

Restoration project launched for McLachlan Lake, above Peachland



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The first wetland restoration is underway as a result of the Okanagan Wetland Strategy.

The last posts to fence off McLachlan Lake or Slough, as it is colloquially referred to by those who frequent the north end of the Garnet Valley above Peachland, were put in on Tuesday in hopes the area will heal in the coming year, just as Ritchie Lake, in Summerland did, after a similar project.

"They don't always come back, but what spurred us on in this case was that this is the first time the McLachlan Lake area has been holding water for many years," said Bryn White, program manager for the South Okanagan-Similkameen Conservation Program.

It's not known why the wetland is holding water again, but Okanagan Wetland Strategy project manager Jillian Tamblyn says several other wetlands which have run dry have recently started to hold water as well.

"The opportunity was there, and there had already been a lot of interest generated in doing the project, so we were able to get going quite quickly," she said.

There are six projects slated to be among the first wetland restorations to come out of the three-year strategy. This project cost less than \$10,000 and four workdays to execute.

The strategy is just entering the second phase, in which work will be done on the ground, after a year was spent inventorying wetlands up and down the valley.

The McLachlan Lake wetland was actually identified in provincial wetland data, but it has sustained significant damage from cattle and mud boggers in recent years, making it virtually impossible to recognize the original ecosystem.

By cordoning off the area with a fence, it's hoped the cattle and recreational vehicles stay out, allowing time for plants to regenerate and wildlife to return.

There are significant penalties under the Forest and Range Practices Act—up to \$3 million in restitution and three years in jail—but Tamblyn indicated most usually stay out of wetlands, if they're clearly fenced off.

"When they haven't been holding water for a very long time, then I think people don't actually recognize it as being a wetland," she said.

The wetland strategy is an Okanagan Basin Water Board project, in partnership with the BC Wildlife Federation and several local conservation groups.

Wetlands worldwide are threatened and, yet, considered vital ecosystems because they house incredible biodiversity.

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