

# Cultivating Conservation

How Local Farmers are Using Nature to Grow Greener



## Re-wilding Unproductive Areas on the Farm

Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship Society (OSSS) partnered with the Okanagan Crush Pad Winery to restore seven acres of creekside forest and floodplain habitat along Eneas creek. The lakes of the Okanagan belie the scarcity of water in the hot, dry climate. The lakes and rivers attract not just tourists to the valley, Okanagan wildlife also head towards water on hot days.

Eighty-five per cent of Okanagan species depend on wetlands or the forested margins along water courses as part of their habitat.

When Okanagan Crush Pad Winery owners Steve Lornie and Christine Coletta purchased Garnet Valley Ranch as future vineyard land, they saw the potential for giving back to the environment.

The property included a large hayfield beside Eneas creek, and they loved the idea of returning it to nature. To maintain the hayfield as a hayfield, they would have to fight nature head-on. The area is naturally wet and boggy in spots- not ideal for growing hay, let alone grapes.



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OSSS, with funding from South Okanagan Conservation Fund, Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation and Environment Canada's National Wetland Conservation Fund, has planted approximately 3,000 plants at the site with the permission of Okanagan Crush Pad Winery. Through a series of planting day, some of which included community volunteers and school groups, the area has been transformed from hayfield to riparian forest.

Over 75 per cent of riparian habitats have been lost to development and channelization of water sources. These habitats are crucial to species at risk like the western screech-owl, yellow breasted chat, and Lewis's woodpecker.

Forests along the edges of water courses and water bodies help to provide shade and keep it cooler during the hot summer months, a necessity for fish like salmon that often breed in these waters.

By restoring riparian forest at the site, the area functions as nature intended- a floodplain where water is able to slow and sink, which helps reduce flooding downstream in freshet.



*“Nature-based Solutions” is a concept that covers a range of ecosystem-related land management approaches that include ecosystem-based adaptation, natural climate solutions, and green infrastructure to address common concerns. By re-establishing a floodplain in a hayfield, flood protection, natural water flow, erosion control are all offered to the farm while increasing biodiversity and wildlife habitat at the same time. It's win-win!*