Water protection benefits returning sockeye

GWEN BRIDGE

Special to The Morning Star

The return of sockeye to the Okanagan River system this year is something for everyone to celebrate. Not since the 1950s have we seen this type of return, and the future looks even better. However, it's also a reminder that we must all do our part to keep the waters clean and plentiful enough

for the fish. Before there were

and around water - as homes and docks built Okanagan people here, there were salmon up along the banks of chinook, coho, chum, the Okanagan, with the channeling of steelhead and sockeye. Today, they are Okanagan River in either completely gone response to flooding, or found in very low and the construction of numbers. The annual dams on the Columbia return of Okanagan River (the Okanagan adult sockeye has been River flows into the as low as 2,048 (record-Columbia). ed in 1998). This is All of these changes mostly the result of have made it hard for

human activities in the salmon to return have contributed to from their passage to the ocean.

However, since 2000, the Okanagan Nation Alliance fishdepartment eries (ONAFD) has been working hard to bring the salmon back. In the past two years, the ONAFD has recorded between 80,000 and 120,000 spawners (2010). Projects that

this success include: the reintroduction of sockeye into Skaha Lake, the alteration of the gates at McInytre Dam to make salmon passage possible, and the Okanagan River Restoration Initiative (returning parts of the Okanagan River to its natural state, making salmon migration easier).

While there is much to celebrate with this year's amazing sockeye run, it is important to remember that clean water is absolutely necessary for healthy fish, especially baby salmon. It is important we all make an effort to keep our water clean and healthy.

Here are a few tips to keep our water clean and plentiful for fish:

Conserve water in your home and outdoors. Low water levels in spawning channels create warmer water which stresses the fish.

Remember that water that enters storm drains flows directly into creeks, rivers and lakes, carrying with it chemicals from our yards, driveways, streets, and parking lots. This damages the health of these waters and the creatures that call them home.

■ If you need to wash your vehicle,



ONA FISHERIES DEPARTMENT

Staff with Okanagan Nation Alliance's fisheries department collect mature salmon from Okanagan **River for breeding.**

and treats it before it's

returned to the envi-

the car a quick wash

at home, use a trigger

nozzle to prevent water

from being wasted,

and wash the car over

grass. The lawn will act

as a natural filter that

removes many of the

chemicals before the

water makes its way

back to our lakes and

■ If you must give

ronment.

take it to a car wash streams. that recycles its water

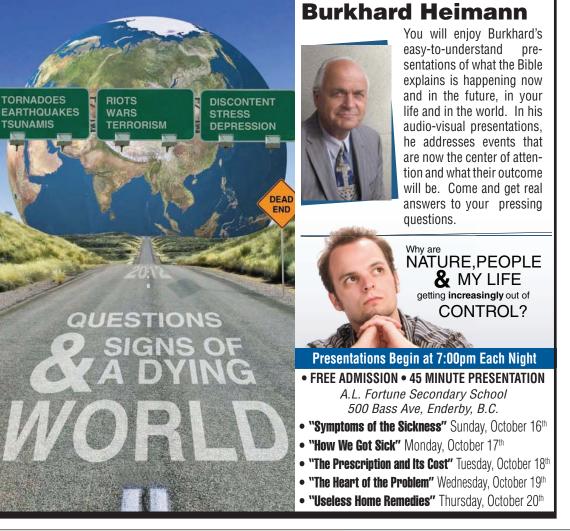
Medications and chemicals should not be flushed down the toilet or washed down the drain. Instead, take unused medications to any pharmacy, and take paints and other chemicals to appropriate disposal locations. Check out the waste reduction department of your regional district for more information on hazardous waste disposal in your area.

■ When enjoying the outdoors, stick to maintained trails. The same goes for your pets! Off-road activities near water sources can kick up sediments, creating murky water that harms aquatic life. Grease and oil from bikes, and pet waste can also contaminate the water.

Choose biodegradable products where possible.

For more Okanagan WaterWise, visit www.okwaterwise.ca. Okanagan WaterWise is an initiative of the Okanagan Basin Water Board.

Gwen Bridge is natural resources manager with the Okanagan nation Alliance and an **OBWB** director.



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