the new viewing platform. The Cat Stream is rippling with the activity of spawning coho. "How many do you think there are?", asks a little girl with widened eyes. "I'm not sure," says the teacher. "Let's go ask the center's guide."



The grade two class quickly runs over to the exhibit area, where the life cycle of the salmon is colorfully displayed. The guide tells the class the coho return this year will be about 150, the highest in many years. "That's wonderful," exclaims the teacher. "I remember when I was a student and helped to plant trees and remove garbage from the Cat Stream." "Well, it looks like your hard work paid off," says the guide smiling. When we enhance the Cat Stream, we also enhance our own lives.

Voluntary Stewardship: Residents can make a conscious, voluntary choice to conserve and enhance the Cat Stream and other natural values of their property. For more information on voluntary stewardship, contact the Nanaimo Area Land Trust (see below).

If you have an idea to share or would like more information, contact one of the following:



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