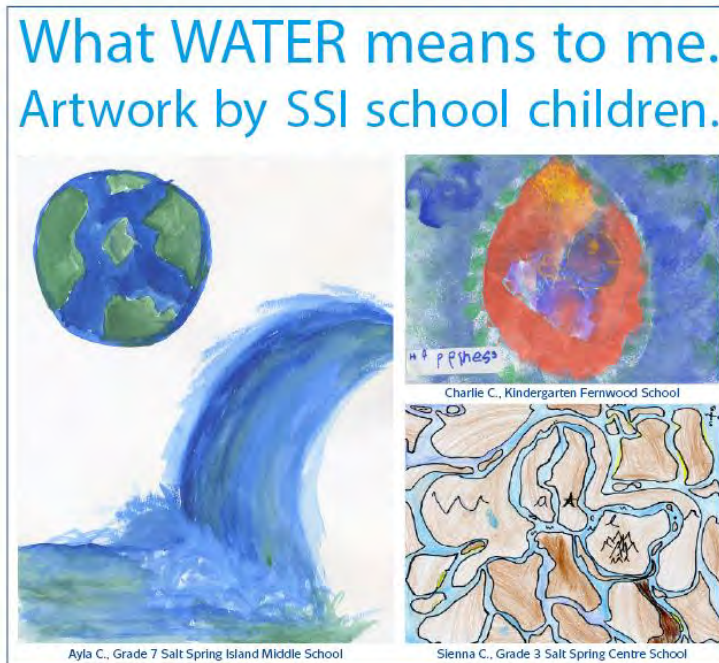


WATER FAIR and RAINWATER HARVESTING TOUR

FINAL REPORT April 2015



A collaboration between:



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Financial contributions and support for the event from the SSI Watershed Protection Authority (Islands Trust), the SSI Water Preservation Society from the Province of British Columbia are acknowledged.



This report is posted on the Water Council website and the SSI Watershed Protection Authority website.

1. Introduction

The Rainwater Harvesting Tour & Water Fair was held on the weekend of March 21 - 22, 2015, coinciding with International World Water Day (March 22, 2015).

The purpose of the weekend events was to raise public awareness of the importance of preserving a reliable water supply, both for drinking and irrigation, and to foster a renewed water ethic of water conservation on the island. Since conserving and protecting our water may seem to be a difficult or cumbersome task to some, one of the goals was to demonstrate the many things, both small and large, that people can do to become part of the solution.

2. Rainwater Harvesting Tour

All of the freshwater on Salt Spring Island relies on rainfall to recharge the lakes, streams and groundwater. Community concerns over limits to supply, water quality and the likely effects of climate change have prompted more attention on rainwater as a supplementary source for residents and businesses on the island for both irrigation and potable use.



Rainwater harvesting is the practice of collecting rainwater for beneficial use. Usually this refers to collection of rainwater from a rooftop and storing it in tanks and cisterns for later use in or near the point of collection. The use of rain barrels is a simple form of rainwater harvesting, although larger storage systems are required to serve most purposes.

In the Gulf Islands, where reliable surface water or groundwater supplies are not always available, several homes and businesses rely on rainwater harvesting as their only source of water. Rainwater harvesting is emerging as one of many sustainable development strategies to reduce the ecological impacts of development.

On Saturday, March 21, people were invited to take the “Every Drop Counts Rainwater Harvesting Tour” of eight residential properties on Salt Spring Island. This was an opportunity for an inside look at how neighbours are harvesting water! A map of the locations was available for downloading. Guided tours of each system were given by the home owner. See Appendix A.

The tour offered a wide selection of rainwater harvesting options, from a modest yet effective 200-litre garden system to a monumental 50,000-litre installation. The table of information provided to attendees on the back of the map was found to be useful, particularly since nobody tried to do the full tour.

Tour hosts would like to repeat the tour again next year but noted that attendance is limited for locations distant from Ganges. They also tried to adhere to half hour limit for tours but often

there were many waiting for the next tour. Participants were very interested in implementing some of the systems to deal with increasing water rates, especially by North SS Waterworks and Fernwood/Highlands Water Districts. They appreciated how simple it can be to install a domestic system without the need for costly rainwater collection equipment.

3. Water Fair Program

3.1 Booths

Information, demonstrations and products were exhibited at a number of booths by the following agencies, organisations and businesses:

- SSI Water Council
- SSI Water Protection Authority
- SSI Water Preservations Society
- Cusheon Lake Stewardship
- SSI Water Education & Learners
- SSI Conservancy
- Georgia Strait Alliance
- Transition Salt Spring
- Ganges Harbour Restoration
- North Salt Spring Waterworks District
- Water Preservation Society
- SSI Water Council
- SSI Watershed Protection Authority
- Slegg Lumber
- Windsor Plywood
- Saltspring Water Co.
- Seven Ravens Permaculture Institute
- Gulf Islands Rainwater Harvesting & Irrigation
- Coast Alive Recreational and Ecological Services



3.2 Workshops

The workshop schedule and presentation topics are summarized in Appendix B. Invitations to deliver a Water Fair workshop went out in mid-January to all potential presenters suggested by the committee. Each of the invitees agreed to give a workshop. Between mid-January and mid-March, via bimonthly emails, topics were clarified and a schedule was arranged. Three of five presenters took advantage of the offer to set up a booth at no cost.

On the day of the Fair, all presenters brought a flash drive and arrived early enough to load their presentations onto one computer. The PA system (mic, speakers) loaned to us by the Film Festival was essential given the substantial noise level in the workshop room. Floor-to-ceiling black curtains at the back effectively created a 'workshop room' in the open space. We opted to project on the wall using a projector loaned to use by Water preservation Society (WPS). Each talk was 15-20 minutes with 10 minutes for questions and this pace felt right.

Presenters were well prepared. Chris Drake’s keynote talk was well received, and the room filled during his talk. Following Chris’s talk, Matt Nowell gave a detailed overview of irrigation systems. After a 1-hour lunch break, Linda Gilkeson’s talk about low-water strategies for the veggie garden was well-attended. Tim Pringle followed with an overview of water management projects underway by the Partnership for Water Sustainability in BC. The last presentation, Michael Nickel’s talk on his Seven Raven’s permaculture education program in Africa, was very well attended and about two dozen participants joined Michael’s field demonstration of swale-building and tree-planting.



3.3 Entertainment

Nomi Lyonns was the Emcee for the Water Fair. She welcomed the crowd, introduced other mainstage entertainers and announced the workshops. Nomi sang two songs about water and caring for our fragile ecosystem.

Naomi Jason and Lesley Smith were dancers who performed with Suzanne Gay and Ananda Sinclair (musicians). They performed an original piece written by Ms. Gay about the last river on earth that was both uplifting and haunting. It was largely instrumental, and there was little vocalized.

Kim Tebbutt introduced the dance, and invoked a water blessing with the help of three children who were water fairies, and from the dancers also.

3.4 KidZone Lineup:

In order to engage children, a number of water related activities were set up in the KidZone including:

- Poetry wall on which children could write their own water poetry.
- Colouring table with water-themed activity book pages, designed by local Children’s Book Illustrator, Aidan Cassie for the “Salt Spring Island Activity Book” (Little Red Schoolhouse publication), reprinted with permission.
- Elizabeth Buchanan (a local author, storyteller, and educator), told and acted out a water-themed story inside of the salmon for children and adults.
- Dancing in costume and singalong with the Ta Daa Lady & Stumpy the Puppet.
- Interactive storytelling inside a 25-foot inflated nylon salmon.
- Face painting station.



3.5 Food

Lunch, coffee, water, and local bites were provided throughout the day by Hips and Haws, Ethos, Wendy’s Coffee stand (Café Ole) and Salt Spring Water Co.

4. Participation

More than 200 participants took part in the Rainwater Harvesting Tour and more than 250 people attended the Water Fair. The workshops were popular with up to 40 people at each session.

Positive comments were received from many participants and suggestions received for next year's Fair. Appendix C summarises the responses.



5. Promotion and Media coverage of the event

The weekend event was advertised on posters, websites (including Facebook and the Salt Spring Hop), notices and articles in the Gulf Islands Driftwood and the Salt Spring Exchange. The local Country Grocer store kindly stuffed our flyers into grocery bags the week before the event. See Appendix D. Notices were also sent to email lists, including all of the school newsletters.

6. Recommendations and lessons learned for future events

6.1 Water Tour

There was positive feedback regarding the map and descriptive information on the reverse, which allowed attendees to choose the most relevant homes to visit. The majority of attendees did not go to all locations, so it was great to have eight to choose from. The format seemed to work well and we recommend a repeat next year.

6.2 Booths

The content of booths was appropriate; we could have more booths next year. It was useful to offer booths to the workshop presenters. The floor plan worked for the booths and booth staff seemed quite pleased. Setting up the day before was very helpful to ensure that everything was ready for the fair.

Other retailers are interested for next year, including plant retailers promoting xeriscaping, drought tolerant plants and how to water plants. There could have been more watersheds maps.



Meet with the Chamber of Commerce and the SSI Economic Development Commission early next year to promote the event and build energy sooner.

The hands-on swale-building demo was a great addition. Next year we could have short Do It Yourself demos by the retailers and service providers: more tradeshow style; more outdoor experiences in workshops; more reaching beyond the “choir” (i.e. those who already have knowledge and skills in water conservation).

6.3 Volunteers

Besides the hardworking and tireless organizing committee, volunteers were very helpful distributing posters in advance, helping with set up and take down, and during the Water Fair itself. Greeters were beneficial to help visitors get started. We could have used more people for set up. It was suggested that the committee consider hiring some young people to help with set up and take down.

6.4 Entertainment

Nomi was an effective emcee. Next year we need to script/schedule the emcee a little bit more effectively, with better timing (Angela Brown was called up 10 minutes early which threw her off). We need to have every workshop announced twice. Nomi’s two songs appealed more to the adults in the crowd.

The space in front of the stage was not conducive to the dancing by Naomi Jason and Lesley Smith. The energy was a bit different and it added for some, but perhaps not for all attendees.

Angela Brown (Ta Daa Lady) offered great content. The giant salmon was a draw for children and adults alike. For the parades, the volume was not workable and she used the main space, which encroached on people at the booths. To improve, if Angela is invited back, it would be most appropriate to have the parade occur out-of-doors without the loudspeaker. Angela also performed at the main stage for the full crowd; she was a success with the young crowd and some of the parents. The location of the show on the floor in front of the main stage detracted from the booths which were immediately adjacent, and volume-wise it detracted from the entire central booth area. Next year, performances should be separated in terms of acoustics from the tradeshow booths.

Elizabeth Buchanan (a local author, storyteller, and educator) was a great success.

The energy generated by Kim Tebbutt’s water blessing was different compared with the emcee and other performances, and might have been off-putting for some attendees, but was welcomed by some. It was very reverent and included interaction with the audience by touching water drops to foreheads in the crowd. This element could be more welcomed if the setting were not in the middle of the tradeshow for next Water Fair.

6.5 Food

The quality was good and the price points reasonable. Food vendors expressed feeling good about it (sales and otherwise), but there was not enough business for a stand-alone coffee vendor. The sit down area for food did not work as planned, nor did the compost and recycling bins. Next year, ask the food vendors to offer beverages and food that people can easily walk around with.

6.6 Workshops

There was some difficulty getting the audio visual equipment working properly. Next year there should be a volunteer A/V tech lined up.

A lot of interest was expressed and congratulations on the diversity and the setup. Workshops had great turnouts. The only real negative was the noise level in the building; next year the workshops should be in a separate room.

Workshop topic suggestions for next year: septic field maintenance; government, not-for-profit, NGO programs implementing water conservation programs; hydrology of SML.

6.7 Facility

Having two days for setup went well. The biggest issue was the acoustics in the building. Next year consider renting the upstairs of the Farmers Institute and look into other facilities such as the high school or the Community Gospel Chapel.

7. Conclusions

For a first Water Fair & Tour weekend, it was a success all round. Attendance was good and the feedback was generally very positive. The only concerns expressed were the noise level near the workshop presentations and the intrusion of a dress-up parade in the booth area.

It achieved the objective of raising awareness of water issues, demonstrating water conservation and rainwater harvesting equipment and promoting water efficient irrigation methods. In particular, the range of booths was good and the expert workshops proved very popular.

The message was delivered in a family friendly atmosphere with music, storytelling, poetry and dancing for both adults and children.

With lessons learned from this event, a second annual Water Fair & Tour should certainly be held next year.

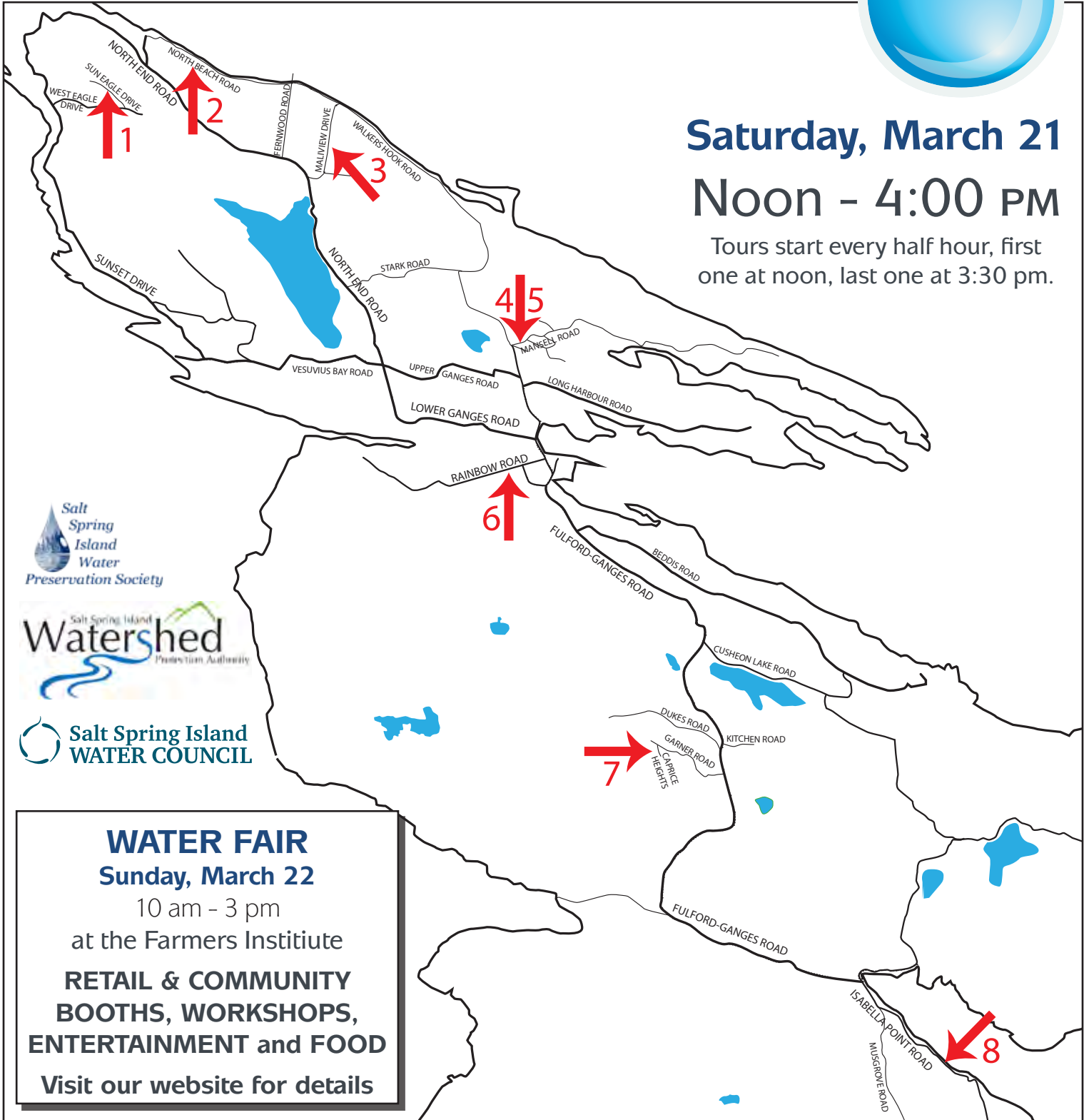
Every Drop Counts Rainwater Harvesting Tour

Tour rainwater collection systems from the north end to the south end, small to large, simple to high tech. See page 2 for details on each stop.



Saturday, March 21
Noon - 4:00 PM

Tours start every half hour, first one at noon, last one at 3:30 pm.



This is a self guided tour on March 21, 2015

You may visit any or all of these homes in any order. Homeowners have agreed to offer guided tours of their rainwater harvesting systems on the hour and half hour starting at noon. If you arrive between tour times feel free to join a tour in progress or wait for the next tour.

Please note: This is an outdoor tour only. Please respect your hosts' property.

	Your Hosts:	How long:	Capacity:	Used for:	Other water:	Roof type:
1	Bruce 248 Suneagle Drive	5 years	50,000 litres / 13,000 gal.	All household uses including drinking	Well water used for garden	Steel
	The house is at the end of a shared driveway off a cul-du-sac on Sun Eagle. Additional parking at 246 Sun Eagle or on the cul-du-sac.					
2	John 1374 North Beach Rd	17 years	32,000 litres / 7,000 gal.	Irrigation and all indoor uses except drinking	Bottled water	Asphalt shingles
	Parking on North Beach is not recommended. There is room for three or four cars in the driveway.					
3	Sharon & Gary 308 Maliview Drive	10 years	2,000 litres / 445 gal.	Irrigation and chores	Highland Fernwood Water District	Metal
	Additional parking across the street at 309 Maliview Drive.					
4	Chris 121 Mansell Road	12 years	68,200 litres / 15,000 gal.	Irrigation	Cedar Lane Water District	Metal
	First house on the right, off Robinson Road. Park on street. Bambi gate—pull cord downward on left side. The property is sloped, which may be difficult for unsteady walkers.					
5	Jane 122 Mansell Road	20 years	227,300 litres / 50,000 gal.	Irrigation & commercial greenhouse	Cedar Lane Water District	Double poly & asphalt shingles
	Limited parking, park on the road.					
6	Chorus Frog Farm 255 Rainbow Road	1 year	200 litres / 50 gal.	Farm stand watering	North SS Water District	Corrugated plastic
	Across from the pool.					
7	Maggie 132 Caprice Heights	2 years	6,500 litres / 1,718 gal.	Irrigation	Well water	Metal & glass
	Park at end of Caprice Heights and walk (it's uphill), or turn right off of Caprice Heights onto shared driveway; I'm the second driveway on the left; the driveway is steep; there is space for 7 vehicles.					
8	Stefan & Tracy Ruby Alton Nature Reserve 661 Isabella Point Rd	10 years	27,200 litres / 6,000 gal.	All household uses	No well, no piped water	Asphalt shingles

APPENDIX B: Workshop Schedule and Presentation Topics

- 10:30 am: **Sweet water: Promoting ecosystem vitality and resilience in a changing world.** Introduction to the marvelous world of the water molecule and the role of water in world climate; brief explanation of expected shifts in water availability in the Southern Gulf Islands as a result of climate change; plus, controlling invasive plants, promoting native plants, and planting to reduce wildfire risk. Presented by: Chris Drake.
- 11:00 am: **Designing Irrigation Systems for SSI Homes & Gardens.** Design for efficiency; water budget and scheduling; water saving Solutions/Retro-fitting inefficient systems. Presented by: Matt Nowell.
- 11:30 am: **How to Grow More Food Using Less Water.** Mulching; just the right amount of water in the veggie garden and orchard; optimizing irrigation; food plants on a low water budget. Presented by: Linda Gilkeson.
- 1:00 pm: **Partnership for Water Sustainability in BC: What We Do.** The Partnership aims to achieve water sustainability in BC through recognition of individual water values, water choices, and water behaviours, and by inspiring and supporting groups to work towards a future without water shortages. Presented by: Tim Pringle.
- 1:30 pm: **The Art of Swale Construction & Practice of Permaculture.** Video overview of project spreading the practice of permaculture in East Africa; outdoor demonstration of swale construction- a permaculture technique for increasing garden and farm productivity. Presented by: Michael Nickels.

APPENDIX C: Survey of Participants

This survey was available for participants to complete upon exiting the Fair.

Water Fair Comment Form				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
The Fair met my expectations for a range of learning experiences	5	11	1	
The Workshop content and presenters were suited to this event:	6	9	1	
The retail and educational booths were suited to this event. I learned something:	8	9		
The performances and kids area met my expectations:	7	4	2	
Comments and suggestions for next year's Fair:				
More of the same please				
Too noisy--too bad. Entertainment should be in another room away from displays				
Place is too loud!				
Noise factor a bit of an issue but otherwise, great job!				
Separation of kid and presentation area - noise factor				
More hands-on DIY rainwater systems. Loved the tour!				
Lectures are interesting, but I could not hear very well because I was distracted by the overall noise in the building				
Run it again!				
Make all paperwork and brochures available online				
Great food!				

APPENDIX D: Media notices and articles



Salt Spring Island

WATER FAIR

From simple to sophisticated means of conserving and protecting our island's limited supply of freshwater.

Come celebrate all things water!

Sunday, March 22
 Farmers Institute
 10:00 AM – 3:00 PM
FREE

Trade Show Booths

Get answers to your questions!

- Information
- Demonstrations
- Retail products
- DIY ideas
- Educational info
- Professional consultants

Workshops:

10:30 AM: Sweet water: Promoting ecosystem vitality and resilience in a changing world

11:00 AM: Designing Irrigation Systems for SSI Homes & Gardens

11:30 AM: How to Grow More Food Using Less Water

1:00 PM: Partnership for Water Sustainability in BC: What We Do

1:30 PM: The Art of Swale Construction & Practice of Permaculture

Food Vendors

Lunch, coffee, water, and local bites by Hips and Haws, Ethos and Salt Spring Water Co.

Entertainment:

Something for the whole family:

- Ta Daa Lady (Angela Brown)
- EcoDiva (Nomi Lyonns)
- Water Blessing by Kim Tebbutt
- Storytelling with Elizabeth Buchanan
- Water Dance by Naomi & friends



Artwork by Ayla C., Grade 7
Salt Spring Island Middle School

Saturday, March 21 Noon - 4 PM

Every Drop Counts Rainwater Harvesting Tour:

Tour rainwater collection systems from the south end to the north end, small to large, simple to hi-tech. Pick up or download a map, see how islanders are creating some or all of their own water supply.

www.ssiwatercouncil.com
|
www.ssiwatersheds.ca







We acknowledge the financial assistance of the Province of British Columbia



people&community

D.W. Salty is looking for material for his column, Streets of Salt Spring Island

WATER FAIR 2015

Every Drop Counts refreshes water ethic

Free Water Fair weekend event offers inspiration for conservation

BY SEAN MCINTYRE
DRIFTWOOD STAFF

Sharon Bywater bought her first rain barrel about a decade ago. Today, the sprawling rainwater catchment system at her Maliview home can supply a productive quarter-acre garden for a long and dry Gulf Islands summer.

"My water consumption does not change from winter to summer," Bywater said. "There's no noticeable difference."

Bywater grew her system on a budget, diligently scrounging materials and expanding when opportunity and funds allowed. With nearly a dozen containers concealed around her yard and a metal roof on her home, Bywater already looks forward to another summer of "guilt-free gardening."

Bywater became infatuated with water conservation while witnessing the preciousness of the island's freshwater resources as a member and chair of the Highlands and Fernwood Water Service Area. With limited supply, increasing expenses and the prospect of drier summers, Bywater believes it's time to foster a renewed water ethic.

"We really don't want to hit the water wall on the island," she said. "We have to get proactive, and we have to work together to do this."

"We've hit a point on Salt Spring where we've maxed out our water supply."

To that end, Bywater has helped organize this year's inaugural tour of Salt Spring's rainwater catchment systems. The Every Drop Counts Rainwater Harvesting Tour offers participants an inside look at a range of harvesting options.



PHOTO BY SEAN MCINTYRE

Sharon Bywater, organizer of the March 21 Every Drop Counts Rainwater Harvesting Tour, with one of her water-collecting rain barrels outside of her Maliview home.

There's everything from Bruce and Wendy Eggertson's behemoth 50,000-litre (13,000-gallon) system to Chorus Frog Farm's modest yet effective 200-litre (50-gallon) installation on Rainbow Road.

In all, eight property owners will open their yards to the public, provide tours of their water-catchment systems and answer any questions that arise.

Tours at each site will begin every half hour between noon and 4 p.m. on Saturday, March 21. Admission is free.

"We want people to come out and have a look," Bywater said. "We want people to see what's relevant to them and to inspire people to do what they can."

"It's not about who's the greenest, it's

about participating and creating your own water supply."

The March 21 tour is part of a weekend of water conservation-themed activities designed to shake people out of their water-wasting ways. On Sunday, the Water Fair festivities move into the Farmers' Institute, where organizers have planned a cabaret-tinged trade show to celebrate World Water Day in a fun, family friendly setting. More details about the event will be published in next week's Driftwood.

A map and more information about the Every Drop Counts Rainwater Harvesting Tour is available at www.ssiwatercouncil.com or by calling Sharon Bywater at 250-537-5000.

WATER FAIR

Kids art part of Water Fair

March event features something for everyone

BY SEAN MCINTYRE
DRIFTWOOD STAFF

Amidst display booths, musical acts, rain-harvesting ideas and great food, a unique art project will give participants at next month's Water Fair the chance to learn what water means to some of the island's youngest residents.

Students from kindergarten through Grade 6 have been busily exploring this year's theme with markers, crayons, pencils and fabric for the inaugural children's art poster design contest.

Shannon Cowan, who launched the project in January, picked up 90 entries from students at Fernwood elementary, Salt Spring Centre School, Fulford elementary and the middle school earlier this month.

As coordinator of the Salt Spring Island Watershed Pro-

tection Authority, Cowan is determined to spread awareness about water conservation among people of all ages.

"Many of our island's children and youth are actively involved in observing, measuring and experiencing the importance of water awareness, and what constitutes healthy watershed living skills, through classroom and outdoor learning projects," Cowan said in an email. "We thought the most engaging way to draw on their learning was to invite them to express that awareness through art."

Art contest entries will be displayed at the event. Judges will select winners in three categories: kindergarten to Grade 2, grades 3 to 5 and grades 6 to 8.

The art contest is one of many kids-zone events, along with dancing, puppetry, a storytelling salmon, poetry wall, face painting and a water creatures dress-up kids parade.

Kids-zone activities are part of a weekend of water-

themed festivities held in conjunction with World Water Day. A tour of island rainwater catchment systems takes place between noon and 4 p.m. on March 21. Other Water Fair events are scheduled for the Farmers' Institute between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. on Sunday, March 22.

The Water Fair is free and organized by SSIWPA in cooperation with the Salt Spring Island Water Council, Water Preservation Society, the Fernwood and Highland Water Service Area's board of directors, Salt Spring Island Conservancy and the Cusheon Lake Stewardship Committee.

Anyone who wants to volunteer for the event can contact Maxine Leichter at ssiwps@gmail.com or 250-537-1577.

Look for more Driftwood articles about Water Fair events and initiatives in the weeks to come. More information is available at www.ssiwatercouncil.com or www.ssiwatersheds.ca.

WATER FAIR

Cabaret-style trade show toasts water

Organizers promise something for everyone

BY SEAN MCINTYRE
DRIFTWOOD STAFF

Dry weather and below-normal reservoir levels in July 2014 pushed the North Salt Spring Waterworks District to implement voluntary water restrictions.

Summer had only just begun, but the season was already well on its way to ranking among the 10 driest years in nearly four decades. The water district's request for voluntary restrictions stayed in effect for three months.

Faced with the prospect of another dry year, NSSWD staff and board members are getting ready to introduce a water restriction bylaw to regulate when and how much water the district's 5,000 clients can use when the water begins to dry up.

Heightened concern over water supply encouraged Sharon Bywater, a member of the Highland and Fernwood Water Service Area, to suggest holding an event to promote water conservation.

"She presented this as a cool idea and everybody liked it, but we didn't do much about it," said Suzan Chamney, Salt Spring Island Water Council coordinator.

Fast forward nearly six months and the group is preparing to host one of the biggest celebrations of water that the island has ever seen.

"Everybody took their piece of the pie and went off in different directions to bring this together," Chamney said. "We sort of want it to be like the Fall Fair of water."

Besides a Saturday, March 21 tour of select Salt Spring rainwater harvesting installations, Water Fair weekend features a day-long, entertainment-infused trade show on Sunday, March 22 at the Farmers' Institute.

Doors open at 10 a.m. with work-

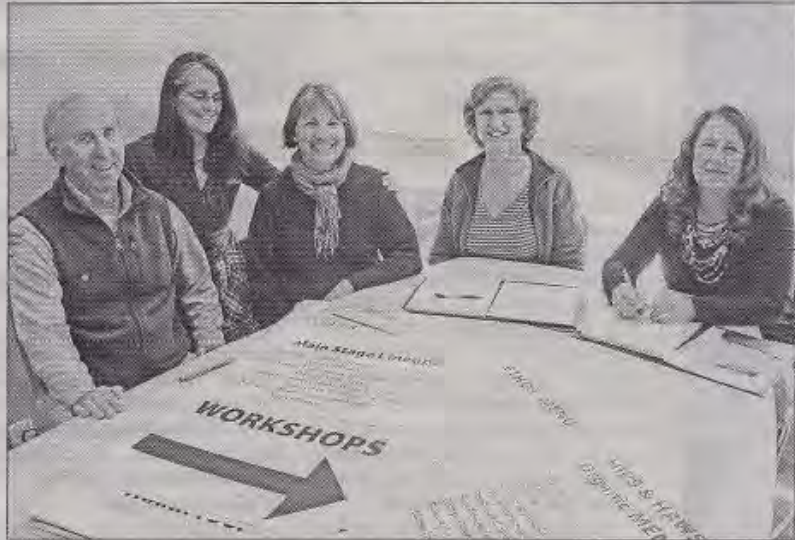


PHOTO BY SEAN MCINTYRE

From left, Peter Lamb, Cate McEwen, Sharon Bywater, Suzan Chamney and Doreen Hewitt work on details for this weekend's Water Fair.

shops starting at 10:30. Topics will include water security, garden irrigation systems, growing more food with less water and the permaculture approach to swale construction.

"We thought it was really important to have things for kids."

SUZAN CHAMNEY
SSI Water Council
coordinator

Entertainment for younger participants will continue all day, with features like a water poetry wall, colouring table, music, kids parade, readings and a puppet performance.

"We thought that it was really important to have things for kids. If we can entertain the kids, we can make it

a family event," Chamney said. "The point of the fair is that there's something everyone can do."

The events will feature information booths hosted by local non-profit and government agencies that have helped host the event, and local retailers.

The event is a collaborative effort sponsored by the Salt Spring Island Water Council, Salt Spring Island Watershed Protection Authority, Salt Spring Island Water Preservation Society, Cusheon Lake Stewardship Association and North Salt Spring Waterworks District.

A complete schedule of events is available at www.ssiwatercouncil.com.

Participants in Saturday's Every Drop Counts Rainwater Harvesting Tour can download a tour map from the site or grab a hard copy at the visitor information centre in Ganges, Natureworks and Windsor Plywood.

WATER

Water fair delivers powerful conservation message



Angela Brown keeps children entertained in the salmonid storytelling tent at Sunday's water fair. PHOTO BY SEAN MCINTYRE

CRD director ponders conservation incentives

BY SEAN MCINTYRE
DRIFTWOOD STAFF

Getting zipped inside a giant inflatable salmon is the last thing you'd expect between the display of water pumps and sprinkler-system workshops at Sunday's water conservation fair at the Farmers' Institute, but organizers say it was all part of the fun.

The salmonid storytelling tent kept the kids busy as parents and other participants learned about Salt Spring's freshwater resources and how best to preserve the limited quantities available.

The event, which coincided with World Water Day, was part of a two-day celebration organizers held to educate and inspire islanders about ways to lower the average household's water footprint.

"We're progressing towards greater sustainability on this island in a big way and this means living and coming together to be able to learn each year to

do better," said Shannon Cowan, who coordinates the Salt Spring Island Water Protection Authority and helped organize the weekend celebration. "We're striving for sufficient water for human uses and to sustain our thriving ecology."

Speaking after the event on Monday, Salt Spring Capital Regional District director Wayne McIntyre said the event's success points to the strong interest in water conservation among islanders. He said work is underway at the CRD level to implement a financial incentive for Salt Springers to install rainwater collection systems.

"I haven't had any negatives. The essence of the plan is in process," he said. "It just needs a little meat on the bones."

From using a bucket of water left-over from rinsing the dishes or warming the shower to installing a state-of-the-art sprinkler system, Sunday's event gave participants a raft of tips, tools and ideas to lower their water bills and help the environment through the island's summer months.

Chris Drake, owner of Sweet Water, stressed the importance of preparing

for longer, drier summers by controlling invasive species and planting to reduce wildfire risk; master gardener Linda Gilkeson extolled the merits of mulching and working with a low-water budget; and Michael Nickels, owner of the Seven Ravens Permaculture Academy and Eco Forest, talked about swale construction, a technique that can greatly increase garden and farm productivity.

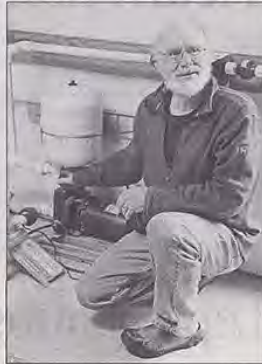
Water council coordinator Suzan Chamney estimates at least 250 people attended Sunday's event. More than 100 participants took in Saturday's Every Drop Counts Rainwater Conservation Tour.

"I thought it went great," she said Monday. "The idea was to have something for everybody."

"It really was nice that so many people came out."

Chris Dixon, who was among eight property owners who opened their yards for Saturday's tour, said he received a steady flow of visitors throughout the afternoon.

People learned how a relatively simple and affordable rainwater catchment



John Campbell shows part of the set-up in his rainwater collection system in his North Beach Road home during Saturday's rainwater harvesting tour. PHOTO BY BEN MACCULLLAIN

system — cobbled together with PVC pipe, some standard garden hoses and a used above-ground pool — can nourish 400 tomato plants through a hot Salt Spring summer.

Whether the event is repeated next year depends on funding availability, Chamney said.

This year's program was organized by the Salt Spring Island Water Council, Salt Spring Island Watershed Protection Authority and the Salt Spring Island Water Preservation Society, with widespread participation from island business and property owners.