

MEDIA RELEASE

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Shuswap Watershed Council keen to work with local agriculture

The Shuswap Watershed Council (SWC) wants to have clean water and a thriving agriculture industry.

“We think it’s possible to achieve both objectives, at the same time,” says Paul Demenok, Chair of the SWC. “The way forward is to work with farmers using good science, best practices, and thoughtful collaboration to guide our activities. We know that farmers want to preserve water quality, and we know our community wants to see farmers succeed and prosper. We want to work together to achieve these important common goals.”

Last month some SWC members toured Trinity Dairies Ltd. Approximately 75 people were in attendance, many of whom are elected officials, to get a first-hand look at the dairy farm run by the Vandalfsen family east of Enderby.

“It was great to see it. We toured the barns and the milking parlour. It’s a modern, impressive operation,” Demenok says. “Ralph [Vandalfsen] talked about on-farm nutrient management, cattle nutrition, cow comfort, and irrigation. It was very informative.”

“Dairy farmers are part of our local communities”, says Henry Bremer, Chair of the Kamloops Okanagan Dairy Association (KODA). “We utilize ever-evolving science in terms of nutrient management and how we help grow our crops. Upon review of the SWC’s reports, we are happy to see the water quality is generally good in the Shuswap, and we want to do our part in sustaining a viable and environmentally friendly dairy industry.”

One project that the SWC and local agricultural producers are already working together on is a three-year study to determine where and how nutrients are getting into the Shuswap River and Salmon River. Researchers at UBC-Okanagan have been retained by the SWC to carry out the study; the third season is getting underway and results should be ready by Spring 2019.

“We need to know where the nutrients in the water are coming from. The concern is that elevated levels of nutrients – phosphorus in particular – can trigger algal blooms. At this point in time, we know that these two rivers contribute a significant load of nutrients to the lakes, but how are they getting into the rivers? That’s what this study will answer for us,” explains Erin Vieira, the SWC’s program manager. “We’ll be better informed about where to focus our time and resources to protect our water quality.”

“There is great benefit in regional bodies such as the SWC working closely with KODA and the BC Dairy Association”, says Vandalfsen. “Collectively we could help pressure the provincial and federal governments to dedicate increased resources toward forage science and research. It’s this research that helps limit environmental impact and fosters cutting edge agricultural practices in our communities”.

The SWC is a partnership of local governments, the Secwepemc Nation, provincial government agencies, and communities. Their primary mandate is to maintain and enhance water quality in the Shuswap. For more information, visit their website at www.shuswapwater.ca.

Local community members have an opportunity to tour a dairy farm in an upcoming public event. “Our industry is hosting a ‘Breakfast on the Farm’ event on June 9. Everyone is invited to come have breakfast, tour a local dairy farm, and have their questions answered about our farming practices,” adds Bremer.

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