

Howe Sound dolphins are back

Northshore Outlook

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Herring eggs dot the material that the Squamish Streamkeepers wrapped around pilings at the Squamish Terminal docks. The increased herring run might be one reason for the return of the Pacific white-sided dolphins. *Submitted photo*

Could Lions Bay soon be called the Dolphin Capital of Canada?

For two years in a row, residents of this small community just north of Vancouver have been amazed by schools of hundreds of white-sided dolphins frolicking in front of their ocean-front properties. Where did these dolphins come from so suddenly and why are they here now when nobody can recall seeing dolphins here in the past?

On Sunday, March 13, the answer to those questions will be given at the Lions Bay Community Hall. The free colourful slide show presentation will show that the Howe Sound herring run is back.

In the 1960s, up to 2,000 tons of herring spawned in the shelter of the Squamish boat harbour and this mass of herring in turn fed the fish, birds, sea mammals and humans of Howe Sound.

Industrial development of their spawning area from the 1960s into the 1970s caused a collapse of this herring run followed soon after by collapse of the animals that depended on them for food.

In 2006, the Squamish Streamkeepers stumbled onto a remnant of this once mighty herring run that had been spawning around the Squamish Terminals docks. A few spawned successfully on bladderwrack, but the majority of eggs were laid on dock pilings that killed their eggs.

The Streamkeepers experimented with various wrappings of these dangerous pilings and the hundreds of dolphins are proof that the herring are indeed back.

The Streamkeepers are still expanding their work and expect the herring runs to increase much more in size in the near future, but there are still obstacles to their full recovery.

The Squamish Streamkeepers are a curious group and have found other parts of Georgia Strait, Puget Sound and Johnstone Strait that have experienced similar declines in herring stocks that together account for some of the dramatic declines seen in local salmon stocks over the last 40 years.

Their spectacular slide show will take you above and below Howe Sound and throughout Georgia Strait to show how helping the herring runs could play a key role in bringing back the salmon stocks of Howe Sound and Georgia Strait. Just ask the dolphins.

The presentation starts at 7 p.m.; admission by donation.

For more information call John Matsen at 604-839-9056 or 604-986-7774.