

Friends of Robert Lake Society Yearly Report for 2021-2022

After two start-up years with just a five people on the Board of Directors, FoRL opened up to general membership in July of 2021. We now of twenty-five members. The formation of a general membership spurred us to produce our first ever newsletter in November, and more perhaps more importantly, a website for the Society (<https://www.friendsofrobertlake.com>).

The website is to act as:

- an information portal to acquire information about the lake and its biota;
- a public eye on the imperilled status of the lake ecosystem;
- a place to document the changing nature of the lake, and
- a place to post beautiful images of the lake and its environs.

The site is still a work in progress and additional pages are planned and the feature of online dues payment is being worked on. The website provided the basis for a poster to be prepared and presented at the 2022 BC Nature AGM that was held at UBC O in May 2022.

FoRL has been active in trying to reach out to institutions that have an agency in Robert Lake's future. In particular, FoRL has tried to highlight the salinity issue in Robert Lake to the City of Kelowna. Karen Perry, Bob Lalonde and Laura Hooker met with city officials in 2020 where a potential plan by the City to divert upslope water away from Robert Lake within the next five years was communicated. FoRL followed up in July of 2021 by asking about the state of planning for this project, and received the response that nothing had been done yet. In conjunction with this line of inquiry, Laura Hooker asked the Central Okanagan Land Trust (who, in conjunction with RDCO and CONC, hold a conservation covenant on a small property on the south of the lake) to research if there were any multi-agency grants related to flood mitigation or habitat conservation that could be applied for in order to move help move the project forward. Wayne Wilson (Executive Director of COLT) and Laura Hooker (Director of COLT and FoRL) met with city officials, Kevin Van Vliet and Rod MacLean, in November about this. It was also discussed why pumping water out of Robert Lake to control water levels is disastrous from saline ecosystem perspective, and why alternatives are needed. Their thoughts as to moving ahead with the project were less related to money and more related to the logistics of the permitting project. Wayne Wilson e-mailed Kevin Van Vliet again in March 2022 to find out what their plans would be if water levels rose to flooding levels again, and he said that the City was prepared to once more pump water out of the lake if necessary. The problems with pumping were reiterated.

FoRL has also been in communication with other stakeholders. Laura Hooker reached out to Wayne Darlington of RDCO to advise him of our activities and our concern for the lake, and we have also been actively engaging UBC's involvement in conservation efforts around the lake. After a visit by CONC President Douglas Graham, we prepared a proposal for a birding platform on the UBC lands which border the northeast portion of the lake. The proposal was greeted quite warmly and incorporated into their planning

process for the 'West Campus Lands'. There was an online planning activity by UBC about these plans in early May which Laura Hooker and Ian Walker attended. UBC was already sensitive to the lake due to both FoRL's proposal and a report prepared by the consulting firm 'Ecoscapes'. Our voices were noted and were echoed by many in attendance. The planning process is slowly moving forward.

Finally, members of FoRL continued to volunteer with the firm 'Associated Engineering' to monitor Great Basin Spadefoot toad populations in the area by mating call and roadkill surveys. In addition to the monitoring that took place in the spring of 2021, roadkill associated with the 2021 fall migration back to overwintering grounds to the northeast of the lake were also counted and collected for DNA sequencing and confirmation of species. The City extended its funding to 'Associated Environmental' for monitoring into 2022. Preliminary results indicate that there were far fewer calls heard in the spring of 2022 compared to the spring of 2021. Although part of this could be due to cooler temperatures, it does appear that the amphibian exclusion fencing and underpasses are not fully effective and John Hindle Drive is an important source of mortality.

In the 2022-2023 year we hope to expand the public's perception of Robert Lake as a rare ecosystem worth conserving, more than just a place with a few curious birds, and that this will help to stimulate the City of Kelowna to action to prevent further dilution of the water and increase protection.