

The Stave West Outdoor Learning Alliance—FIT Project Summary Report

Overview: The Stave West Outdoor Learning Alliance (SWOLA) is a partnership between the District of Mission Forestry Department, community partners, and post-secondary institutions. Stave West is the western half of the Mission Community Forest (formally the Mission Tree Farm #26), BC's oldest community forest. FIT funds were used to develop an inventory of possible research, student engagement, and placement projects within the forest. They were also used to do research on how field centres are organized and managed.

Progress: The inventory was established, although the number of partners whose projects were included in the inventory was lower than anticipated. This is in large part due to Covid, which slowed down our ability to do outreach in the winter term and into summer. Because of this, one student hired last winter undertook more specific research on how field centres are organized and their relationships with universities. This reflects one of the goals of SWOLA, which is the creation of a field site for university and college students.

A total of four students were employed at various points of the project. The first two students were only hired for the second part of Summer 2019, due the late notice of the grant's award, and their hours were limited. One student was subsequently hired in the Fall 2019 term and another during Winter 2020.

Despite the smaller inventory than anticipated, the project was successful. One lesson we learned from the inventory process is that when asking partners about their project needs, their project needs are in fact immediate. This was particularly the case with Stave Falls Elementary. Three students completed applied projects with the school, including one who assessed options for endangered species removal, one who completed an inventory of birds on the nearly 10 acre site, and another who developed online learning modules for use during Covid.

In addition, one of the other areas identified in the inventory was the development of interpretive signage within the Stave West area of the Mission Tree Farm. In the winter term, seven students from GDD, Communications, and history produced design guidelines and communications templates for use in this signage. A working group of the Stave West Leadership Team (a committee which guides planning in the area) will be using these design ideas as they roll out the first new signage in the area this summer.

Finally, multiple sections of GEOG 111 examined wood waste management options on the Mission Tree Farm (which includes Stave West). This is one of the project needs in the inventory, although the work undertaken by the classes were not intended to solve the issue, but rather to work through the challenges.

Changes from FIT Plan

The faculty team overseeing the FIT-funded project itself underwent significant change in this past year and a half. One of the faculty members returned to Australia, and the other two took on new positions or moved to new academic units.

These changes, combined with the impact of Covid, disrupted continuity at times, particularly when it came to identifying possible student researchers. The research students submitted quality work. However, fewer students were hired than had been planned for, and one of the students experienced high stress associated with the loss of employment due to the pandemic. Covid-related restrictions and impacts on budgets have also affected the ability of organizations and municipal agencies to support additional projects identified as part of the inventory.

Additional work remains to update the inventory and add to the field centre research. This will be taken on by the faculty lead (M. Rhodes) in the winter 2021 term, as her schedule allows, as she is also part of the working group developing interpretive signage for the area.