

The Osoyoos Desert Society
2002-03 Strategic Plan
DRAFT

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Mission

The mission of the Osoyoos Desert Society is to rescue, restore and conserve the endangered **Antelope Brush Ecosystem** in the South Okanagan Valley of British Columbia; and through education, to generate public knowledge, respect and active concern for fragile and endangered habitats worldwide.

Background

The Antelope Brush ecosystem is one of Canada's most fragile and endangered ecosystems. Over the past century, more than 60% of this habitat has been totally destroyed, and only 9% of what remains is relatively undisturbed.

In B.C., the Southern Okanagan area hosts one of the largest concentrations of species at risk in Canada, with almost 30% of Canada's red-listed (endangered) species and over 50% of its blue-listed (vulnerable) species using this habitat as their home. Only two ecological reserves protect token parcels of what is left of the habitat, and at the current rate of development the Antelope Brush ecosystem in Canada will be completely eradicated within 30 years. Preservation of this ecosystem is vital to the continuation of biological diversity in B.C., yet the existing protected areas are too few, too scattered and too small for effective biodiversity conservation.

In response to this "disappearing desert", a non-profit charitable organization was formed in 1991 by local individuals concerned with preserving this unique desert environment for future generations. A 68 acre site was secured in 1998 and the creation of an interpretive educational centre began. The Desert Centre now has 1.5 km of raised boardwalk with 4 interpretive kiosks, a visitor's reception centre and store, a display area and a native plant garden. Guided tours of this fragile ecosystem are conducted year round.

Goals

The Desert Society has identified **five goals** to achieve the above Mission: **Education, Research, Land Acquisition, Restoration and Management/Infrastructure.**

1. Education:

- Conduct **guided tours** and **presentations** of the Antelope Brush ecosystem along the 1.5 km. boardwalk on site.
- Present a daily **children's summer program** on site.
- Establish a **school educational program** with the creation of units of study including on-site pre- and post-tour activities which comply with the BC curriculum.
- Present an adult **lecture series** on topics related to nature using local, regional and provincial speakers.
- Present ad hoc **public lectures** on topics of interest about local habitats.
- Introduce local **high school student** work experience and research studies as they can be determined in consultation with the high school science and work experience departments.
- Create **training programs** for tour guides and local volunteers.

- Establish a Desert Center **newsletter**, and continue development of brochures, cards, advertising, websites, etc. for marketing the Desert Center.

2. Research:

- Continue on-going **University of British Columbia** research at the graduate and postgraduate levels with respect to noxious non-native weed control and eradication, desert land/flora rescue and restoration, invertebrate identification, vertebrate monitoring and study, and other habitat research studies as determined on an on-going basis.
- Invite **Simon Fraser University and the Okanagan University College** to pursue similar scientific studies in furtherance of the above mission.
- Complete **Habitat Conservation Trust Fund - Shrub-Steppe Project** 2003 final report, year 5.
- Invite **Aquila Environment Team**, as per SFU/OUC invitation above.
- Invite potential/future **American university** involvement in accordance with the mission statement, i.e. Washington State Univ.
- Conduct **other research studies**: fire ecology, cattle damage research, etc. (as determined by the Desert Society board in consultation with interested parties).

3. Land Acquisition:

- **Renewal** of the Desert Society's current lease.
- Purchase (or acquire) the exhausted, adjacent **community landfill** site for restoration to Antelope Brush habitat in cooperation with a research facility.
- Acquire the **government leased land** adjacent to the current Desert Center site.
- Acquire the area adjacent to the grass **landing strip** and the portion of the **Heritage Trail** adjacent to the Desert Center.

4. Land Restoration:

- **Remove** at the Desert Centre, species of Knapweed, Toadflax, Hound's Tongue and other **noxious weeds** introduced into the South Okanagan.
- **Eliminate** non-native grasses introduced by early ranchers (such as Crested Wheatgrass), while retaining native species.
- **Replant** original native desert shrubs and grasses and research the **reintroduction** of appropriate native desert invertebrates, birds and mammals that are currently red- or blue-listed, as per the Recovery Action Group guidelines and recommendations.
- **Restore** the landfill site (if acquired, and in concert with specialists) to the native landscape.

- **Establish** (in concert with provincial and federal specialists) and maintain habitat corridors for animals whose survival requires Antelope Brush habitat, uninterrupted by agriculture or other forms of development.

5. Land Management/Infrastructure

- Complete, at the Desert Center, **boardwalk and kiosks**, respectively, to protect the fragile habitat from the public and to protect the public from the summer sun and other hazards.
- Establish, at the Desert Center, **wildlife management areas** for the reintroduction and protection of red- and blue-listed species.
- Establish **temporary trailers** for public entry to the Desert Center, for display areas, temporary office and storage spaces, and public washrooms.
- Establish public **gardens** for display of desert flora, and a public **parking lot** and **picnic area** at the Desert Center.
- Establish temporary **rescue beds**.
- Plan for, fund and construct a suitable **permanent Desert Centre building or buildings**, inclusive of public reception space, viewing areas, a lecture hall, a school program area, office space and boardroom, and facilities for research, a greenhouse, recycled water toilets, storage, etc.
- Continue and enhance **fundraising** efforts in the following areas:
 - a) Desert Society membership
 - b) Friends of the Desert donations
 - c) Public admissions
 - d) Romancing the Desert evening & dinner
 - e) Grants in Aid
- Maintain an ongoing program for **hiring** informed, salaried staff and **training** local volunteers.

Vision Statement

The vision that the Desert Society holds for the Desert Center is the rescue, restoration and preservation of a small portion of the Antelope Brush ecosystem. The Desert Society, in pursuing and achieving these goals, specifically envisions the following: a public and student educational program that continues the current seasonal desert tours, birding tours, night tours, school tours, and children's tours; continuation and enhancement of the current lecture series, and introduction of an on-call cadre of topic specialists for school and public ad hoc presentations; and the establishment and recognition of the Desert Center as a training site.

The Desert Society foresees the establishment of school educational programs with the creation of units of study including pre- and post-tour activities that comply with the BC curriculum, and the continuation of the Desert Center as a local high school work experience site.

The Desert Society will continue publication of the Desert Society Newsletter with issues increasing to quarterly as the membership increases, and enhanced use of the Desert Center

website. The Society will continue to enhance public marketing of the Desert Center worldwide through magazine and other advertisements.

Further, the Desert Society foresees continued university graduate and post-graduate research with respect to extirpated and red- and blue-listed desert flora and fauna, rescue and restoration, weed control, invertebrate identification, vertebrate study; study of habitat restoration with respect to used land fill sites, grazed grasslands, and former public land usage; implementation and study of native habitat corridors as avenues of species egress in populated agricultural areas; and the employment of several research institutions including universities, colleges, public companies and government agencies working in concert to resolve current conservation issues with respect to native ecosystems.

The vision of the Desert Society includes future acquisition of those parcels of land surrounding the present Desert Center site to include the adjacent spent community landfill site to the northwest, the government lease land to the north, the government Heritage hiking trail area to the southeast and partnering with the Osoyoos Golf and Country Club in use of desert areas to the south (to be used for future research studies and a habitat corridor as described above). This land will be weeded to remove such noxious species as knapweed, toadflax, hounds tongue and others introduced into the Antelope Brush ecosystem and will be replanted with native flora.

Finally, the Desert Society foresees replacement/renovation of the temporary trailers to create a permanent Desert Center facility for public reception and education, and for scientific purposes; the establishment of native habitat gardens for display, bedding out/greenhouse facilities, picnic sites and infrastructure enhancement.

Results

The Desert Society will determine the effectiveness of the Desert Center program based on the following results:

Education:

- Continuation of guided boardwalk tours & presentations.
- Continuation of the daily children's summer program in the months of July and August and on a pre-booked demand basis during the school months.
- Establishment of a school program and the creation of units of study consistent with the B.C. curriculum.
- Establishment of a high school work experience program and research studies appropriate to high school students and the high school science program of studies.
- Continuation of the adult lecture series bimonthly December through March inclusive.
- Presentation of ad hoc public lectures as demand dictates and maintenance of a list of specialist speakers.
- Creation of an ongoing training program for both volunteer and permanent staff at the Desert Center.
- Continuation of the Desert Center newsletter, increasing regular publication to quarterly, and continued development of advertisements, brochures, magazine articles, the website, etc. for marketing the Desert Center.

Research:

- Continuation of post-secondary research with respect to weed control and elimination, native flora/fauna, rescue & restoration, particularly towards extirpated, blue- and red-listed species, invertebrate identification and other research studies to be determined.
- Invitation of other agencies (gov't., business, etc.) to conduct relevant research consistent with the Desert Society mission statement and their own interests.

Land Acquisition:

- Acquisition of the following land tracts:
 - a) the adjacent landfill site
 - b) government lease land north of the Desert Center
 - c) government lease south of the Desert Center and east of the grass landing strip and along the Heritage trail

Land Restoration:

- Reduction and/or elimination of noxious weeds on the site.
- Successful research to eliminate or reduce introduced non-native grasses while retaining native grasses.
- Continued successful replanting and reintroduction of native shrubs and grasses.
- Successful restoration of the landfill site, if and when acquired.
- Successful establishment of native habitat corridors in conjunction with government and other agencies (gas and telephone companies, the Osoyoos Golf & Country Club, etc.).

Land Management/Infrastructure:

- Construction of a permanent site at the Desert Center and ongoing maintenance/improvement of the boardwalk.
- Improvement of the public gardens and parking area and intro of a picnic area.
- Construction of permanent bedding out/greenhouse facilities.
- Establishment of a permanent and viable funding program for the future management, improvement and continuation of the Osoyoos Desert Center.