

Goldstream NEWS

GAZETTE

"Langford working to protect cave in path of highway interchange"

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Cave experts keeping close eye on project

Cave experts and enthusiasts from around the world hope Langford can change the routing of a proposed interchange to protect a nearby cave.

In a May 8 response to an April 25 letter from Vancouver Island Exploration Group president Adrian Duncan, Langford clerk administrator Rob Buchan said the City has determined that Langford Lake cave is located within the proposed alignment of the Spencer Road interchange access ramp, and thanked Duncan for drawing attention to that.

Victoria is one of the few, if not only, provincial capitals that has karst, or limestone caves _ a type that forms from the flow of water through fissures and cracks _ within its boundaries.

"At one time, there were more than 20 known caves in the Victoria area and now we're down to nine," Duncan said in a telephone interview from Coquitlam. "We've lost over half the ones that existed through development."

Vancouver Island's unique landscape has a reputation that draws attention from cave enthusiasts from all over the world, Duncan said.

He pointed out that the recent destruction of Spaet Cave to make room for the Bear Mountain development drew international attention and resulted in several websites being set up in Europe that chronicled the cave's demise.

"The spectacle of caves being lost in our provincial capital is not one we want to be presenting to international caveists," Duncan noted. "We're not trying to save all the caves, we're trying to save the ones that are left."

While Spaet Cave was only about 12 metres deep, Langford Lake cave is about 40 to 50 metres, Duncan said.

Another 80-metre cave near Florence Lake was lost when it was blocked to make way for a trailer park in the 1980s, he added.

Langford Lake cave is also an excellent cave for familiarizing novice caveists with the sport, and has been used in the past as a training site for practicing cave rescue techniques.

Duncan said Langford's response was 'satisfactory enough', and he's waiting to see what the engineers propose.

Langford Councillor Denise Blackwell said the City is in the process of conducting an archeological and environmental assessment, which she hopes will be completed in the next few weeks.

Once that is done, staff can investigate ways to look at changing the route.

“We're doing our level best to move or realign it so it doesn't affect the cave,” Blackwell said.

Campbell River resident Paul Griffiths, a cave and karst inventory specialist with 30 years experience in the field, said the first principle of managing caves is to protect the structural, functional and ecological integrity.

“That generally entails maintaining the vegetation, catchment and native forest cover,” Griffiths said.

The reason for that is the karst solution process is widely affected by the soil and vegetation system, he explained.

“To maintain the integrity of the site is to maintain the cave,” he added.

There appears to be other features in the vicinity of Langford Lake cave that warrant further examination in planning the route for the access ramp, he said.

Griffiths was invited to attend a conference in Vienna in April, to speak about Langford Lake and Spaet caves, and his wife made a presentation earlier this month at a conference in Australia.

Preserving caves on Vancouver Island drew strong reaction at both conferences, Griffiths said.

³The principle is important, no matter how big the cave is,” he said.