

UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA

Putting knowledge into action

Now that the environment is a top priority for most Canadians, many of us are asking ourselves how we can help turn things around. Students in UVic's award-winning Restoration of Natural Systems Program, offered through Continuing Studies and the School of Environmental Studies, are finding ways to answer this question by applying their skills to local projects both on and off campus.

Nigel Buckland, a graduate of the RNS program, earned credit toward his certificate in ecological restoration by working with the Capital Regional District to help stabilize the shoreline during the raising of the Sooke Reservoir. Buckland, a watershed technician with the Capital Regional District Water Services, decided to take the RNS program to help fill in some knowledge gaps and expand his expertise in restoration.

"The project I worked on involved taking cuttings from native willows located at the old shoreline and planting them six metres higher where the new shoreline would be located after we raised the water level," explains Buckland. "The willows control erosion, take up nutrients which helps protect water quality and provide habitat for maintaining biodiversity."

Buckland explains that this project and the RNS program in

UVic's Restoration of Natural Systems students are making a difference

general helped him to look at restoration from many different perspectives and realize the value of being flexible in your planning. The experience also introduced him to a great network of people and projects that he continues to benefit from.

Other RNS students apply their learning experiences to "greening" projects that involve the UVic campus. For example, environmental studies student, Julia Adam, is one of 16 students who recently completed the winter component of the Seasonal Native Plant Propagation course. This "hands on" course in plant cultivation is offered four times a year to coincide each season.

Over the last few months, Adam and her classmates have spent weekends in the greenhouse growing and maintaining native plants including trees, shrubs and perennial herbs such as common camas, white fawn lilies, woolly sunflower and grasses. These plants will be used to populate the native plant garden and green roof planned for the new Social Sciences and Mathematics Building, scheduled to open in 2008.

"As an ethnobotany student I feel

that it is extremely important to connect the theory I learn in class to what's happening on the ground," Adam says. "I was drawn to this course because of its year-round focus. I believe that there's no better way to learn about an ecosystem than to experience it through every cycle of the season. By going back to the same places and working with the same plants at different times of the year you get to learn how they're being impacted and how they change over time."

When they aren't busy growing native plants, some of Adam's classmates volunteer with the Native Plant Salvage Program — an initiative led by the District of Saanich to preserve local native plants. This program involves recovering native plants from development sites, identified voluntarily by land developers, before the land clearing begins. The plants are then used by non-profit organizations for community restoration projects and can be used by local salvage volunteers for their personal use. None of the salvaged plants may be sold commercially.

RNS students who volunteer with this program find it valuable because it allows them to apply their skills in practical ways while advancing their studies in restoration.

For more information, visit: continuingstudies.uvic.ca/restore/



Restoration of Natural Systems student Alicia Newbury shows off grasses to be planted on the green roof of UVic's Social Sciences and Mathematics Building. Amy Geddes Photo