



Kootenay Lake Development Area Project

Helping to ensure the protection of riparian areas around Kootenay Lake

July 19, 2022

By Dan Elliott, RDCK Communications Coordinator

At just over 400 square kilometres, Kootenay Lake is the fifth largest lake in British Columbia. This biologically unique watershed is home to a diverse amount of fish species and wetlands, while boasting over 400 kilometres of shoreline. In order to protect the shoreline, as well as the flora and fauna in and around Kootenay Lake, the Regional District of Central Kootenay (RDCK) is currently reviewing its Environmental Development Permit Areas (EDPA) on the Lake.

The goal of an EDPA is not to prevent property owners from building near the lake, but rather to ensure it is done sensitively to protect riparian areas, which are the transition areas between land and water. Riparian areas improve water quality by filtering runoff and preventing sediments and contaminants from entering the lake, they are home to deep rooted trees and shrubs that protect lakeshore areas against wind and wave action, and they act as enormous sponges, soaking up as much as 45 cm of rain to help mitigate against flood damage and shoreline erosion. The RDCK has four Electoral Areas on Kootenay Lake; three have EDPA's - Area A, D and E. There is currently no EDPA for Area F.

“The purpose of an EDPA is to ensure development activities on shoreline properties are undertaken in a way that is consistent with a community’s expectations, which should be embedded into an EDPA’s guidelines,” said Corey Scott, RDCK Planner. “While it is preferred to avoid disturbance of riparian areas altogether, development within them is not prohibited. However, having an EDPA ensures professional oversight by a qualified environmental professional to educate property owners on the habitat along the shoreline and recommend mitigation strategies to minimize impacts to sensitive riparian areas when development takes place.”

In 2021, Living Lakes Canada completed a Foreshore Integrated Management Planning (FIMP) Project for Kootenay Lake to document changes that have occurred since 2012. Over the nine year span, approximately 4.5 km of natural shoreline was lost, 91% of that shoreline was on residential properties. Losses are expected to continue unless the status quo shifts to better reflect shoreline stewardship principles. Having a clear and effective EDPA will reduce these losses and can provide opportunities to reverse previous damage. FIMP also called for a consistent EDPA approach across all of Kootenay Lake’s shoreline. Without consistency around the lake, development may become focused on areas with lesser requirements and could actually create greater lake wide impacts.

In order to ensure a healthy Kootenay Lake, it is the responsibility of shoreline property owners to be stewards of the lake. This is a big challenge with such a diverse population with different attitudes towards development and the environment living along the lake. That is why having an EDPA in place that makes sense to all groups involved is key.

“The science tells us that the majority of shoreline disturbances that are degrading the environment of the lake that supports fish and wildlife habitats are happening on residential lands at the individual property level, “ said Scott. “We want to revise the EDPA in a way that makes sense and is rigorous where it needs to be. This will allow us to develop a pathway to work with property owners to get approved for a permit, while ensuring the protection of riparian areas. We find that most property owners’ intentions are aligned with shoreline stewardship principles, but the actions they can take to uphold those principles may not be clear. The EDPA for the lake will help provide that clarity.”

Changes to the EDPA would not affect current property owners who previously developed within the permit area; however, any future building, soil disturbance, or vegetation removal could trigger the need for a permit.

For more information on EDPA’s and how to get involved in the review, visit the project webpage: www.rdck.ca/KootenayLakeDPA.

For further information, please contact:

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