

2007 Somass Marsh Bench Report

The Somass Estuary is a highly disturbed and degraded environment. Less than 34 % of the Somass Estuary is in a relatively natural state. The loss of Estuary habitat is thought to be a limiting factor in Salmonid production. Over thirty million salmon smolts rear in the estuary on their way to the open ocean. Increased habitat (marsh benches) will increase food production and should lead to better ocean survivals. The Somass estuary management plan recommended increasing marsh bench habitat. So in 2006 and 2007 the Alberni Valley Enhancement Association (AVEA) coordinated the construction of two marsh benches. Eighteen hundred square meters of marsh bench in 2006 and 9100 square meters of marsh bench in 2007.

In 2007 the Pacific Salmon Commission allocated fifty thousand dollars to the AVEA for a marsh bench project. This funding was combined with an additional fifty thousand dollars from the Pacific Salmon Foundation, Ministry of Transportation and the AVEA. B.C. Timber sales and Bowerman Excavating donated 9100 cubic meters of gravel for the project. Fisheries and Oceans donated surveying and staff time.

Costs incurred included a botanical survey, equipment purchase and contractor bills. The botanical survey ensured that no blue or red listed plants were impacted and cost \$995.00. The equipment purchased included a pruning saw, cedar lathe and a shovel which cost \$79.75. The contractor expenses included the use of excavators, trucks, front end loader and lowbed. The total cost here was \$94,019.05. Although final project costs exceeded projected costs the existing budgets from the Pacific Salmon Commission, Pacific Salmon Foundation and Ministry of Transport were met. Additional costs were covered by the AVEA. The targeted 8000 square meter bench was exceeded with 9100 square meters of marsh bench created in 2007.

The discrepancy between projected costs and real costs related directly to the trucking costs. Project cost projections, in the funding application, were based on discussions with contractors. The initial plan called for tandem highway trucks (two bunks) to be used with a half hour turn around time. In actual fact we used both highway and off road trucks none of which could use a tandem bunk because of the space restrictions both at the loading site and the dump site. Turn around time was closer to one hour and there were delays on the loading end as material was not always ready at the loading site. In summary the funding allocations were not exceeded and target marsh bench construction was exceeded.