

Our Mission and the Pathway to an Inquiry Question

Our initial driving question for our project relating to the restoration of Bowker Creek was pretty broad, being, “what is the ultimate goal of the 100-year restoration plan?” The simple answer to that question is pretty obvious: “To divert the track of stormwater to prevent overflow and erosion, and excess turbidity that causes imbalance in nutrients, cut off connections to the sewage system and implement filters for oil and other pollutants, and of course to restore the wildlife and plantlife along the aboveground sections of the creekbed. But our question was actually referring to the purpose of urban watershed restoration as a whole and inquiring how, specifically, Bowker Creek’s watershed will be of benefit to our community.

Generally speaking, the purpose of ecological restoration is to rebuild functioning ecosystems that are necessary to provide us with more natural resources and food, and to maintain the healthy cycles of water, energy, phosphorus, carbon, and oxygen that allow us to survive. However, the restoration of Bowker Creek’s ecosystem is not on a great enough scale to truly make a positive impact in any of those areas, nor would leaving it unrestored have a significant negative impact on our community, as Bowker Creek hasn’t been in its original ecological state since the European settlement in the early 1800s when the creek’s watershed was diverted to aid agriculture and we seem to be surviving a-okay as of now in the absence of a fully restored urban creek. Is it purely a matter of nature-friendly appearances or is there some other grand motif behind the 100-year-plan ?

The Official Bowker Creek Initiative (3.0 Watershed issues Vision, Goals and Objectives) lists Goal 1 as “Individuals, community and special interest groups, institutions, governments, and businesses take responsibility for actions that affect the watershed,” with the objectives of A) Foster long-term community stewardship of Bowker Creek and celebrate accomplishments. And B) Plan and manage land in the Bowker watershed in ways that create compact and attractive communities, increase areas of green space, reduce stormwater runoff, and improve water quality in Bowker Creek. So really it’s all a matter of a common goal within the community and achieving personal ideals for what the creek can bring to people’s lives, whether it’s the knowledge that the community is supporting a wider range of wildlife and preserving a natural ecosystem, the visual effect of feeling immersed in an a natural and undisturbed natural setting within a city, or the educational and community-building benefits of being involved in maintaining the creek’s well-being.

The prospect of Bowker Creek’s restoration that we find most exciting is the possibility of it supporting a salmon-run. Historically, Bowker Creek was a major salmon and trout source for indigenous peoples and a functioning salmon cycle in our neighbourhood to observe is something that is not outlined as part of the 100-year blueprint but is a change that we very passionately want to see as the restoration process progresses. That’s why we’ve set out to find exactly what changes would need to happen in order for the creek to house a healthy salmon-run and created a hypothetical action-plan we call, “The Oak Bay Salmon Cycle Initiative.”