

Friends of Black Mountain/sntsk'il'ntən Regional Park

December 2017 Newsletter



Tom Koneck, Eli Enns, Jordan Coble and Murray Kopp

Big Event! Big News!

By C. Millar

Big news: over 300 acres or 127 hectares of land was added to the existing park.

This announcement was made on September 21st on top of Black Mountain. A testament to the importance of this event and the broad collaboration of many groups, this event was attended by federal, provincial and local governments, Westbank First Nations representatives and environmentalists from far and wide, including members of our society, The Friends of Black Mountain/sntsk'il'nten Regional Park.

Why is this such a big deal? Land acquisition in the Okanagan is expensive, and protecting the rare and valued spaces in this unique valley, with its vanishing grasslands and Ponderosa pine forests, is important to preserve before all the natural ecosystems are bulldozed for housing or commercial development. Black Mountain is as vital to the history and culture of First Nations as it is for preserving the diversity of wildlife that inhabit the rare ecosystems found here.

Murray Kopp, the director of the Regional District of Central Okanagan made the big announcement and invited stakeholders to speak about this new land acquisition as the audience ahhed at the panorama views.

City councilor, Gail Given, spoke of the broad support various groups provided to make this gift to the people possible. The new land was bought for \$2.3 million, with \$2.1 million coming from the Regional Parks reserve fund, \$200,000 from the Government of Canada's Habitat Stewardship program and \$15,000 from the Central Okanagan Land Trust. She also gave credit to the foresight of the Regional Parks for having purchased land over the last 50 years since its inception. Recognizing, too, the contributions of people donating land through the Ecological Gifts Program and crediting the contributions of First Nations, Gail enthused about the beauty and value of the park and the passion people have for protecting valuable spaces.

Linda Bauer spoke on behalf of MP Stephen Fuhr, Tom Koneck spoke on behalf of Westbank First Nations and Murray Kopp spoke on behalf of the Regional District of the Central Okanagan (RDCO). The park itself is a collaboration between the RDCO and Westbank First Nations as both groups have an interest in the land.

Westbank First Nations member Jordan Coble, then gave an informative and impassioned speech about the significance of the land to the indigenous groups that have lived here for thousands of years. Speaking in the Okanagan language, he gave thanks for nature's bounty and for the coming together of the community to protect the land for future generations.

He spoke of the mountain's significance as a lookout point for the valley. Elk herd locations, human interlopers and even fire threats can be viewed far and wide. In bygone days, a steady stream of runners would convey information like this to those who were in the valley.

Jordan also spoke of the origins of the name sntsk'il'ntən, which translates as “the place where flint is found.” Legend has it that Coyote fought with Flint Man on Mount Boucherie and the intensity of their fight caused an explosion in which much flint was projected into the air, most of it landing on Black Mountain. Here, First Nations people collected flint and made it into spears and other tools for their use.

After the assembled guests returned to the base of the mountain, all were invited to a dinner at Sunset Ranch. Eli Enns, the keynote speaker at this event, brought perspective to the issues of land stewardship by saying, “we’re all indigenous to the planet earth.” Eli is the regional coordinator of the Indigenous Peoples and Community Conserved Territories and Areas Consortium (ICCA) which focuses on environmental stewardship, Aboriginal rights and land titles and economic stability for Indigenous communities.

He spoke of the relationship of cultural and linguistic diversity to biodiversity. Indigenous cultures around the world have much to add to conversations about biodiversity because indigenous people have lived harmoniously on the land for thousands of years. Eli spoke of “tribal parks” being established by First Nations in an attempt to create healthy watersheds and places where indigenous wisdom is shared with governments to safeguard places and the economic stability of indigenous communities.



Linda Bauer, Tom Koneck, Gail Given and Murray Kopp spoke about the huge land acquisition and the collaboration required to make it all possible.