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Contact us:

PO Box 4144
Williams Lake, BC
V2G 2V2
Website:
www.friendsofchurn.ca

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Winter 2020

Upcoming Events

AGM

The 2020 AGM will be on **Friday, May 1st** at **Scout Island Nature Centre** in Williams Lake. Join us for a **potluck dinner** starting at 6:00 pm, followed by a brief AGM including a summary of our recent activities within the Protected Area. A short Power Point presentation will show some interesting images captured by our trail cameras. Please contact Peter Opie (peter&skye@telus.net) for more information or if you would like to become a director.

Activities Update

2019 Hikes in Churn Creek P.A.

Dry Lake - Coalpit Loop with Churn Canyon overlook.

On June 2nd a group of Friends of Churn Creek and W.L. Field Naturalists hiked from the Iron Gate Road to Dry Lake and through Coal Pit Pasture. It was a great day to see grassland flowers. We



Checking the plants above Dry Lake, visible in the background. Coalpit pasture is around the end of the ridge.

checked the plants and the birds in the Dry Lake wetland and also in the grasslands and sagebrush shrublands, noting how the condition of the grassland differed in different locations. Lunch was enjoyed at a breathtaking overlook of Churn Creek canyon. An American Kestrel, perched on a spire overlooking the canyon, provided lunchtime entertainment.

Activities Update continued

South side Clyde Mountain. On September 1, seven Friends of Churn Creek enjoyed a great hike from the Empire Valley Road near Stinky Lake up Clyde Mountain to the southern end of the ridge which overlooks the ranch headquarters and back along the top of the breaks above the Fraser River. Clyde Mt reaches relatively high elevations (1040m) and this walk provides spectacular views of Empire Valley and the Fraser River Canyon and includes some Upper Grassland plant species. Several Fairy Rings were present in the grasslands and we checked out an old fallen-down cabin on our way back to the trail head.



Hikes in 2020.

We are currently planning hikes to Goose Lakes and Kentworthy Creek areas. If there is an area within Churn Creek P.A. to which you would like to hike, please let us know and we may be able to organize a trip. When the areas and dates of hikes are confirmed, all members will be notified by email and through our face book page. Please stay tuned.

Membership and Donations

Society membership continues to be stable but low in number. Dedicated directors and other members continue to successfully complete a number of projects within the Protected Area each year but there is much more work that could be done. Consider encouraging a friend to join our organization as without a new and younger volunteer base, the Friends of Churn Creek Protected Area Society will be unable to continue undertaking valuable projects within the Protected Area. Both individual (\$20.00) and family (\$30.00) memberships are available. Membership forms are available on our website at: www.friendsofchurn.ca Remember that FCCPAS is a registered charitable organization and that receipts for income tax purposes can be provided for any donations other than membership.

Project Updates

Airport Flats Project Completed and Dry Farm Project Initiated. With continued funding from the Cariboo-Chilcotin Ecosystem Restoration Committee (CCERC) the FCCPAS was able to complete the restoration project at Airport Flats. Between 2017 and 2019 over 150 hectares of forest encroachment and ingrowth was treated above BC Lake by Stswecem'c Xgat'tem crews (SXDLP). After discussions with BC Parks in the fall we initiated another project on the north end of Dry Farm Pasture and treated 47 hectares. An extensive area of encroachment and ingrowth remains. Funding was provided by the CCERC and work was

completed by SXDLP. Volunteers laid out treatment units and established monitoring plots.

Sheep Flats Project Underway In June and July 2019, FCCPAS successfully treated over 40 hectares of encroachment on critical California Bighorn Sheep habitat at Sheep Flats with funding provided by Habitat Conservation Trust Fund (HCTF) and BC Parks. The primary objective of this project is to remove tree encroachment on the perimeter of Sheep Flats which was providing stalking cover for predators along sheep migration routes. Due to the remoteness of the site, SXDLP crews and volunteers were shuttled into the area by helicopter. As a result of this work this important sheep habitat is being incorporated into BC Parks prescribed burning plans.



Tree encroachment of Sheep habitat on Sheep Flats.

Dry Farm Tree Thinning Project Monitored. A successful funding request to BC Parks Park Enhancement Fund allowed us to contract Iverson and Mackenzie Biological Consultants to monitor fixed plots to document vegetation changes following 2003 tree thinning. Plots were initially established just prior to tree removal and prescribed burning. Treatments were designed to promote a grassland - open forest ecosystem to promote grassland species and wildfire resistance. The plots were last monitored in 2008. Results from 2019 suggest that although the abundance of some plant species have changed, the ground cover of most grassland species was similar to that in 2008.



Trail Cameras Installed. A small number of trail cameras were placed at selected locations within the Protected Area to determine how valuable the cameras might be for monitoring wildlife use of an area. Although we are still evaluating how best to install and program the cameras, a number of species have been recorded.

Wetland Inventory and Assessment. Wetlands are critical ecosystems for wildlife, plant species diversity, and livestock watering and are very susceptible to changing climate. FCCPAS initiated a project in 2019 to document wetlands within the Protected Area. A preliminary map of all wetlands, based on aerial imagery interpretations, has been prepared and will be ground-truthed in 2020. If adequate funding can be obtained, we will also select 20 - 30 wetlands for detailed and long-term assessments of sustainability in the face of changing climate and livestock use.



Feature Article

Holmes Family Reaches Major Milestone.

John and Joyce Holmes consider themselves lucky. They have had the rare opportunity to live, work and raise a family in one of the most stunning landscapes in Canada and on one of the oldest ranches in British Columbia, the Empire Valley Ranch. They started out together in 1998, shortly after the Ranch became part of Churn Creek Protected Area. They had less than 300 head of cattle then but a whole lot of energy and enthusiasm. There are now four children in the family, all of whom show the maturity of home-schooling and dedicated work. Having secured a long-term tenure on the ranch in 2000, the Holmes have now operated the ranch for 20 years with a Range Branch permit for 500 cows.

Their cattle are generally fed from January to March, spend the spring on pastures within the Protected Area, and summer in the mountains west of the Protected Area. In late fall, the cattle make their way back through Protected Area pastures and gather at the home ranch. John and Joyce have incorporated rotational grazing into their operation using the grasslands south of the ranch headquarters in odd numbered years and those to the north in even numbered years. Depending on water availability and the size and location of a pasture, each area may be used by cattle for only a few days to a few weeks every other year. They are confident that the condition of the grassland within Churn Creek Protected Area has improved over the 20+ years that they have managed the ranch.



The Holmes family - Hattie, Joyce, Ellen, Madison, Sam, and John



The herd, which numbers less than half of historic levels, is usually managed as a single unit. With the entire family helping out, they are able to take on much of the riding to manage cattle distribution. Through the years the Holmes have been open to new ideas, experimenting with using various pastures at different times of the year, installing electric fencing and using a portable water tank and trough in areas with little or no water to improve cattle distribution. Recent clear-cut

logging west of the Protected Area has increased forage production in that area and the Holmes are pursuing opportunities to move cattle out of the pastures within the Protected Area at an earlier date to speed recovery of the Upper Grasslands which were heavily impacted prior to establishment of the Protected Area.

After making Empire Valley Ranch their home for over twenty years, John and Joyce believe the ranch is increasingly contributing to the conservation values of Churn Creek Protected Area. The ranch and its wide open spaces is a home they cherish.