

THIS WEEK ON THE
westside

WEDNESDAY

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Dock helping salmon to spawn

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WESTSIDE REPORTER

It's the first of its kind for the Okanagan and so far it seems to be working.

Kokanee salmon are spawning under and around a unique dock on Okanagan Lake at The Cottages at Secret Point.

The dock was designed to accommodate the fish and reduce the impact to their natural habitat.

Now, the waters around the dock are filled with bright red kokanee, each one completing a four-year life cycle.

"The fish are back and that's good," said Kyle Hawes, an aquatic biologist with Eco-scape Environmental Consultants. "They're not avoiding the site."

The area is four kilometers north of Okanagan Lake Resort on Westside Road, and is a traditional salmon spawning ground.

As a result, the proposal to build a dock at the 20-unit strata development raised more than a few questions from the regional district when developer Nicola Consiglio approached the Central Okanagan Regional District board with the application last spring.

At issue was the possible environmental impact that the 20-berth dock could have on kokanee salmon when they returned to the area to spawn in the fall.

The board asked its staff to work with Consiglio and to come up with a plan that reduced the environmental risk to the fish spawning area.

The developers responded with a first for Okanagan Lake, a partially removable dock with transparent plexiglass portions.

What makes the dock different is the way it is designed. The dock is built so that sections can be removed during the sensitive time of the salmon's reproduction, from Oct. 15 to April 2.

And so far the results seem to be working.

Hundreds of the land-locked salmon have been counted in the area.

"It's a good start," Hawes said.

Hawes hit the water, decked out in scuba gear, for two days last week to count

the fish and take DNA samples for a multiyear study with UBCO.

Hawes said the data collected at The Cottages site, and other shoreline spawning grounds, will be valuable in tracking the life cycle of the kokanee.

The salmon have been threatened since the 1970s, due to a number of factors, including the loss of habitat areas.

According to the environmental planning department of the regional district, more than 4,000 kokanee were observed spawning at the Cottages site last October.

As a result, the CORD board initially deferred a decision to support the developer's application to build a dock and required the applicant to go through the province's Integrated Land Management Bureau and get approval from the Ministry of Environment for the structure.

To meet the requirements, the developer designed the dock with removable sections and a plexiglass surface to allow for the largest amount of light possible to penetrate the water below where the fish spawn.

Hawes said that by allowing more light through the sides and through the top, the potential impact on fish habitat is reduced.

To fully determine the impact that the dock may have on the kokanee spawning grounds, a case study on the area is being conducted over a three-year monitoring period.

Regional district staff have been asked to report back to the board in one year to discuss the implementation and findings of the study on the impact of dock structures on fish spawning.

So far the results of reducing the human impact on kokanee salmon in Okanagan Lake seem to be working and the fish population is on the rise.

Kokanee fishing on Okanagan Lake, was shut down in 1995 to help the population recover, but the environment ministry announced a limited kokanee trial fishery this summer because kokanee numbers have reached the highest recorded level since 1988.

Although it is still early in the spawning season, the en-



CONTRIBUTED

KOKANEE SALMON are spawning under and around a unique dock on Okanagan Lake built at The Cottages at Secret Point development. The dock was designed to accommodate the fish and reduce the impact to their natural habitat.

vironment ministry estimates that more than 100,000 fish have returned to traditional spawning sites so far this fall, making this the first time in 14 years there have been returns

that high in two consecutive years.

It will still be another two weeks before the final numbers can be estimated, but ministry officials said ko-

kanee populations appear to be improving as stream habitat is protected and maintained as part of the Okanagan Lake Action Plan (OLAP).

The Okanagan Lake Ac-

tion Plan was created in 1996 to address the physical and biological factors that influence Okanagan Lake and the kokanee populations that inhabit it.



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