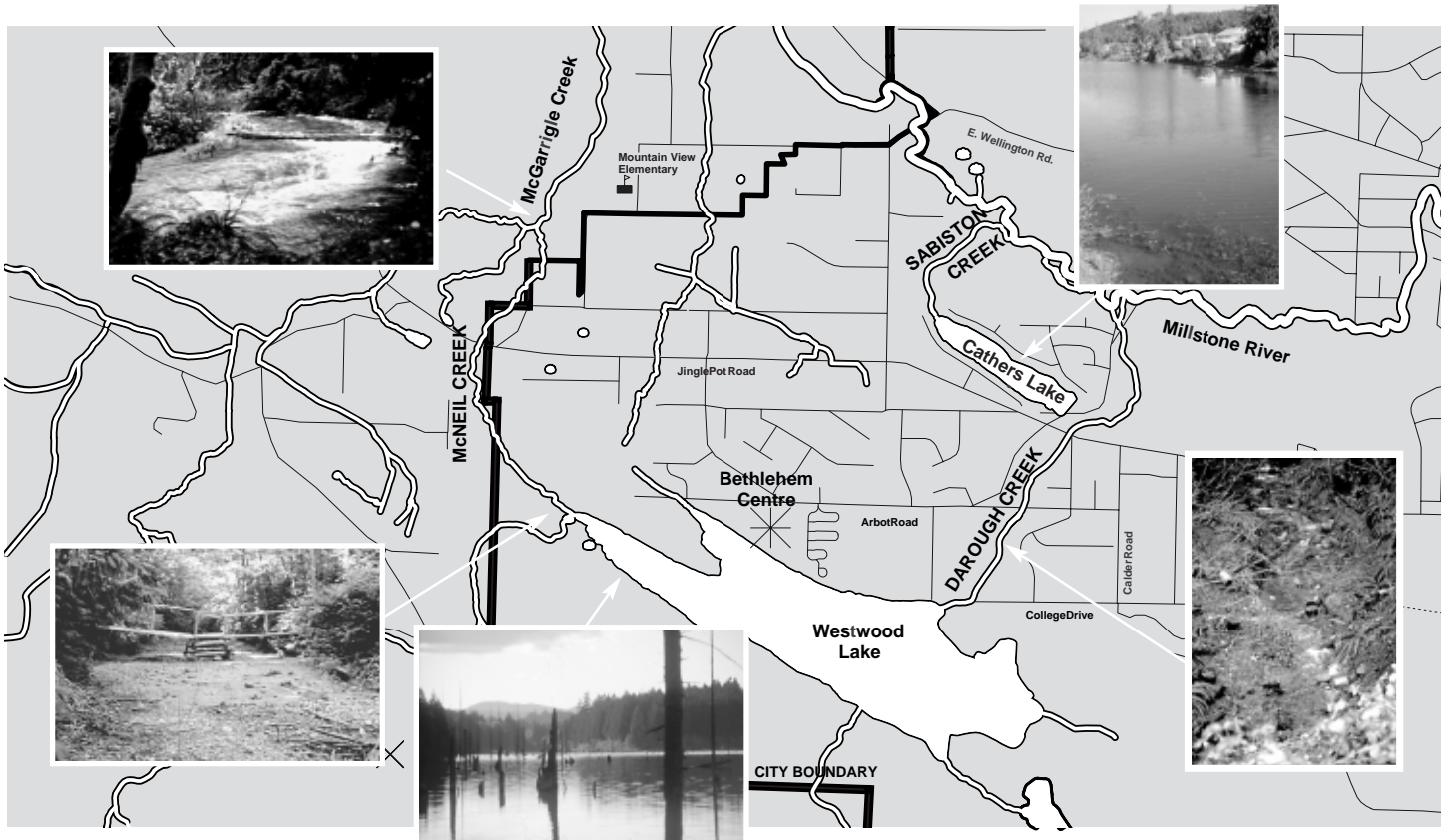


Westwood Watershed and You



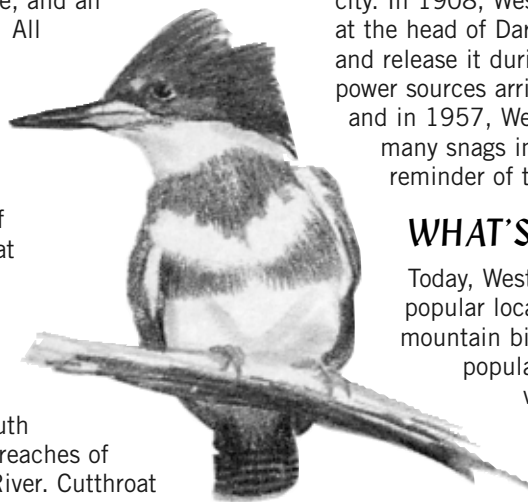
WHERE IS THE WESTWOOD WATERSHED?

From the north slope of Mount Benson, many small feeder streams find their way into Westwood Lake, which then drains into McNeil and McGarrigle Creeks. Other watercourses in the neighbourhood include Darough Creek, Sabiston Creek which flows out of Cathers Lake, and an unnamed creek east of Durnin Road. All these watercourses flow into the Millstone River and eventually into Nanaimo Harbour.

FISH AND WILDLIFE

This watershed contains a diversity of stream, lake and wetland habitats that support fish. Westwood Lake itself is home to cutthroat and rainbow trout (stocked by the Ministry of Environment) as well as pumpkinseed sunfish, threespine stickleback and small mouth bass. Coho salmon inhabit the lower reaches of McGarrigle Creek and the Millstone River. Cutthroat trout are also found in Cathers Lake and the unnamed creek.

Mature second-growth forest rings most of Westwood Lake. Bald eagles, great blue herons, Canada geese, river otters, mink, beavers, rough-skinned newts and painted turtles are just a few of the many wildlife species found there.



A BRIEF HISTORY

William J. Westwood settled the area in the 1860's when Westwood Lake was no more than a shallow marsh. Back then, electrical power was generated near the mouth of the Millstone River, but summer flows were insufficient to support the growing city. In 1908, Westwood Lake was created when a dam was built at the head of Darough Creek, to hold water during the winter and release it during the summer. However, as more reliable power sources arrived, the Millstone power plant was abandoned, and in 1957, Westwood Lake was dedicated as a city park. The many snags in the lake are a legacy of its creation, and a reminder of the history of this area.

WHAT'S GOING ON?

Today, Westwood Lake and its surrounding trailways are a popular local destination for hiking, swimming, fishing, mountain biking, birding and boating. However, this popularity is taking a toll. Trail and lake-side vegetation is being trampled, denuded shorelines are eroding away, and trash left behind is degrading the natural setting. As recreational use intensifies, the City Parks Dept. is building boardwalks and reinforcing trails to waylay these effects. Urban development in the surrounding watershed also poses a threat of erosion and degraded habitat. All these impacts together affect the quality of the Westwood watershed.

How Can We Help?

The following actions can help make the Westwood watershed a better place for fish, wildlife and people.



MAINTAIN LAKE AND STREAM-SIDE VEGETATION:

Trees and shrubs provide shade for water, keeping it cool for fish and providing cover from predators. Leaves and insects fall into the water as food for fish and other wildlife. When vegetation is removed, water temperatures rise, shorelines erode and habitat is lost.

ACTIONS: Protect stream and lakeside trees and vegetation. Restore these riparian areas by replanting native vegetation in denuded areas.



PREVENT SHORELINE EROSION:

Some erosion occurs naturally, but when vegetation is removed, shorelines collapse. Heavy recreational use too close to the lake edge aggravates this process. Soil washing into the stream or lake smothers the bottom and reduces water quality.

ACTIONS: Leave lakeside vegetation intact. Keep activity on trails away from the lake edge to prevent further plant loss and promote shoreline stability.



PREVENT GARBAGE ACCUMULATION:

Plastic containers, newspapers, batteries, metal scraps, old car parts and other human wastes can reduce water quality, damage habitat and make the area unattractive and undervalued. The beach site on Westwood is especially vulnerable to littering.

ACTIONS: Remove human garbage from the lake and shoreline areas, but leave natural woody debris in place. Pick up your pet's droppings and dispose of them responsibly.



RESPECT WILDLIFE:

Westwood Lake is a sanctuary for a rich diversity of wildlife. For instance, there are many nesting sites as well as shrub habitat for numerous small birds, and rotting wood on the ground for newts and insects.

ACTIONS: Be considerate of wildlife. Respect nesting and burrow areas by keeping your distance and staying to the trails. Control your pets so they don't chase wildlife and keep noise levels down when walking through the forest. You may just hear or see something special!



REDUCE URBAN RUNOFF:

In any watershed, when pavement, roofs and other hard surfaces replace natural vegetation, rain can't filter slowly through the soil and vegetation. Instead, it runs off these surfaces very quickly into storm drains, and then streams and lakes. This upsets the natural balance of these aquatic systems in terms of water quantity and quality.

ACTIONS: Think of using alternatives to pavement and concrete, like gravel or flagstones, whenever possible. Let rainwater from roofs drain directly into the ground or into rain barrels for use in gardens. Prevent pollutants like oil, fertilizers and herbicides from running off the surface.

WHAT COULD THE FUTURE BRING?

It's the year 2020 and a beautiful day at Westwood Lake. Walkers are enjoying cool forest trail that circles the lake. Over time, this trail has been re-aligned and restored to reduce the effects of heavy use on the lakeside environment, while still allowing opportunities to enjoy the natural setting. Birds nest in the trees and shrubs re-planted along the lakeshore. Many residents enjoy early morning angling from the fishing piers and boardwalks sprinkled around the lake.



On hot summer afternoons, the beach attracts swimmers who enjoy the clean, refreshing waters. It seems this place hasn't changed in a generation.

HOW CAN WE PRESERVE THE NATURAL BEAUTY OF WESTWOOD LAKE AND ITS WATERSHED?

- stay on the designated trails
- tread softly
- clean up after ourselves and our pets
- leave the native vegetation

The Future is Ours to Create: Become a Voluntary Steward

Residents can make a conscious, voluntary choice to conserve and enhance the natural features and values of their property or neighborhood. For more information on *voluntary stewardship*, contact PROJECT 2000 (see below).

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



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