



DRIVEWAY

WELCOME TO the driver's seat as the Capital News unveils its new automotive section in today's edition, designed to inform and entertain with brightly written stories from a group of B.C. journalists.

B1

SPORTS

THE HEAT is on as the UBC Okanagan men's and women's volleyball teams begin the 2013-14 Canadian Interuniversity Sport season eager to hold their own against more established university teams.

A21

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FRIDAY

October 25, 2013

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C A P I T A L

NEWS

Weekend Edition

Why value wetlands?

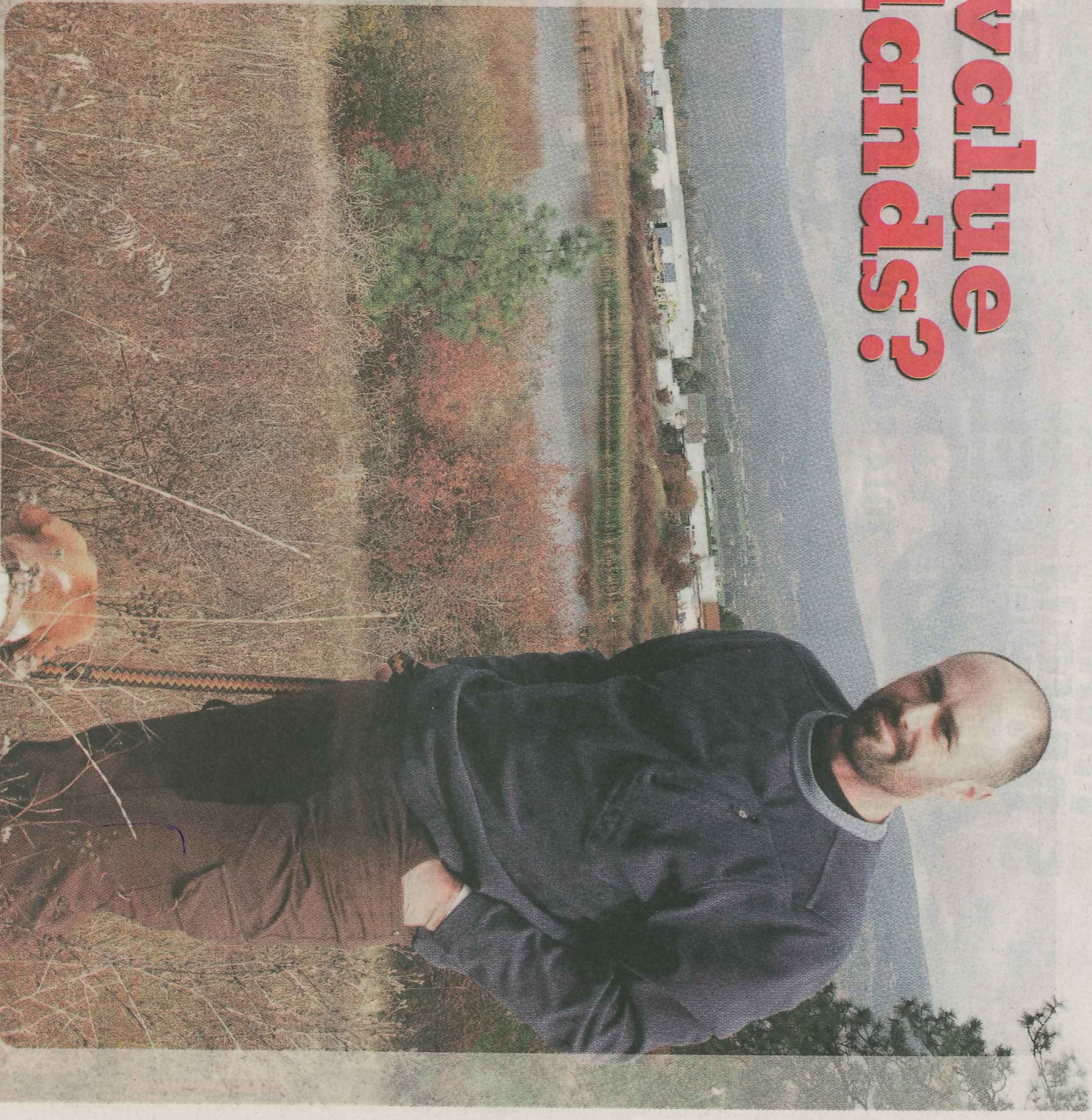
Wetlands are more than a haven for mosquitoes or a place to dump worn-out tires.

They have value in the biodiversity they offer, but they also provide economic returns such as in filtering runoff, alleviating flooding, recharging underground aquifers, controlling erosion and managing stormwater.

They're home to such species at risk as painted turtles, great basin spadefoot toad, tiger salamander and yellow-breasted chat.

You're being asked in the coming weeks to list wetlands you know and describe how you value them as part of the Okanagan Wetlands Strategy. *Capital News* reporter Judie Steeves researched the background on this project and how you can participate.

See story on page A3



JUDIE STEEVES/CAPITAL NEWS

AQUATIC BIOLOGIST Kyle Hawes, of Ecoscape Environmental Consultants of Kelowna, says the wetland behind him is a healthy one, with an uneven edge, some open water, varied aquatic and wetland plants, a variety of bird species using it and native upland vegetation.

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CLOSE-UP

Wetland mapping project a collaboration of regional district and B.C. Wildlife Federation

SURVIVING FROM A3
 And then there's recreation, particularly an activity known as mud-bogging, which involves intentionally destroying wetlands, just for the fun of it.
 Margaret Bakelaar, environmental/land use planner for the regional district, says they have Sensitive Habitat and In-

ventory Maps or SHIM, Wetland Inventory and Mapping or WIM and Foreshoreshore Inventory Mapping or FIM and worked with a student from UBCO to do base-

line maps of wetlands, but this project will compile information from around the valley.

The regional district had planned to hold public workshops on wetlands, but found the BCWF was planning to do the same thing, so the collaboration was born.

"We want to know where the priority wetlands are and where they're under pressure from development," she explained.

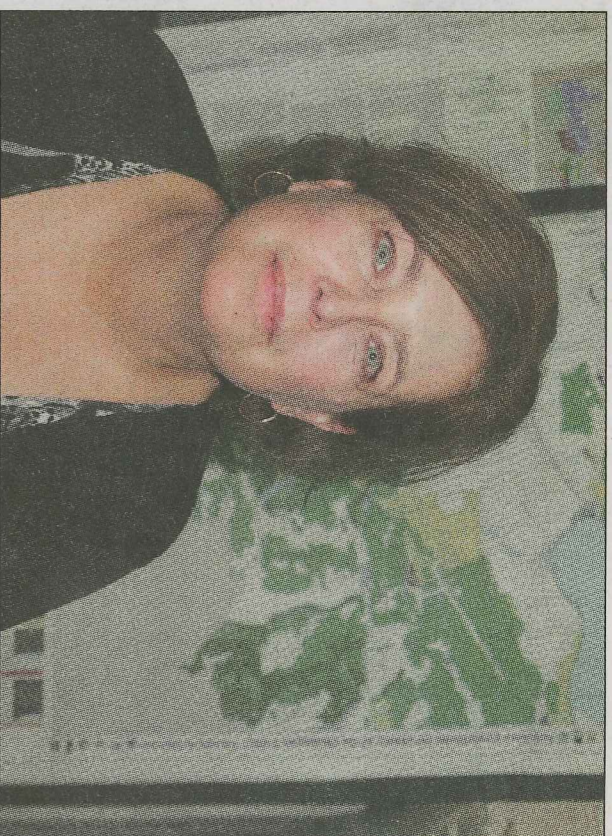
"The more information we have, the better. It provides valuable guidance for decision-making," she added.

Once wetlands have been identified there can be a focus on stewardship, she noted. There are lots of non-government agencies out there interested in restoration or protection of wetlands, she added. Protection is a priority over restoration, she noted.

There are other tools such as covenants through land trusts to protect sensitive natural features, she said.

The BCWF has had a wetlands program since 1996 and is the only group to hold onto the Wetlandkeepers program, which was adopted by the organization, explains Neil Fletcher, wetlands education program coordinator.

It has projects going on around the province to help communities restore wetland habitat, en-



JUDIE STEEVES/CAPITAL NEWS

MARGARET Bakelaar, environmental/land use planner with the Central Okanagan Regional District, says detailed mapping of sensitive areas has been done, but this project will take that the next step.

hance and conserve wetlands, and had planned to get involved in some work in the Okanagan when Fletcher discovered other projects were getting underway.

"We didn't want to re-invent the wheel, so we collaborated," he explained.

The aim is to engage more fish and game clubs to get involved in projects conserving wetlands.

"There's a huge base of volunteers there," he commented.

The BCWF Wetlands Education Program has the support of Wildlife Habitat Canada, the Real Estate Foundation of B.C. and Shell Canada.

Once Ecoscape completes the outreach portion of the project and collates the results of the data gathering process, there'll be a clearer idea of what now exists in the valley.

he noted, and from there, priorities can be set so volunteers interested in a field project know where they should begin.

PROJECT UNDERWAY

Ecoscape staff have been collecting data from a variety of sources so they can consolidate the information that's already been gathered by other agencies, and is organizing meetings with the public, First Nations, fish and game clubs and naturalists' organizations.

They'll be asking people to list wetlands they're aware of and describe the sort of wetland it is: whether there's open water; whether it's swamp, marsh, fen or bog and what types of vegetation there is.

Wildlife observations are also important, from animals to birds and insects.

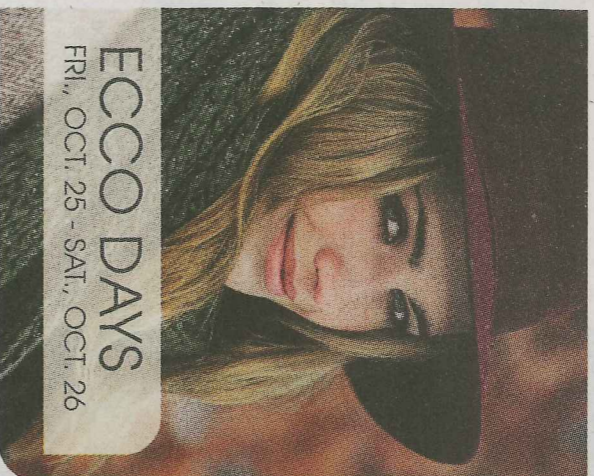
The potential risks to each wetland are also important, noted Hawes.

That information will be gathered together in a single document with assessments of what everyone has had to say, including their comments on the importance of wetlands to them and what qualities matter the most.

From that, a list of priority wetlands will emerge.

Taking action to protect, enhance or restore wetlands would be part of a next phase of the project.

To contribute your knowledge and valuation of wetlands, go to: surveysmonkey.com/sokanagan.wetlands_strategy_phase1
 A public meeting has tentatively been set for Thurs., Nov. 28 at a location yet to be determined. jsteeves@kelownacapnews.com



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