

CEAC member set to 'Ride the Wave'

A CEAC minute

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At the last meeting of the Cochrane Environmental Action Committee (CEAC) a plan was presented which left in its wake a sense of hope and energy for the challenges we all face in our efforts to honour the environment.

This happened when Eily Sweeney, the newest member of our group, told us about her next project. This will be a cycling journey to Vancouver. It will highlight specific sustainable initiatives that are being taken by individuals and communities, and how these small steps can make a difference to the environment.

This project, named 'Ride the Wave', will profile at least 15 communities including Invermere, Kimberly and Nelson. Importantly, Eily will have a website and blog where she will keep a journal of her experiences and share her observations. She believes this is her key to raising awareness and hope for the future.

Leaving on June 20 and returning in late August, this will indeed be a challenge. In preparation, Eily has been triathlon training since November and commuting by bike within Calgary and in many places in Europe where she traveled for 14 months.

Living in the countryside near Cochrane since childhood has triggered a deep desire to preserve nature. Environmental action first surfaced in Cochrane high school, where she was one of the founding 15 members of the nationally recognized Sustainable Development Project.

Their first phase was to install 30 solar panels and a wind turbine on the school's roof and their goal of raising \$40,000 to make this possible was reached in four short months. She said being involved was inspiring. It instilled a firm belief that

small changes and acting locally can truly make a difference.

After graduating, Eily traveled to Europe to experience the world outside of Canada. Working in England and Scotland and teaching English as a second language in Pamplona, Spain offered life-changing experiences.

A month living and working on a farm in Denmark gave her the opportunity to visit two sustainable communities. One site, Munksøgård, consisted of 100 row houses placed in five dwelling groups each with their own common houses where joint activities, common meals, celebrations and meetings take place. The 250 residents work offsite, relying on their own water purification system and renewable energy sources. They support sustainable 'green' building practices, and car share, all pointing to a society where working with the environment in mind is the norm.

Eily is now going into her second year of studies at Mount Royal College. Last March she organized a very successful environmental fair offering free fluorescent light bulbs and organic pizza. 13 vendors helped increase student awareness of simple, local green options. As well, a major presentation on co-housing encouraged her to connect the experiences of environmental progress in Denmark and Europe towards seeking solutions here in Canada.

By sharing these ideas and highlighting the small initiatives already happening, Eily wants to help in creating policy changes in the government, including the national building code, where more incentives to adhere to sustainable building practices could be offered.