

For immediate release

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School district to host first Climate Action Conference for island secondary students

Comox Valley, B.C. – The voices of Valley youth on the topic of climate change and environmental protection has been heard loud and clear.

In response to the growing desire among youth and educators to introduce more education opportunities around climate issues, Comox Valley Schools will host the first Regional Youth Climate Action Conference at Florence Filberg Centre 13 February.

Word has spread quickly to neighbouring school districts about this unique initiative. There are now close to 100 registrants from others District including Nanaimo/Ladysmith, Parksville/Qualicum, Ucluelet/Tofino, Powell River, and Campbell River but registration from the local area is lacking.

“We need representation from our District youth”, said Serina Allison, on of the conference coordinators and District Environment and Outdoor Learning teacher. “It’s a big deal, and we need to ensure enough space is available to our students so that they too can be part of this amazing experience.”

The conference, titled *Empowerment for Impact*, is the first of its kind for the Valley and is designed for students in grade 8 to12 throughout Vancouver Island and surrounding regions.

The conference is youth centered with a focus on optimism and positive environmental action with a list of impressive guest speakers, action workshops, art, music, collaboration, and sharing to fill the entire day.

“It is intended to create an opportunity for youth to connect and share their passion for environmental advocacy and to generate positive discussion and ideas,” explained Allison. “All the planned activities are geared toward empowering and fostering collaboration to create positive environmental change and to educate youth around the issues we face here on our island.”

With the help of the District’s secondary school environment club educators, Allison and her team developed a robust day-long agenda, connected with local community organizations and businesses willing to sponsor the event and reached out to the broader education community on the island and neighbouring regions to consider taking part in the initiative.

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Allison explains that the impetus to develop a conference of this kind was because of the increasing interest from youth to learn how to take a positive role in society regarding climate change.

“It is our hope that an organized event of this nature will give our youth the space and the place to collaborate and plan meaningful solutions for a positive future with support from our local community mentors.”

Space for the conference is limited to 200 students. Deadline for application and permission is 29 January.

“Although the event takes place during a school day, all student absence will be reflected as a conference participant,” added Allison. “We have a designated teacher representative in each of the secondary schools taking registration information, so we encourage Valley students to act fast before the opportunity has passed.”

The following are presenters and facilitators at the Youth Conference.

Elin Kelsey, PhD is a science communicator who specializes in hope and wonder. An educator, Kelsey is also an internationally renowned author specializing in children’s books including *You Are Stardust* and *Watching Giants: The Secret Lives of Whales*.

Meaghan Cursons is a community organizer who combines art, culture, science, and politics to activate community action. She is the executive director of the Cumberland Community Forest Society and a facilitator of events, workshops and presentations about community organizing, watershed and forest protection, climate change and resilience, environmental theatre and bats.

Tina Willard-Stepan is a community environmental educator with the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) and Comox Strathcona Waste Management. She is an active community member passionate about change and supporting our youth in the global environmental movement.

Will Cole-Hamilton, a Courtenay City Councillor and CVRD Director, has a background in law and communications. Hamilton has been an activist on climate issues for many years. In 2017, he received training from former Vice-President Al Gore’s Climate Reality project.

Sina Berndt is a University of Victoria (UVic) student and part of a group, *Alternative Space Makers*, who are working towards changing physical and mental spaces to provide more sustainable alternatives. Sina recently completed a practicum in environmental food security with *LifeCycles* in Victoria. She is actively working on eliminating single use plastics within food services at UVic and will be participating in an internship in Uganda with a community-based organization in the field of sustainability and environmental development.

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Media Contact

Mary Lee
Manager of Communications
Comox Valley Schools (School District 71)
mary.lee@sd71.bc.ca
Office: (250) 334-5500

Image (Source: Comox Valley Schools)

Local youth have demonstrated to the community their growing passion and concerns on climate issues by participating in climate strikes such as the two held in the Comox Valley in May and September 2019.

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