It ain’t easy being green

by KATRINA SIENIUC

Don’t get bogged down by staying indoors this summer. The struggle to conserve one of Vancouver’s most precious ecosystems will be highlighted on Sunday, July 25 during the 19th annual International Bog Day.

Bogs have become increasingly rare due to increasing peat usage. International Bog Day aims to address this concern and hopes to educate the public about the importance of this resource, while celebrating the beauty of bogs themselves.

Eliza Olson, president of the Burns Bog Conservation Society, said the Scottish Wildlife Trust started International Bog Day in 1994 to raise awareness about the importance of peat lands worldwide. As a non-profit environmental organization, the society works to conserve and protect Burns Bog.

“Burns Bog itself is unique because of its size, locations and its chemistry,” said Olson, adding that since it is large, raised, and at the mouth of the Fraser River, it classifies as the only Mediterranean bog in the world, and thus very rare.

In 1996, Canada held its first event and became the eleventh country to recognize the important role bogs play in the environment. A 2007 UNESCO statement said that peat lands cover only three per cent of the Earth’s surface and are responsible for filtering 10 per cent of the world’s fresh water. They are 10 times more efficient than any other ecosystem in the world, especially in storing carbon.

Areas such as Burns Bog provide an environment where a wide variety of plants and animals can survive, adding to the biodiversity of a region. Furthermore, cold living plants in bogs provide indicators of environmental changes that occur due to climate change.

Burns Bog is an important habitat for rare and endangered animals, including the southern red backed vole, the sand hill crane, and the pacific water shrew, since many animals are forced out of their habitats into peat lands, said Olson. There is also a diverse group of plant species within the bog, including bog forest, heath bog and open water communities.

Olson said, because of its location at the mouth of the Fraser River, Burns Bog has a very moderating influence on our climate in the Lower Mainland. In the summer it releases moisture in the air and filters water into the Fraser River and into our farmland. However, it is impacted by its proximity to both urban and agricultural pressures, resulting in the danger of displacement or loss of many species within the bog. Therefore, it is vital to increase public awareness about the importance of preserving Burns Bog, and other bogs of its kind.

“We’ve got a real treasure here. We support it as Ramsar site [of international importance] and an UNESCO designation, which is a world heritage [recognition],” says Olson.

Burns Bog Conservation Society will be celebrating with a festival bringing in various events that represent different cultures because bogs are found on every continent (except Antarctica).

Entertainment for the day will feature dancers, singing groups and various kids activities. There will be local speakers and exhibitors promoting green living and sustainability, including BC Power Smart and Operation Save H20. As the main feature, guided tours of the bog are scheduled throughout the day.

For more information regarding Bog Day, plus a 2-for-1 tour coupon, see www.burnsbog.org.