

Burns Bog Conservation Society

Report of the Board

April 3, 2021 AGM

Hello everyone! Thank you all for attending our first ever virtual online AGM. The following Report of the Board provides a summary of the significant events experienced by the Society since our last AGM in May 2019. This two-year period reflects the fact that the Society was unable to hold an AGM in 2020 due to COVID, combined with legal problems it faced later in the year. I'll tell you more about that later.

First, some of our accomplishments:

- 2019 was a mostly successful year for the Society. Our summer programs carried out by our Education Department which is supplemented by summer hires successfully carried out the Bog Pilgrimage, multiple school tours through the Bog, summer day camps and our annual Jog for the Bog. Our annual Step into Nature was attended by hundreds of high school students in September/October 2019. We also held successful fund-raising social events, including the annual Jog for the Bog and the Pub120 Summer Social. We were successful with our BC Gaming application and permitted to place our coin boxes into Lower Mainland liquor stores.
- In 2020, however, the Society had to temporarily close its offices due to the COVID-19 virus in compliance with Government directives. Staff continued to work at home with individual trips to the office to access information only as needed. We continued with our summer hiring program as Federal funds had been approved but school, public tours and community outreach programs were mostly cancelled or postponed. One bright spot was our summer day camp program which the staff was able to carry out with proper COVID safety measures in place. Despite the reduced class size due to COVID protocols the program was sold out for the summer and had a waiting list of parents hoping for their kids to attend if any cancellations.
- The energy and enthusiasm of summer hires normally spent on outdoor program activities were re-directed to help the Society with other matters. Some of their successes included modernizing the Society's logo and streamlining our website; work that was all badly needed and long overdue. We also undertook a number of initiatives to expand our membership which had not grown significantly in recent years. This included lowering membership fees and holding a membership drive in late Spring. We were successful in signing up more than 150 new members, effectively tripling our membership. Many of you attending this meeting today are a result of those initiatives. Welcome to the Society and thank you for your support!

Now, more about the serious legal challenges that the Society faced in 2020.

Following the Society's May 2019 AGM, a Society employee filed a complaint with the Board in which he alleged that he'd been the subject of bullying and harassment initiated by Eliza Olson, who was serving as both Executive Director and President of the Society at the time. Due in part to that complaint, at its June 20, 2019 meeting, the Board voted to rescind the position of executive director and establish a Board-Staff Liaison Committee, known as the BSLC, to oversee and liaise with Society staff.

At the following Board meeting, held on October 24, 2019, the Board voted to limit Ms. Olson's responsibilities as president to chairing meetings and receiving and providing non-binding input into various staff reports. All other duties of the president were transferred to the BSLC.

In early 2020, Ms. Olson hired legal counsel, Myron Barr and engaged the services of a West Vancouver private investigator, Lawrence Skwarek, for reasons unknown.

At its June 4, 2020 meeting, the Board voted, among other things, to remove Ms. Olson as chair for board meetings, to confirm she was not the executive director of the Society, either on a permanent or acting basis, and to prohibit her and two other of the Minority Directors, Ms. Von Kish and Ms. Kolvyn, from entering the Society's offices. This last measure was taken to protect the Society's staff from further intimidating behaviour.

At the following June 25th, 2020 meeting, the Minority Directors, comprised of Eliza Olson, Porsha Von Kish, Moneca Kolvyn, Richard Brousseau, alleged that a vote to remove the Majority Directors, including Edward Brown, Liz Walker, Nancy McLeod, Robert Saito, and Derek Zeisman had been held and passed at our June 25th Board Meeting. Such a vote was not included on the agenda, nor was it recorded in our meeting minutes. Further, the entire meeting was recorded on the Zoom platform, clearly indicating that no such vote had ever occurred. But the actions of the Minority directors did not stop there.

On September 21, 2020, Ms. Von Kish and Ms. Olson removed Evelyn Wedley, the Society's accountant, as the Society's authorized representative with BC Registries and replaced her with Ms. Von Kish. They also filed a notice of change of directors with BC Registries, removing the Majority Directors as directors of the Society. This was not a "spur of the moment" decision on their part, as Ms. Olson had previously attempted, unsuccessfully, to tamper with the Society's Registry Account, and the information contained with it, on July 14th, 2020. Fortunately, Ms. Wedley was able to correct that first tampering attempt, but was unable to prevent the second.

Relying on the revised BC Registries filing, certain Minority Directors attempted to change the authorized signatories of the Society's bank accounts, re-directed the Society's mail to an unknown address and advised the Society's employees, members and members of the public that the Majority Directors were no longer directors.

As a result of the dispute between the Majority Directors and the Minority Directors regarding the Majority Directors' status as directors, the Society's bank accounts were frozen and Canada Post withheld delivery of its mail, which, among other things, prevented the Society from paying rent, its staff and meeting other financial obligations and receiving donations through the mail and otherwise made the continued operation of the Society's business difficult. A major impact was the loss of the annual BC Gaming grant which was denied due to the Society Registry being frozen. Other grant applications which would have been normally submitted were not, again due to the uncertainty of the Society's future.

In November 2020, the Majority directors engaged legal counsel to dispute the unlawful actions of the Minority directors. A court hearing was held in December 2020, and the Judge's final ruling was released on February 2nd of this year. The court decision found in favour of the Majority directors and ordered their reinstatement to the Board. The Court also ordered the Society's bank accounts to be unfrozen, and its mail released for processing by our staff.

The Society has posted the Court Decision and the resulting Court Order on its website. We encourage all of you to read these documents online, and judge the facts for yourself.

Overall, the actions of Ms. Olson and her fellow Minority Directors have caused significant financial, legal, and organizational harm to the Society. It will take the Society a good period of time to recover from the setbacks imposed on it by their unauthorized actions, but I am confident that the incoming Board of Directors will work productively with staff, volunteers, members, and our external partners, including the City of Delta and Metro Vancouver, to build a better, stronger Society in the months and years ahead.

On behalf of the Board, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of our valued members, from the bottom of my heart, for standing with the Burns Bog Conservation Society through these extremely challenging times. Together, we will continue to protect and preserve "The Lungs of the Lower Mainland" for the benefit of today's citizens, and for many future generations to come!