

Fishing club aims to inspire next generation of conservationists

Steve Noakes and David Williams worried about threats to West Credit River

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Members of an area fly fishing club are advocating for conservation of the West Credit River as it faces existential threats from the Erin Wastewater Treatment Plant and a large proposed blasting quarry in Caledon.

Steve Noakes and David Williams belong to the Izaak Walton Fly Fishing Club (IWFFC), which recently released a seven-minute video on the importance of environmental preservation and the dangers the aforementioned treatment plant and quarry present for the Credit River watershed.

The video is available at the following link: youtu.be/2hYRRJwM3qg

Noakes spent hundreds of hours capturing footage for the video, which he hopes will inspire others to take action.

Noakes is a semi-retired professional aquarist and in addition to being an IWFFC member, he's on the Board of Directors for the Greg Clark chapter of Trout Unlimited Canada and is a founding member of the Coalition for the West Credit River. He enjoys photography, including underwater and drone work, which he used for the recent video.

"I spend most of my time designing restoration projects for brook trout habitat," said Noakes. "Tree planting, in-stream work restoring habitat? I live outside, basically."

Williams is a retired family doctor and is on the executive of the IWFFC. He looks after all the videos the club produces, editing them and putting them online.

Born in England, Williams came to Canada in 1975 and fell in love with the beautiful fishing here. He became more involved with the conservation side of things when the Erin Wastewater Treatment Plant, which is now under construction, was proposed.

"I thought, 'that's rubbish, how can they put a wastewater treatment plant at the headwaters of some of the nicest brook trout fishing streams in Ontario?'," said Williams. "We've been working to try and mitigate the effects of the wastewater treatment plant."

Brook trout rely on a cold-water ecosystem, as they can only spawn in a certain temperature range, and Noakes said those ecosystems are increasingly at risk in Southern Ontario.

"It's a whole ecosystem that's disappearing? it's very underappreciated? people don't even notice they're there," said Noakes.

He said by rehabilitating brook trout habitat, positive impacts will be felt throughout the entire ecosystem.

Noakes said he recently worked on a habitat restoration project near Charleston Sideroad (Highway 24) in Caledon that's a stone's throw away from the proposed blasting quarry.

He said as the proposed quarry site is immediately upstream from the Forks of the Credit Provincial Park. He's dedicated to working with the Forks of the Credit Preservation Group to stop the quarry. Noakes said he's not against some industry, but the proposed blasting quarry is too close to the Credit River and the risk from it is too high.

Operations at the proposed quarry would see work done below the water table, and Noakes said this is worrisome because brook trout rely on groundwater upwelling. He said groundwater upwelling helps to regulate trout egg temperatures throughout the winter months.

“The eggs do not incubate and will not hatch without those upwellings, and they're very sensitive,” said Noakes. “If you start drilling, altering the course of the groundwater, you potentially change all of that? a major spawning area is right next to where they plan on putting the quarry in and it will have a direct impact on them.”

Williams and Noakes both said getting the next generation of people involved in conservation is very important.

“Anyone can volunteer, everyone is welcome,” said Noakes. “We really need help? people don't realize that they can help, everybody brings something different to the table? whether it's a small contribution or a big one, if we all did something it would make a huge difference.”

Williams said it's phenomenal to see the skills of the people volunteering for the various organizations dedicated to protecting the Credit River. He and Noakes said while there are some amazing subject matter experts volunteering, you don't need to have any background knowledge to make a positive impact on the environment.

“We need young people to get in on this? to understand what's happening,” said Williams. “There's only a finite time we have to do something about this? we have to leave a story and a message for the younger generations so they can guard and protect what they have.”

Noakes said one of his biggest regrets is that he didn't get into conservation work sooner.

“The biggest thing I would tell anyone is don't be on the sidelines for this,” said Noakes. “Don't wait, do it now.”