

The redeveloped waterfront at Olympic Village has brought new life to the neighbourhood – in more ways than expected.

The City’s plan for redeveloping the waterfront required that a portion of shoreline be filled. The federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans initially resisted the plan, arguing that filling would diminish shoreline area and associated habitat. The need to create habitat

for wildlife eventually led a team of environmental consultants – including Lee Nickol and Barb Warnik from Golder Associates and Mark Adams from Envirowest – to propose building a small island off the SEFC shore. This innovative solution allowed the City to proceed with its plan, replaced lost shoreline area and resulted in a net increase in the area of intertidal fish habitat and park space.

The island and naturalized segments of the shoreline host aquatic, riparian and upland ecologies, including vertical snags, native vegetation and a natural shoreline that have attracted perching bald eagles and a variety of waterfowl. The habitat island and natural shoreline demonstrate the ability to reintroduce natural habitat back into the urban environment. The island form maximized the extent of new

shoreline; a connecting segment of land emerges at low tide which provides limited access to the public. Proof of success appeared in the fall of 2008 when herring returned to spawn, for the first time in many years, on a one kilometre stretch of the once toxic shoreline of SEFC.

Habitat Island was constructed to make up for habitat that was lost when another area of the False Creek shoreline was filled to enable development. The island includes vertical snags, native vegetation and a natural shoreline, which have attracted bald eagles and a variety of waterfowl.



INNOVATION

Increasing Shoreline Habitat

Dense human populations tend to drive out native plant and animal species. Development that creates new habitat, such as the new island off the shore of SEFC, provides an invitation to species to return – while enhancing the beauty and livability of the human experience as well.

Herring have laid eggs on approximately 1 km of shoreline spreading east from Habitat Island. Marine biologists confirm that the environmental cleanup and shoreline habitat creation is a huge success.



PROFILE

Tilo Driessen

Park Planner, Vancouver Park Board

An architect by training, with degrees from the Technical University Munich and UCLA, Tilo Driessen went back to school when a downturn in the real estate market coincided with his rising interest in the development of open space and public lands.

“I was lured in by the Greenways plan being developed for the City of Vancouver,” says Driessen.

“As an architect, I had always worked for private clients. I was intrigued by the idea that as an open space planner, I could work for the public at large. I liked that idea.”

Driessen began studies in landscape architecture at UBC with the goal of becoming a park planner. When an opportunity to work on the Greenways project opened up, he left school and dove into work with the City, eventually landing his current job – in the field he had targeted – with the Vancouver Park Board.

Working on the Olympic Village site was a privilege, says Driessen.

“There were fantastic people working on the project; it was a lively stimulating atmosphere,” he says. “Everybody who worked on it – from the people who conceived the first policies to the people who built it – we all feel a similar sense of pride. It’s a great project.”