

Closing the Drainpipe on Urban Streams The Vancouver Sun, August 25, 2000

Scott Simpson - Planners at the Greater Vancouver regional district now recognize that our current system of management stormwater is a bigger threat than pollution to salmon in small streams, As a result of this philosophical change, developers may soon be asked to alter time-tested methods of building new communities.

When Eleanor and William Ward moved on to their Coquitlam hobby farm in 1966, nobody gave much thought to the connection between the small waterways on their property and the health of salmon in the Strait of Canada.

As far as the Wards could tell, salmon did not use the seasonal brooks that threaded through their land. The water collected in small pools and disappeared into the ground so quickly that it wasn't even enough to sustain 10 cows they grazed on their farms. Out in the strait, salmon were thriving, but that was the 1960s -- the last great hurrah for sport and commercial fisheries in B.C.

The human population's appetite for land in the settled areas of the strait was on a collision course with the habitat the fish needed to reproduce.

Coho, the bread and butter fish of a lucrative sport fishery in the strait, were hardest hit. On the east and west flanks of the strait, hundreds of small salmon-bearing streams were shunted into popes, ditches and storm drains -- or buried and forgotten underneath industrial parks, suburbs and garbage dumps.

Much of this work was undertaken by municipal governments in the name of stormwater management -- control the drainage path of rain, and you protect human life and property by minimizing the risks of floods.

In the last five years, however, there is growing recognition that our system of stormwater management visits more long-term harm upon streams than anything short of obliteration.

Little ponds like those on the Wards' property may not contain fish, but they contribute to the natural drainage that sustains salmon in other waterways.

While streams and ponds in northeast Coquitlam still survive, allowing salmon to flourish, that could soon change.

In late July, Coquitlam city council approved a development plan that will put 25,000 people -- eight times the present population -- into the northeast in a futuristic, self-contained community.

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