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Halalt honours river, awaiting court

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Abstract (summary)

Halalt's finance director Tricia Thomas said the Chemainus River once rivaled the Cowichan River as a salmon river, but now returns are almost nonexistent although Halalt members collect eggs and release juvenile Chinook regularly.

Full Text

Halalt First Nation is holding the third annual Honour Our River day at the Chemainus River on Friday, Sept 25.

Busloads of children from neighbouring schools will be among those taking part in river walks as well as information about the food and other resources in the river's watershed. Others are also expected to attend in order to learn more about one of the most fragile river systems on the Mid-Island.

This year the River Day takes on added significance with Halalt's recent petition to the BC Supreme Court for a judicial review of the Chemainus wells project. That project, by the Municipality of North Cowichan, would see water pumped from wells in the river's aquifer, only about 100 meters from where Friday's event will take place. The BC Supreme Court in Duncan could hear arguments in the case in mid-October.

Chief James Thomas said Halalt is inviting its neighbours to the event so that everyone can both celebrate and learn more about the importance of the fragile river.

"There are so many users of this river," he said. "There are farmers and landowners and a fish hatchery. It means a lot to so many of us.

"Halalt and our First Nation neighbours, have used this river for many generations," he said. "The river has taken care of us and we have done our best to take care of it."

Halalt's finance director Tricia Thomas said the Chemainus River once rivaled the Cowichan River as a salmon river, but now returns are almost nonexistent although Halalt members collect eggs and release juvenile Chinook regularly.

"The river is being threatened by all the development that is going on around Chemainus as well as logging in the watershed. Some people think they can just take, take, take from the river without giving back. But we think it's time to listen to and watch the river, to hear what it's telling us."

Chief Thomas said the band and others have called for a comprehensive watershed management plan to be in place before any more developments impact the river's resources. The Chemainus Residents Association and the University of Victoria-based POLIS project are among those who have asked the municipality to study the watershed before water is pumped from the aquifer.

He said visitors would also have an opportunity to add their names to the hundreds of signatures already gathered for the Pledge To Our River.

Honour Our River day will run from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. There will be guided walks along the river as well as a variety of displays and a lunchtime feast.

Credit: The Citizen

Illustration

Photo: Submitted / Chief James Thomas of the Halalt spends the day at the Chemainus River with a number of youngsters who are learning about honouring and caring for the life-giving waters. ;; Caption:

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