



BC Wildlife Park breaks ground on new vision

by Karyn Sutherland, Extensionist

On a sunny day in Kamloops this past April, the first shovel of dirt launched the construction of the British Columbia (BC) Wildlife Park's new Discovery Centre. Visitors at the groundbreaking also heard the Park's latest good news—a \$330,000 pledge from the province's Olympic-Paralympic Live Sites Program. This success followed news of

\$3 million "challenge" grant from the City of Kamloops and \$2 million award from the Canada/British Columbia Infrastructure Program. This money will help the Park meet its goal of raising \$10 million for a "New Vision" development plan.

So what has changed

at the BC Wildlife Park to warrant all this attention? Many things, including a formal 10-year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the B.C. Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection (MWLAP), now the Ministry of Environment. Signed in November of 2004, the MOU describes common goals between these two agencies relating to wildlife rehabilitation, restoration and re-introduction of natural species, stewardship of natural resources and habitats, and natural history interpretation.

This MOU dovetails with the new, broader vision of the Kamloops Wildlife Park Society that foresees "[a] future where people of all ages embrace conservation of healthy wild ecosystems, preservation of species diversity and sustainable living."

This vision focuses on providing visitors with formal and non-formal educational opportunities that lead to achieving objectives in three main areas:

- 1) An increased understanding of, and appreciation for, healthy, wild, and sustainable British Columbia ecosystems.

This learning objective will be pursued through the visitors' interaction with exhibits housed in the new 11,000-square-foot Discovery Centre, scheduled to be completed in April 2006. This centre will include:

- Eco-Inquiry Gallery: Six eco-zones representative of various terrestrial British Columbia ecosystems (grasslands, temperate rainforest,

boreal forest, interior plateau, mountains, and riparian areas), which will provide a "whole body" experience and focus on issues such as the role of fire in natural ecosystems, the management of mountain pine beetle, and the diversity and vulnerability of the grasslands.


- Theatre: This space "will enable visitors to witness two million years in the formation of British Columbia in 14 minutes." It will increase their understanding of the plate tectonic activity and the glaciers that shaped the land, and the forest fires and other forces that are part of our current environment.
- 2) An increased understanding of and improved practices around "sustainable living."

The Park aims to lead by example. The Park will employ techniques and procedures for operating in a sustainable manner. They will educate visitors about what they are doing and what others can do to live sustainably. In an effort to improve sustainable living, the Park staff is working in partnership with the City of Kamloops to deliver the Water Smart Program to local schools.

- 3) An increased understanding of the need to preserve species diversity.

This learning objective is pursued through the presence of representative British Columbia fauna at the Park, through the provision of wildlife rehabilitation services, and through a breeding program for the burrowing owl.

- Rehabilitation: In 2004 the BC Wildlife Park rehabilitated 338 animals with the help of the Animal Health section of Thompson Rivers University Rehabilitation Services. Park staff also extends information to the public about what to do with injured or potentially orphaned animals.
- Re-introduction: The Wildlife Park is home to the most successful Burrowing Owl breeding program in North America and has released 377 individuals since its inception in 1991.

There is a lot of excitement ahead for the BC Wildlife Park, but there are also challenges. Staying true to their vision to go beyond "promotion" and building awareness to actually increasing knowledge and affecting behaviours will be one of the most daunting. But with an award-winning facility and staff, they are well on their way! 



Kamloops Daily News photo

Groundbreaking for the new Discovery Centre at the BC Wildlife Park.