

# Green Scene: Get outdoors and enjoy Environment Week

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[photograph]

[caption: Although the birding walks at Colony Farm this weekend will focus on finding the beautiful lazuli buntings, other migratory songbirds such as this elegant eastern kingbird may also be seen.

Kiyoshi Takahashi photo]

[Title in Tri-City News: Check out special lands saved for you]

This weekend, Environment Week will conclude with birding walks at Colony Farm (June 7 at 9 am and 3 pm, meet at the end of Colony Farm Road) and a half-day hike on Burke Mountain (June 8 at 8 am, meet at the end of Harper Road). Thirteen years ago, Colony Farm Regional Park and Pinecone Burke Provincial Park were announced as new parks by the Premier at the Coquitlam Recreation Centre on June 8. Public walks this weekend will provide local residents with opportunities to become more familiar with some of the special features in each of these protected places.

In 1904, the provincial government set land aside for what was then called Essondale to provide residential care for the mentally ill and fertile fields where food could be grown for their nourishment. The lowland area beside the Coquitlam River became known as Colony Farm. It quickly became famous as the province's show farm where prize-winning farm animals were raised with the help of Essondale's patients and a variety of crops were grown to supply food to institutions throughout the Vancouver area. Although a series of fires and floods destroyed some of the grand historical farm buildings, the Farm remained in production until the 1980s at which time concerns were raised regarding the use of patients as farm labourers.

In 1983, the provincial government finally decided to close Colony Farm and sell its equipment and fabled herds. For several years, the land lay fallow. As urban development grew closer to the Farm, wildlife increasingly found refuge in its hedgerows, forests and tall grasses of the ungrazed fields. Local naturalists observed an increasing diversity of birds at the Farm and initiated public walkabouts at the Farm in 1989 to introduce members of the public to Colony Farm's growing list of interesting bird species including lazuli buntings. Others also noticed the "vacant" lands and suggested the site should be turned into a golf course, a new home for the PNE, a racetrack or a residential area with a bridge linking it to Douglas Island.

In 1993, the provincial government announced a public planning process to determine the best future use for Colony Farm. A committee was struck and public input sessions were held over the next two years. In 1995, it was announced that Colony Farm would become a new Regional Park with a land use plan that provided for wildlife habitat, agricultural activities in some fields (including community gardens) and public recreation in the form of walking and cycling trails along the dikes.

Burke Mountain has a similar lengthy history. In 1913, a report by the Dominion Government suggested it should become part of park that would reach from Indian Arm to Pitt Lake. In 1966 and again in 1980, Burke Mountain was again proposed for park status in government reports but no actions were taken. In the early 1990s, a proposal to build an extensive mountain village and downhill ski area alarmed some in the local community. Finally in 1993, the provincial government convened a public consultation process to

determine if Burke Mountain and areas to the north should be protected. Two years later, a 38,000 hectare wilderness park was established which reaches from Burke Mountain on Coquitlam's municipal boundary along the west side of Pitt Lake all the way to Garibaldi Park. In one fell swoop on June 8, 1995, residents in Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam and Port Moody were presented with a stunning legacy of two new parks for the use and enjoyment of all.

Some local residents have considerable sweat equity in the creation of both these parks. They understood members of the public needed to tour these areas to be able to support park protection. Years ago, volunteers spent many days clearing blackberry brambles at Colony Farm or brushing out old logging roads on Burke Mountain to create trails that could be enjoyed by everyone. This weekend, local residents again will have an opportunity to join guided walks to observe the birds at Colony Farm or take a 7 km hike to a beautiful waterfall on Burke Mountain. Some of the "park pioneers" who built these trails will again be assisting with these organized tours. For more information, see elsewhere in this paper or [www.bmn.bc.ca](http://www.bmn.bc.ca).