



YOUTH EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE

Success Story

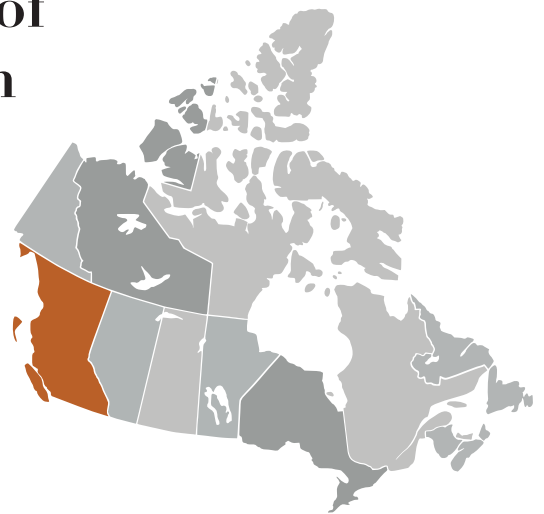
Simone standing in front of a fallen uprooted Cedar in Askew Creek Park.

Learning about the eradication of invasive species and preservation of vital ecosystems

THE MUNICIPALITY OF NORTH COWICHAN

on Vancouver Island has a natural environment that enhances quality of life for those who live there and attracts many visitors passionate about outdoor activities, such as hiking, mountain biking and kayaking. The area contains 86 parks, multi-use trails, forests and lakes – and the municipality's Parks, Forestry & Recreation Department works hard to preserve this beautiful and diverse environment.

An important part of the department's mission is to protect against invasive plant species, which pose an ecological and economic threat to this region, as well as other parts of British Columbia.



MUNICIPALITY OF NORTH COWICHAN,
BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Some of the Ivy they worked on

“Invasive plants are not native to the local ecosystem and have the ability to grow and spread quickly,” says Keona Wiley, Manager of Parks and Trails for the municipality. “These species can out-compete and crowd out our native species, and they are one of the biggest threats to an area’s biodiversity.”

Some of the species of particular concern in North Cowichan are blackberries, holly and ivy, explains Keona. “Controlling invasive species is a constant battle that is difficult to stay ahead of.”

That is why the municipality was pleased to receive CPRA funding to hire an additional summer student for 2021, and have the student join the effort to eradicate invasive plants in areas where they are causing problems.

“The CPRA Youth Employment Experience gave us a great opportunity to bring in a summer employee and introduce them to the parks and recreation sector – while helping us tackle a critical task,” says Keona.

The CPRA program, which is funded by the Government of Canada, is designed to give young people an opportunity to gain experience and skills in parks and recreation, while also helping organizations build capacity.

The municipality hired Simone Bruce, a 16-year-old high-school student from Shawnigan Lake. Simone’s first-ever job paired her up with Jody Hammerer, a 10-year veteran of the parks and recreation department. Simone and Jody formed a team tasked with getting rid of invasive species in high-priority areas.

They achieved some wins in the battle against invasive plants, Keona says. “They were able to get rid of considerable amounts of holly and ivy growing in areas that were threatening trees. They had a big impact at Herd Road Park,



A truck full of the Holly from Fuller Lake

a very popular destination for pickle ball and tennis that includes a playground and a dog park, by removing a strip of overgrown blackberries. Blackberries are particularly invasive and this removal was key to maintaining public access and enjoyment of the park.”

Simone learned about the impacts of invasive species on ecosystems and about strategies for restoring landscapes to their original ecology. She also gained practical skills working with hand and power tools, learning how to identify invasive species and ways to safely handle and eradicate them.

Jody helped Simone learn about other types of work done by the parks department and by the municipality more broadly. Attracted to the idea of potentially becoming a mechanic, Simone spent a week with the mechanics team, where she became particularly interested in the idea of working on heavy-duty trucks.

As a mentor, Jody also provided guidance on ways to succeed in any type of job.

“We focused on how to prepare for the job each day and how to develop a work plan and manage your time efficiently,” Jody says. “Simone learned things like work routines, professionalism and teamwork – helping to get her ready for her next adventure in life.”

For Simone, it was a great immersion in the world of parks and recreation. “I enjoyed getting to learn about the different types of jobs that involve working outdoors. I liked working outside and the physical nature of the work I did,” she says.

Keona says she appreciates how the CPRA employment program opens up opportunities for young people like Simone to get their first jobs. “Competition for employment is tough, and one of the barriers, of course, is lack of experience. This is the kind of program that can help youth overcome that barrier,” she says. 🍁