

Purchase will double size of Sage and Sparrow

NCC in final stages of fundraising for \$4.4 million 1,836-acre property

BY RICHARD McGUIRE
Osoyoos Times

The Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) is close to acquiring additional land near Kilpoola Lake that will more than double the size of the Sage and Sparrow Conservation Area.

Barb Pryce, Southern Interior program manager with the NCC, said the conservation organization plans to purchase the Elkink South Block, which will connect two existing properties acquired last fall.

“Right now we have a negotiated agreement with the Elkink Ranch and we’re in the last stages of our fundraising, which we need to bring to a close by June 1,” Pryce said.

The NCC held an event Thursday afternoon amidst the rolling hills and sagebrush grasslands to celebrate its acquisition last year of 1,200 acres of environmentally sensitive and endangered South Okanagan land.

Representatives from several conservation groups stepped onto a stage of hay bales in pouring rain to pledge support or hand over cheques for the Elkink purchase. This was followed by a ceremonial barbed wire cutting just as the rain picked up.

With the addition of the Elkink South Block, the protected Sage and Sparrow Conservation Area will increase to 3,120 acres. The land adjoins the provincially protected South Okanagan Grasslands Protected Area west of Osoyoos.

Among those speaking to the audience of nearly 100 people was Ian McGregor, a Kamloops representative of the Habitat Conservation Trust Fund, an organization that has raised substantial funds for conservation projects throughout British Columbia. He acknowledged that he was unable to bring a cheque to Thursday’s event, but he hinted that his board would be discussing a significant contribution this week.

The price of the Elkink purchase is \$4.4 million which must be raised by June 1, but most of those funds have already been raised. The purchase agreement is subject to the NCC successfully raising funds needed by this deadline.

The Elkink South Block is very important because it has a number of species at risk on it and it lies between two other properties purchased in the fall of 2012, connecting them, said Pryce.

Various species include the sage thrasher, an endangered bird, as well as the Western rattlesnake. There is also a burrowing owl reintroduction program on the Elkink land.

It’s important that lands be connected because some species, badgers for example, have large territories, Pryce said. She added that there’s a possibility badgers are in the area, although this isn’t known for sure.

The lands will be closed to motorized access, but will be open to the public to walk in, Pryce said. Hunting will be allowed, subject to provincial regulations.

“We’re still in the process of developing our management plans for the properties we own, and we also



Photo by Richard McGuire
As rain poured down last Thursday, Bob Redgate (left) and Andrew Harcombe performed a ceremonial barbed wire cutting at an event celebrating the Sage and Sparrow Conservation Area. The Nature Conservancy of Canada hopes to close a deal shortly to purchase the Elkink South Block, which would connect two existing conservation properties and would more than double the area of Sage and Sparrow.

have to do the same thing on the Elkink property, but it will be closed to motorized access,” said Pryce.

The lands were private and closed to the public, so access to hikers and nature lovers is being increased, she added.

Grasslands make up less than one per cent of British Columbia’s natural environment, yet the fragile environment hosts a diversity of plants and animals.

Most of the land surrounding Kilpoola Lake remains in private hands, although the Nature Trust of B.C. owns land to the northwest of the lake as conservation land.

Pryce said the NCC is always open to discussions with landowners, but it takes considerable time to put together deals and raise the funds. Landowners must be willing to sell, and no one can force them to, she said.

The NCC works with landowners through purchases, donations and conservation agreements to conserve ecologically sensitive lands. It is a registered charity.



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