

## Feature

### Community Participation in WRP Projects: the Squamish and Lillooet River Watershed Committees

In March of 1993 the Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks (MELP) extended an invitation towards many stakeholder groups within the Squamish River watershed to discuss the quality of the water in the Squamish River system. The outcome of this meeting was the formation of the Squamish River Watershed Committee. Over the succeeding years, the Terms of Reference of the group expanded to include other environmental issues within the Squamish area.

In 1995 MELP staff approached the Squamish River Watershed Committee regarding the formation of a partnership with MELP as lead proponent in a Forest Renewal BC funding application for watershed restoration work in selected drainages. The community responded with strong support for the application, supplying letters of support from various stakeholders. (It should be noted that this organization differs from the Squamish River Habitat Task Force in the immediate focus and location of its work within the watershed. The Watershed Committee is currently concentrating tributaries of the Cheakamus River, and the Habitat Task Force is focusing on the tributaries of the Squamish River above Ashlu Creek (see Figure 4)).

Similarly, the Pemberton-Mt. Currie community was approached, and the community formed the Lillooet River Watershed Committee. Currently these committees are comprised of representatives from government agencies, non-governmental organizations, First Nations, municipal and regional governments, and individuals, including for example: Soo Coalition for Sustainable Forests, Squamish Nation, and B.C. Hydro. The licensees in the watersheds are Terminal Forest Products, Pacific Forest Products, Interfor, and CRB. Although they are not official members, they participate by assisting the committees with maps, information, and other support.

In 1995/96, a Year One Condition Assessment was conducted in both the Squamish River and Lillooet River watersheds, in order to determine the most suitable candidate drainages for restoration (following the approach of the Coastal Watershed Assessment Procedure). In 1996/97 detailed Fish Habitat, Riparian and Channel Assessments (following WRP procedures) were completed

on the candidate drainages and various works were initiated. Projects are ongoing.

The two guiding principles of the work are community involvement and an ecosystem approach to restoration planning and implementation. Regarding the first principle, last fiscal year 25 community members were trained and employed in the Lillooet River project, and 15 members were trained and employed in the Squamish River project. An attempt was made to hire approximately one-half from each of the community's displaced forest workers and the First Nations groups. An example of the ecosystem approach is demonstrated in our attempt to address potential limiting factors to fish production by considering related functions of the riparian zone and the aquatic food web. Thus, in addition to



A large number of community members from both Watershed Committees were involved in a training program in fiscal year 1996/97; shown here with the trainers and specialists.

monitoring fish densities in response to restoration techniques, benthic invertebrate (stream insect) sampling is being used as an indirect means of examining fish 'health'.

The staff involved from MELP proposed from the outset that the community committees phase into the role of sole project proponents by becoming legal entities and receiving project funding directly from Forest Renewal. MELP could then revert to a purely technical advisory role to the committee. Preliminary discussions with Forest Renewal, the MELP and the community committees are scheduled in the immediate future, with the goal being a transfer of the proponent position by April 1, 1998.

Continued training, education and empowerment of the local community will enable them to become more effective environmental stewards of their watersheds. The proposed proponent transfer should help to ensure that the social and biological benefits of restoration return directly to the impacted areas.