

## Rotary District 5040-2022 Conference Support the Environment

We are committed to supporting activities that strengthen the conservation and protection of natural resources, advance ecological sustainability, and foster harmony between communities and the environment.

We feature two perspectives from the preservation of a unique ecosystem just East of Prince George that may, one day, become a world heritage site. We discover the academic and scientific aspects of the Ancient Forest and uncover the cultural meaning to our Indigenous peoples of Chun T'oh Wudujit.

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The **Chun T'oh Whudujut/Ancient Forest**, located within the Lheidli T'enneh traditional territory, recently became a provincial park co-managed by the Lheidli T'enneh First Nation and BC Parks. An ambitious infrastructure and development plan is currently being implemented to add facilities and upgrade walkways for visitors. The collaborative efforts of many from the community such as the Lheidli T'enneh, BC Parks, UNBC, Caledonia Ramblers Hiking Club, Rotary club members and many others brought this beautiful and culturally significant hidden treasure to the world in an environmentally sensitive and thoughtful way – accessible to all. The purpose and future pathways for this now protected and acknowledged Ancient Forest is educational, economical and peace promoting. The access and open invitation to this unique inland temperate rainforest promotes educational opportunities for everyone. The Ancient Forest provides an invaluable opportunity to explore and learn from both an ecological and cultural perspective and in turn, brings awareness to the importance of protecting and supporting the environment and learning about Lheidli T'enneh First Nation's connection to this land. The tourism potential and future economic opportunities are expected to grow for the Lheidli T'enneh First Nation and the local communities of Prince George and McBride. The provincial and federal governments acknowledged and supported this growth opportunity by recently contributing \$8.7 million towards the park's new developments, which includes new trails, a sweat lodge, interpretive centre, gazebo and pit house. This Ancient Forest is a special and beautiful piece of the Lheidli T'enneh story. In this place and time in our shared history there is opportunity to bear witness and celebrate the ancient and historical and the current visionaries and community leaders are



seizing this time to move into the future. The continued partnerships and collaborative methods of protection, co-management and development will ensure the natural values of this area are respected and promoted for future generations.

The Chun T'oh Whudujut/Ancient Forest invites everyone to visit and "encourages conversations to foster understanding within and across culture."



Presenter, Jordan Contois is the Ancient Forest Enhancement Project (AFEP) Coordinator from Lheidli T'enneh's Economic Development office – Jordan provided details regarding the infrastructure and development plans being implemented at the park.



Presenter Darwyn Coxson is a Professor in the Ecosystem Science and Management Program and a founding faculty member of the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC). Darwyn presented on the biological diversity of the Ancient Forest and provided a historical perspective of the last two decades which included his and his graduate students' studies within the forest along with a timeline and background regarding the many volunteers and supporters that supported the Ancient Forest project.



Moderator: Bob Redden, CEO, EDI Environmental Dynamics Inc. (EDI)