

Green Scene: Enjoy and Explore during Environment Week

by Elaine Golds

(published June 2, 2012 – *The TriCity News*)

This weekend marks the beginning of Environment Week in Canada, a time when all Canadians are encouraged to consider the environment and the many benefits bestowed on us by healthy ecosystems. In 1972, the United Nations decided to celebrate World Environment Day on June 5 in order to raise global awareness of environmental issues. About two decades later, June 8 was chosen as World Oceans Day for similar reasons. However, our Canadian Environment Week predates all these initiatives because Prime Minister John Diefenbaker chose this week in 1970 as a time when Canadians should pay more attention to environmental issues. Since then, the happy coincidence of usually sunny weather and a renewed focus on the environment has encouraged volunteers to offer some enticing opportunities for people to enjoy nature. Locally, volunteer groups are hosting a number of events during Environment Week at which people can explore and learn more about the natural world around them.

On Saturday, June 2 at Colony Farm Regional Park, nature walks to enjoy migratory songbirds and other wildlife will be held at 9 am and 3 pm. These two hour walks, led by experienced birders from the Colony Farm Park Association and Burke Mountain Naturalists, will focus on finding the beautiful lazuli buntings that arrive every May to nest in the Park.

The male lazuli bunting is one of the most colourful birds found at Colony Farm Regional Park during the nesting season.

Photo by Derak Matthews/Vancouver Avian Research Centre

Every spring, millions of birds of various species fly north from Central and South America to nest in the temperate zones of North America. The long daylight hours of summer plus an abundance of insects which they feed to their young provide the incentive for these birds to undertake long and hazardous migrations. The tall grass meadows and shrubs of Colony Farm Park provide ideal habitat for some of these migratory species. On these walks, which are suitable for all ages and take place on mostly level ground, participants can expect to see approximately 20 of the over 200 species



of birds that rely on habitat in this Park. Walks will depart from the parking lot at the end of Colony Farm Road which intersects with the Lougheed Highway in Coquitlam. Spotting scopes will be available but participants are encouraged to bring binoculars if they have them.

On Sunday, June 3, the focus will shift to the Riverview Hospital Lands on the other side of the Lougheed Highway in Coquitlam opposite Colony Farm Park. These lands are presently the subject of public

consultations regarding its significant heritage values (see www.rivervalues.info/ for more information). At Riverview, volunteers from the Riverview Horticultural Centre Society will offer tree and heritage tours and 1 and 2 pm, respectively. In addition, tea will be offered in the Henry Esson Young building starting at 12:30 pm preceded by a question and answer period at 11 am (see www.rhcs.org for details).

Riverview Hospital, formerly known as Essondale, once included Colony Farm and provided care for thousands of mentally-ill patients. Riverview was designed to be a therapeutic healing site where patients had exposure to fresh air and exercise in beautiful surroundings. In addition, they were given opportunities to help grow nutritious food at Colony Farm. Riverview was the original site of the Botanical Garden now located at UBC and it continues to host western Canada's most outstanding collection of mature trees graced by the presence of a number of heritage buildings. Late spring is one of the best seasons of the year to enjoy the stately trees of Riverview. For people not familiar with the Riverview site, this event will provide a wonderful opportunity to experience its many vistas and learn some of its stories. All tours will depart from the Henry Esson Young building which can be found by following the colourful banners along Holly Drive and turning uphill at Oak Crescent on the Riverview Hospital grounds.

At the conclusion of Environment Week on Saturday, June 9, the Burke Mountain Naturalists will host a hike for the public on Burke Mountain which is part of Pinecone-Burke Provincial Park and was established on June 8, 1995. This 7 km hike on the Woodland Walk trail requires boulder-hopping across a stream and will have an elevation gain of 250 meters. The destination will be Pritchett Creek with lovely views into the Coquitlam drinking watershed and a single surviving old-growth Douglas fir tree on its stream bank. Participants should wear sturdy hiking boots; bring lunch and appropriate clothing for this 5 hour hike. The hike will depart at 8 am, June 9 from the trailhead at the end of Harper Road off Coast Meridian Road in northeast Coquitlam. More information is available at www.bmn.bc.ca.