

## **The importance of a healthy foreshore**

The foreshore area of a lake encompasses the part of the shoreline between the high and low watermarks and is an important connection between aquatic and terrestrial environments. This area bears high biological and ecological significance and is very sensitive to disturbance.

The Lake Windermere Project, established as an ongoing water quality monitoring and water stewardship education program, began in 2005. The project is a member of the East Kootenay Integrated Lake Management Partnership (EKILMP). This partnership is a coalition of various agencies, local governments, First Nations and non-government organizations with joint responsibilities to protect lakes and their beneficial uses for wildlife, drinking water, heritage, recreation and aesthetics.

Government agencies and local groups have been studying Lake Windermere for decades. It is clear that the pressures caused by increasing development rates, recreation impacts and use, are having a negative impact to the lake's health and its ability to support biological processes.

Lake Windermere has recently experienced a collapse in the Burbot (*Iota Iota*) fishery. Because Burbot are a top predator, the health of their population is an excellent indicator of the health of the ecosystem as a whole. Currently, this fishery is closed for recreational fishing under the Province's freshwater fishing regulations.

The lake is currently undergoing a Fish and Wildlife Habitat Assessment, an EKILMP initiative that is a critical component to determining where, if any, development including marinas, mooring facilities, docks, retaining walls or other foreshore constructions can occur around the lake. The assessment will identify Zones of Sensitivity, or areas that would be negatively affected by development. Critical habitat features could include Kokanee shore spawning areas, aquatic vegetation and creek mouths. It is important to understand the cumulative impact of foreshore developments on the lake ecosystem prior to proceeding with any further development applications, which is why the Lake Windermere Project will not support any marina or foreshore applications at this time.

The Fish and Wildlife Habitat Assessment results will be presented to the public for comment and consultation at an open house hosted by EKILMP on Tuesday, July 29<sup>th</sup>. It will take place at the Windermere Community Hall from 2pm to 5pm and 7pm to 10pm. EKILMP professionals will be on hand for discussion and to answer any questions.

By greatly improving information about watercourses in the East Kootenay we are helping to support better protection and restoration of streams and riparian habitats in the face of continued land development.

The Lake Windermere Project is a long-term comprehensive stewardship program dedicated to safeguarding the health of our lake. This project is made possible by generous support from Wildsight, Environment Canada, Columbia Basin Trust, the Real Estate Foundation of B.C. and the Lake Windermere Ambassador program. If you would like to become a Lake Ambassador or find out more about the East Kootenay Integrated Lake Management Partnership please phone 250 341-6898 or visit the Lake Windermere Project office located in the old District of Invermere office beside the Invermere Community Center.