

SPEC CELEBRATES 45 YEARS



1969
SPEC is
founded.



1970
First advocates
for rapid transit



In December of 1968, William A.C. Bennett's Social Credit party approved strip mining in the Kootenays. Strip mining is devastating to the local terrain. Removing the "overburden" (what we call vegetation) by bull-dozing and blasting results in landslides, erosion, sedimentation, flooding, and stream/river contamination. Gwen Mallard, a Coquitlam woman, is particularly outraged by this decision and this mining practice. That same month, she and husband Derrick gathered friends in their living room. That gathering blossomed into SPEC.

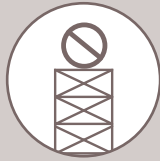
Within a year the organization has a name, an address, and a constituency of 4,000 members. Pollution, in all its multiple forms, is the overarching concern. SPEC will grow to 8,000 members in the second year and over the next 4.5 decades will undertake multiple campaigns resulting in:

- ▶ protection of the local **watershed** and **Agricultural Land Reserve** (ALR)
- ▶ a **moratorium** on **off-shore oil** drilling and oil tanker traffic
- ▶ the start and growth of the **local recycling movement** and bottle deposit legislation
- ▶ legislative and court decisions protecting **water and air quality**
- ▶ the **overturning** of plans to build unnecessary **hydro dams**
- ▶ opposition to highway and bridge expansion in favour of **public transit**
- ▶ **freedom of information** and public intervener **financial support**
- ▶ calling the Federal government to **legal account** for abridging **environmental review legislation**
- ▶ **overturning** a decision in WA state to start a highly polluting **coal-fired power plant** (Sumas 2) with severe air quality issues for our regional air-shed



1972

Oil spill clean-up
at Crescent Beach



1973

Moratorium on
offshore oil exploration

Sometimes SPEC acted alone, often in coalitions, and many campaigns resulted in victories that have withstood the test of 4.5 decades. Others have gone back and forth in the win/lose columns, underscoring that we cannot rest in our efforts to keep the minds of citizens and legislators on public good and the integrity of the natural world.

Public education programs have always been a feature of SPEC's work, starting in 1970 with a 10 week, 2,700 mile Ecology Caravan criss-crossing the Province. Over the decades SPEC has provided public education on: urban sprawl, transportation options, water quality and habitat protection, reduce/recycle/reuse, air quality, land use, energy conservation, alternatives to pesticides/herbicides, hazards of nuclear power/weapons, climate change, and films and speakers on a range of topics. As well, we have provided direct hands-on learning for children in school gardens and adults in a variety of sustainable behaviours, including organic food production, fossil fuel reduction, residential energy conservation, and zero waste.

Over the decades, SPEC has incubated dozens of other environmental organizations. Where we once stood nearly alone, there are now many sturdy, impactful organizations, some with a broad environmental agenda, others focused on specific aspects of the work.





1973

Helps draft
Agricultural Land
Reserve legislation



1974

First SPEC recycling
depots lead to Recycling
Council of BC



1980

Launch of award
winning Clean
Air Campaign



1981

Energy demonstration
building opens



1983

Defeats proposed
Site C mega dam
construction



1985

Protests the dumping
of raw sewage into
Burrard Inlet



1990

Starts first
Car Free Day

SPEC has survived several internal and external conflicts, economic hard times and other losses that have severely challenged our institutional metal, not the least was the devastating loss of our beloved building at 6th and Maple in 2011, a loss compounded this past week with the destruction by CP Rail of community gardens along the Arbutus Corridor, including one started by a SPEC staffer in 1981. Despite the losses, SPEC has shifted and morphed according to the needs and available resources of the time. Along the way, SPEC's image changed from "radicals upstarts" to interveners/researcher/activists and eventually to an organization invited to the table as various levels of government began to take up the challenge of environmental pollution and degradation. SPEC has worked effectively to offer constructive advice/research but

also to bring considerable pressure to bear on political decisions that eventually turned towards environmental protection and public well-being. However, this has not been a uniformly smooth transition. Over time, governments have devised increasingly sophisticated strategies for resisting and stifling the impact of environmental educators and activists. Many fear the Harper Government's new anti-terror legislation is another iteration of this strategy that will become a tool to muzzle environmentalists as threatening to national security. It bears an eerily disquieting relationship to the October '98 APEC Inquiry which revealed that military intelligence spied on SPEC meetings (Sept '97) and secretly listed SPEC and 69 "anti-APEC groups, including BC Federation of Labour, BCEN, Greenpeace and First Nations as "threats."

Environmentalists have always stood up for sustainable/resilient ecosystems just as much as we have been against the practices that threaten them. Louise Arbour, (former Canadian Supreme Court Justice and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights,) wisely reminds us that the belief that, 'if we have nothing to hide, we have nothing to fear' from authoritarian power, is specious and undercuts democratic power in favour of sweeping legislation that has the potential to one day impact each one of us. She recalls the quote by Martin Neimoller:



1991-1999

Stops logging in North Shore watersheds



2003-2009

Opposes Highway 1 expansion and twinning of Port Mann



2005

Adds photovoltaic solar collectors to SPEC building



2008

School Gardens Program launch



2011

First Westside Community Food Market



2013

Green 2 Go launch – reducing take-out food container waste



2015

Launches Sustainable Communities Field School

“ First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out —

Because I was not a Socialist.

Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out —

Because I was not a Trade Unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out —

Because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me — and there was no one left to speak for me.

As we face the perils of the growing climate crisis, we need to re-think: what are the real threats? Is it those who

plead for caution and respect for nature, for more moderation in consumption and more actual conservation? Is it the 99.9% of the planet’s scientists who insist that the problem is already here, that we’re already running a century of carbon debt that must be repaid in higher temperatures and more severe weather events? Or is it the elevation of personal interests and ideology ahead of common concerns while denying all signals that we’ve run amuck?

As has been said at previous anniversary celebrations, SPEC has withstood the test of time. Join us in celebrating our past and looking ahead to our future.



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