

BC Ecological Reserve Warden Report

ER Name: Catherine Creek

Ecological Reserve # 146 **Report Date:** 25 May 2023

Warden Name: Kevin Tyler

Travel / Timings. The ER was visited on 15 and 18 May, each time travel was one hour via Hwy16 to the Reserve from Smithers and another hour to return. Two hours were spent walking the Reserve on each trip, respectively. The first trip involved being shown the area and the exceptionally large old cedar trees by the landowner to the north of the ER, Mr. Taylor Goerke. The second trip involved myself walking the perimeter of the ER and marking the corners.

Access, Connectivity. The dirt road into the Goerke farm and the ER goes south off of Hwy 16 at 450M west of the Suskwa FSR – Hwy 16 junction; the exit is ~40 M west of where the CN tracks go under the Hwy. Travelling South into the Goerke's one crosses under a BC Hydro line at the 200 M point; another 250M brings you to their farmyard. From the farmyard walking south after ~250 M one hits the north boundary of the ER. Instead of going to the Goerke's yard, the ER could also be accessed by continuing along the power line until one is within 20 M of the NE corner of the ER, however there are some rough spots along the power line and most of this area is also Goerke property, so it is best to let the land owner you are there. Cell coverage in this area is poor to none depending on one's provider. The Goerke home landline number is 250-277-1660.

Weather / Conditions. Warm (~21 C), dry and windless were consistent conditions the week of the visits.

15 May Visit. I met Taylor Goerke at the farm and he offered to take me to the ER. During two hours of trekking through parts of the ER he showed me many highlights, notably the groves of large cedar trees (4'+ diameter base, > 140' tall), some very old tall hemlocks and paper birches (~2' diameter trunks), swampy areas dominated by Devils Club and ferns with large aspen trees (10" trunks). These sites were in the center of the ER and the NW corner. Taylor Goerke also brought me to additional large cedars just outside the ER's NW corner on Crown land.

Taylor Goerke grew up on his parents farm 1 km away and during his youth he regularly hiked the area, so his knowledge of it is intimate. The conversations with Taylor during our hike were very informative. He noted that in 1917 a large forest fire which originated in Smithers came through the area and killed many of the trees – he pointed out damage on cedars that one can still see today over 100 years later. He showed me some stumps from trees that had been logged with axes in ~1950 when parts of the ER had some logging. Taylor mentioned there had been a road on the ridge above the ER (to the SW) that was a pre-Hwy 16 transit route through the Valley used in the 1960s. In the 1970s someone had applied to log the old cedars and was getting the BC Timber Sales permit to do so, but Taylor's father had refused the applicant access through the Goerke property to facilitate logging, so the applicant did not proceed. The roadbed can likely still be found today. Also of note Taylor explained a chaga fungus hunting craze that came to the area during a two year period ending a year ago. He recalled twice confronting individuals who had cut trees down and hacked off the chaga fungus; they had come onto his property to the west of his house and adjoining Crown land, having walked in through the bush from Hwy 16. He noted their felling indicated people not familiar with falling trees, causing hung up trees and further felling. No trees were cut in the ER as part of chaga hunting.

18 May Visit. Later the same week I returned and hiked the four sides of the ER, marking out the corners and the centers of the longer (East-West) sides, with flagging tape. After a couple more days of the hot weather that week the mosquitoes were thick in the damp areas. I hiked to the NE corner first and out to the Hydro line that is near that corner. Going south to the SE corner meant going uphill as one travels North to South. Then hiking along the southern boundary of the ER one continues uphill and it becomes very steep (>45 degree south to north slope). One passes many sphagnum moss covered boulder fields. Also fields of blown down cedar and hemlock varying from 6" diameter and 30' long trees to double that in individual size; many of these blowdown fields were very old moss covered with the trees now rotten and intertwined with devils club; other blowdown fields were from more recent decades with still sound wood in the fallen trees. Near the center of the southern boundary there is one notably large old Hemlock (photo below). By the time one reaches the SW corner of the ER it is very steep (>55 degrees) up towards a cliff and ridge outside the ER. On the 2nd last leg of the West boundary, moving downhill one comes into the large cedar tree areas. The creeks that run through these groves of very large old trees widen out in some plateau areas and keep it moist year round. It is unclear if these had been salmon streams in times past (and that a source of nutrients for the trees), but there are no salmon runs in that creek today or in recent memory.

Wildlife notes: Observed two small wood frogs recently developed, in a small trickling creek near some of the old growth cedars. Multiple returning song birds, moose and deer scat were observed. Evidence of wolves chewing on discarded sheep skins from the Goerke family farm. Taylor mentioned the wolves that transit the area.

Plant notes: Swampy areas dominated by devils club, alder, and ferns. The old growth understory has very few shrubby plants.

Photos. Selected photos have been inserted below.

Human Activity / Public Access Issues. There were no recent signs of human visitation apart from members of the Goerke family walking their property along the southern lower level boundary; and some recent selective logging to the NE of the ER by the Goerke's.

Maintenance. There are no signs marking the ER. The four corners and the middle of each of the North and South boundary lines were marked with flagging tape. These could be locations for BC Parks signs.



20230515KT _Hydro line NE corner



20230518KT _NW corner marker



20230515KT _CC ER _1917 fire scarring



20230518KT _CC ER _blow down along South boundary of ER



20230518KT _CC ER _1950s stumps



20230515KT _CC ER _Hemlock grown on 1950s stump



20230518KT _CC ER _3.5' diameter hemlock, Location: ~South Center



20230518KT _CC ER _devils club area



20230518KT _CC ER _understory plants



20230515KT _CC ER _big old birch



20230515KT _CC ER _typical small creek



20230515KT _CC ER _collage of a big old cedar