



Working TOGETHER to Improve the Health

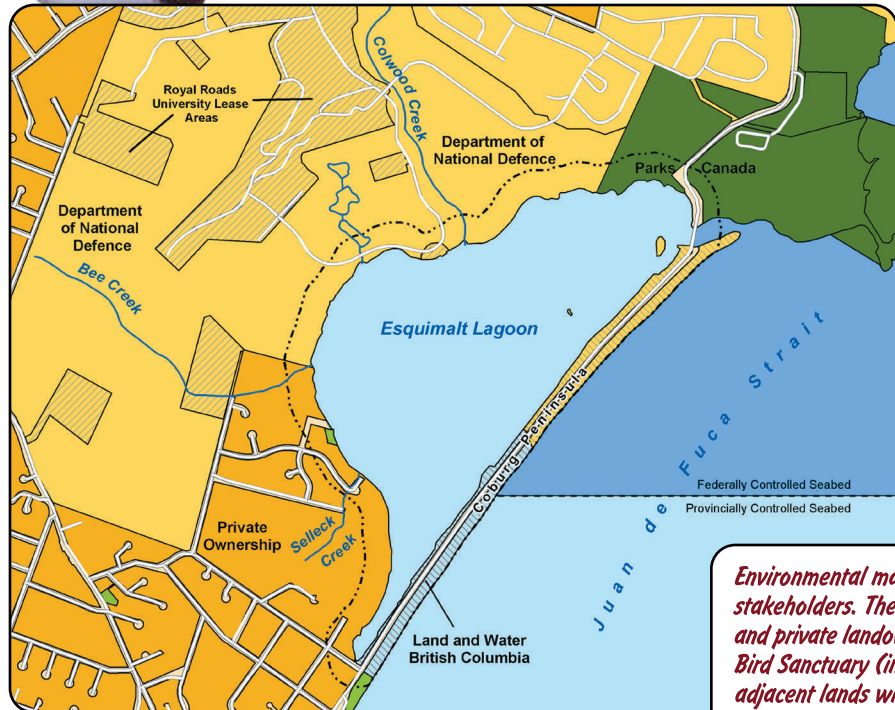
esquimalt lagoon stewardship initiative

of Esquimalt Lagoon





elsi esquimalt lagoon



The Esquimalt Lagoon Stewardship Initiative (ELSI) is a broad coalition of community and environmental groups, government agencies and First Nations working together to protect and improve the health of Esquimalt Lagoon and Coburg Peninsula. This initiative was established because of issues related to the environmental quality of Esquimalt Lagoon and the need for coordination between multiple levels of government involved in managing the area.

ELSI establishes a framework for coordinated environmental management of Esquimalt Lagoon, creates opportunities for collaboration on environmental projects and outreach activities and provides a forum for the exchange and sharing of information.

Environmental management of Esquimalt Lagoon is complex as it involves many stakeholders. The land around the lagoon is owned by various government agencies and private landowners, while the seabed is under provincial jurisdiction. The Migratory Bird Sanctuary (indicated by on the map) encompasses the lagoon and adjacent lands within 100m and is managed by the Canadian Wildlife Service. The City of Colwood leases and manages Coburg Peninsula as a municipal park.

stewardship initiative



ELSI's vision is to protect, enhance and restore the health of Esquimalt Lagoon for present and future generations of people, plants and animals. This will be accomplished by:

- promoting and supporting lagoon stewardship and education
- preventing further loss or destruction of habitat and wildlife
- reducing contaminant inputs to the lagoon
- promoting environmentally protective recreational uses in the lagoon area
- promoting environmentally protective land uses within the lagoon watershed
- promoting restoration of degraded areas



Esquimalt Lagoon is located just east of Esquimalt Harbour near the southern tip of Vancouver Island

ELSI Partners

- BC Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection
- City of Colwood
- CRD Parks
- Department of National Defence (CFB Esquimalt)
- Environment Canada (Canadian Wildlife Service)
- Esquimalt Lagoon Enhancement Association
- Esquimalt Nation
- Fisheries and Oceans Canada
- Habitat Acquisition Trust
- Local residents
- Pacific Center Family Services
- Parks Canada
- Royal Roads University
- Songhees Nation
- University of Victoria, Restoration of Natural Systems Program
- Victoria and Esquimalt Harbours Environmental Action Program
- Victoria Natural History Society
- West Shore Chamber of Commerce (Tourism)

ecological features

Esquimalt Lagoon is regionally significant due to its unique ecology and beauty, its designation as a federal Migratory Bird Sanctuary and its importance to Esquimalt and Songhees First Nations as a place where they exercise their special and ancient relationship to the land, water and natural resources. The lagoon ecosystem provides important habitats for a diverse community of plants and animals and is a popular recreation destination within the region.



There are 15 hectares of eelgrass in the lagoon
Eelgrass

Eelgrass beds in the lagoon provide rearing habitat for sea-run Cutthroat trout, Coho salmon smolts and juvenile Chinook. Eelgrass, a key fish and invertebrate habitat, is among the richest and most productive of all marine ecosystems.



Black Oystercatchers are sometimes seen feeding at the lagoon entrance

Intertidal Bivalve Beds

Intertidal gravel bars at the entrance to the lagoon support large populations of butter and littleneck clams, as well as mussels and oysters. Historically, the lagoon was an important shellfish-harvesting site for First Nations.

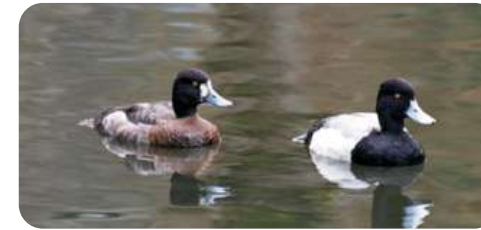


Fringe Marsh

Fringe marshes in the lagoon provide birds and other animals with food, shelter and nesting habitat. These, and other wetland areas, act as natural buffers by helping to filter contaminants from urban runoff before they reach the lagoon waters.



Fringe marsh along the lagoon



The lagoon is an important staging area for migratory birds, such as Lesser Scaups

Key Bird Habitat

The lagoon ecosystem supports a highly diverse and abundant bird population. The tidal lagoon, surrounding forests and wetland areas offer birds important shelter, nesting sites and ample food sources.



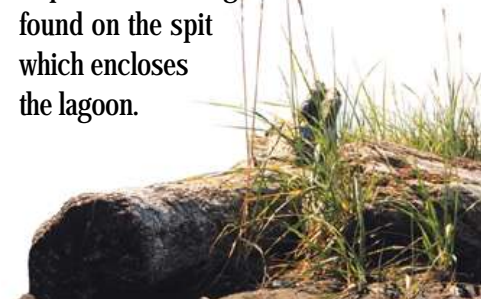
Barred Owls live in the forested areas around the lagoon



The root structure of dune grasses help stabilize the beach

Dune Habitat

Coastal grasses provide favourable habitat for many migratory and resident bird species and play an important role in maintaining beach-dune stability. Although much of the dune grass habitat in the lagoon has been degraded by trampling and the invasion of exotic plant species, fragments of this important and fragile habitat can still be found on the spit which encloses the lagoon.



environmental CONCERNS

Increased popularity as a recreation area and ongoing development throughout the lagoon watershed have had an effect on the environmental quality of Esquimalt Lagoon and the wildlife it supports.



Degradation of Water and Sediment Quality

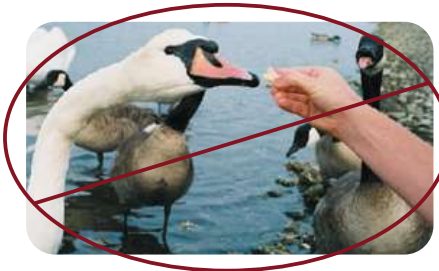
Contaminants entering the lagoon come from many sources within the 1850 ha watershed, including urban runoff, yard and garden chemicals and malfunctioning septic systems. Contaminant inputs have been linked to dense algal blooms that periodically occur in the lagoon and to fish and crab deaths. Shellfish harvesting is currently prohibited at Esquimalt Lagoon due to contamination.

Esquimalt Lagoon is closed to shellfish harvesting due to contamination



Keep wild birds wild! If you must feed the birds, please use bird seed - bread has low nutritional value and can make birds sick

Introduced species, such as Mute swans, compete with native species for resources - they should not be encouraged to make the lagoon their home



Disturbance of Wildlife

Birds and wildlife are often disturbed by visitors and residents who are unaware of the potentially harmful effects of their actions, such as walking through the intertidal areas at low tide, letting dogs run off the leash, getting too close to wildlife or feeding birds inappropriate food items.

Dogs should be leashed within the Migratory Bird Sanctuary - dogs that are NOT leashed can scare and disturb the wildlife



Much of the dune grass habitat has been degraded by trampling

Degradation and Loss of Habitat:

Trampling by vehicles and pedestrians has resulted in the degradation and loss of dune and fringe marsh habitats as well as intertidal plants and animals.

Residential and institutional development has altered the shoreline resulting in the loss of important habitats such as fringe marshes and wetlands. In other areas, non-native species such as Scotch Broom and Himalayan Blackberry are encroaching



Scotch Broom is an invasive species that can suppress many native plants

a plan for stewardship

A coordinated restoration and stewardship program for Esquimalt Lagoon is necessary to prevent further loss and destruction of habitat and disturbance of wildlife, reduce contaminant inputs to the lagoon and promote environmentally protective recreation and land uses in and around Esquimalt Lagoon. The ELSI partners have developed a stewardship plan for the lagoon that is designed to promote community stewardship and implement solution-oriented actions that will protect, enhance and restore the health and beauty of this significant ecosystem. The main components of the Esquimalt Lagoon Stewardship Plan deal with jurisdiction, land use and development; recreational uses; and outreach and education. Corresponding subcommittees have been established to implement the components of the plan.



If you would like more information on ELSI,
its projects or volunteer programs,
please visit our website or contact:

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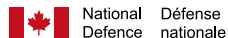
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you can help!

Whether you live within the watershed or are a visitor to the lagoon, you can help preserve and protect this special area. ELSI can provide you with more information on actions you can take to minimize potential impacts to the lagoon and its inhabitants.

ELSI is often in need of volunteers to help out with implementing the stewardship plan. Contact us for more information and become part of the Esquimalt Lagoon Stewardship Initiative.

