

## Here comes the sun



By Nate Smelle

Of all the months in the year, March bears the most signs of seasonal change. When the icicles start dripping, the water levels rise, and migratory birds return to our skies, we know that soon our routines, like our clothes, once again must realign with the weather.

Each year, this seasonal reawakening brings life to the landscape, and replenishes our vitality by opening us up to a wide range of opportunities to get outdoors, flex our muscles and fill our lungs with fresh air. Day by day, as the hours of daylight increase, we find ourselves discovering more and more reasons to spend time outside. Whether conscious of this connection with nature or not, we all share in the health benefits it provides us with after a long season, short on sunshine.

African-American writer Harriet Ann Jacobs captured the essence of this annual rejuvenation most accurately when she wrote, "The beautiful spring came, and when nature resumes her loveliness, the human soul is apt to revive also."

A useful byproduct of this annual period of revival is the energy boost it gives us, every time we tap into the influx of solar power it delivers. Russian writer Leo Tolstoy hinted of his awareness of this personal energy source available to all when he described spring as "the time of plans and projects."

With March 11 marking exactly one year since the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic, everyone of us has had lots of time to plan and take on new projects. Now that spring is about to blossom, we soon will be able to extend our creativity outdoors. For some this expansion might translate into a blooming pollinator and/or food garden full of vegetables, wildflowers, and native plants that will provide a broad diversity of species - including humans - with sustenance, shelter, and soul-soothing beauty. For others, moving or starting projects outdoors will invite a wave of inspiration unleashed by Mother Nature.

Feeling the urge to get moving on my own plans and projects last Saturday, I made a list of the essential supplies needed and headed for town. Checking every item off my list after stopping at several local businesses, I decided to take the scenic route home in hope of getting a photo or two of some of our non-human neighbours. Driving by the municipal offices on my way out of town, I noticed a small group of stragglers left over from the anti-mask/anti-lockdown protest. Disinterested in the dangerous disinformation and the foolish conspiracy theories they were selling, I drove on, refocusing my attention on the natural beauty of North Hastings.

Tired from a productive day in town and at home, I switched on my computer after dinner to put in a couple hours researching the

articles I was writing. As I scrolled through social media to see what news I had missed during my adventure, I wondered why anyone would waste such a beautiful day protesting a lockdown and masks meant to protect us from a global pandemic that has indisputably taken the lives of more than 2.66-million people worldwide, including those of 22,000+ of our fellow Canadians. Attesting to the wasteful use of this group's time and energy was the fact that the lockdown did not prevent me, or the thousands of others shopping in downtown Bancroft that day, from accomplishing almost anything on our to-do lists.

Then, after coming across a video of the protest online, I realized that many in the group out front of the municipal offices on Saturday - including Hastings-Lennox and Addington MP Derek Sloan - are the same folks spreading climate crisis denial.

Watching the video, I cringed as the unmasked organizers of the protest handed an un-sanitized megaphone used by several of the protesters to three of the unmasked children in crowd. Don't get me wrong, I'm all for freedom of speech and getting the youth involved in the fight for social and environmental justice. However, when self-interested individuals pump children full of pseudoscience to sell poisonous snake oil, a line that should never be crossed has been recklessly ignored.

The consensus of the overwhelming majority of the scientific community have agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic, and humanity's earth-shattering role in fueling the climate crisis are as real as rain. It's one thing to put yourself at risk by exercising your right to be wrong. It's a crime to neglect the wisdom of science and endanger the lives of children and the community.