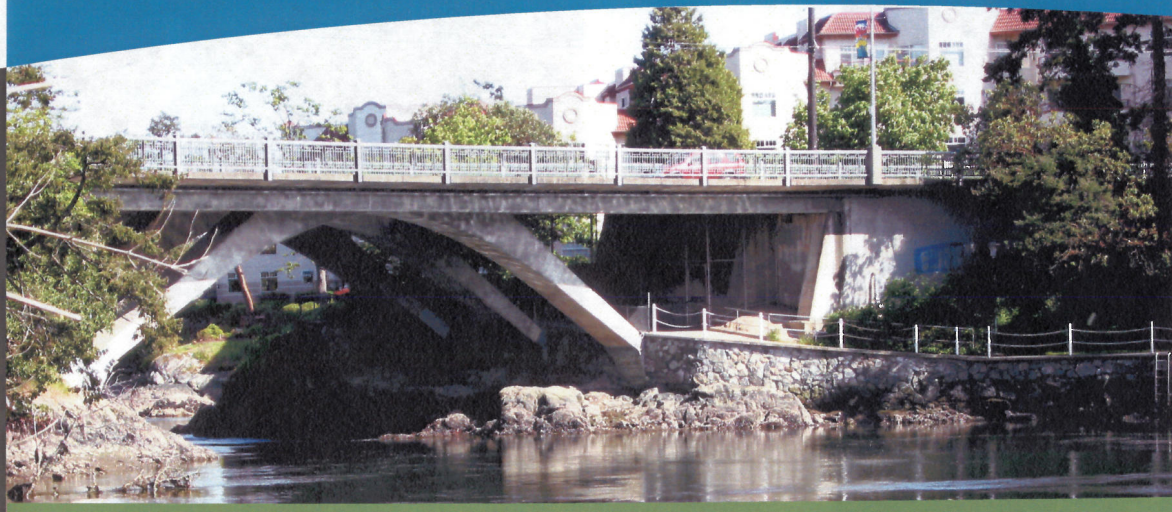


Our Vision

Promotion of a healthy environment for all life in the Gorge Waterway Portage Inlet, and their watershed and communities for the well-being of present and future generations.

Our Goals

- provide a forum for the exchange and sharing of information regarding the Gorge Waterway, Portage Inlet and their watersheds
- promote education and awareness programs on appropriate land and water use
- establish and encourage activities that show care and concern for the natural environment



The Gorge Waterway Initiative

Background

The Gorge Waterway Initiative (GWI) is a collaborative, community-driven group of organizations working to protect, enhance and restore the natural and cultural features of the Gorge Waterway, Portage Inlet and the surrounding watersheds.

The GWI was established in 2005 when organizations with a common interest in the waterways and their watersheds agreed to work together. As a 'group of groups' that represents a broad array of interests, members of the Gorge Waterway Initiative (GWI) includes representatives from community and environmental groups, landowners, local governments and local government environmental advisory committees, and recreational users. Collectively, they act as a community-based, multi-stakeholder body working to address environmental issues in the waterways and their watersheds and to foster partnerships between municipalities, community groups, landowners, universities and colleges and others.

The GWI partners created a common vision and goals for the waterway and established a community stewardship strategy and a communications plan for the initiative. The committee, which operates by consensus, meets monthly to facilitate program implementation and to share information. Working subcommittees are established when needed to move GWI projects and activities forward. The GWI is facilitated by the CRDs Stormwater, Harbours and Watersheds program and a part-time coordinator position has been established to provide administrative support and to manage projects.

During 2007, the GWI improved community appreciation and stewardship for the waterway through the development of outreach materials and at community events, initiated projects to restore habitat along the waterway and worked to protect threatened and endangered wildlife on the waterway.

Initiatives and Projects

Community Events

The GWI hosted two free, public Speakers Series events about the Gorge Waterway. The first event featured Yogi Carolsfeld of World Fisheries Trust and Tom Rutherford of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans speaking about the fish that use the

Above photo: The landmark Gorge Bridge spans the narrows of the Gorge Waterway

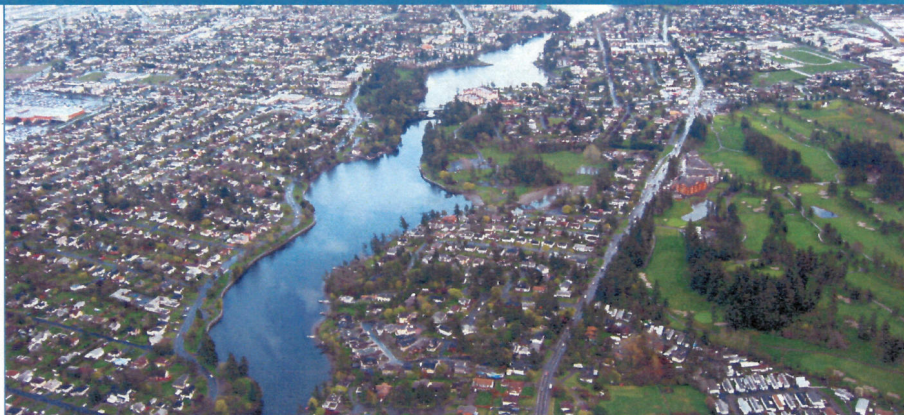
GWl Partners

Community Members

- Burnside Gorge Community Association
- Friends of Cuthbert Holmes
- Gorge Tillicum Community Association
- Gorge Waterway Action Society
- Portage Inlet Protection Society
- Portage Inlet Sanctuary Colquitz Estuary Society
- POLIS Institute on Ecological Governance, University of Victoria
- Seachange Marine Conservation Society
- Seaquaria in Schools
- The Land Conservancy
- Habitat Acquisition Trust
- Veins of Life Watershed Society
- Victoria Canoe and Kayak Club
- Victoria West Community Association
- World Fisheries Trust

Local Government Members

- Capital Regional District
- City of Victoria
- Victoria Shoreline and Environmental Advisory Committee
- District of Saanich
- Township of Esquimalt
- Esquimalt Parks and Recreation Commission
- Town of View Royal
- View Royal Parks, Recreation and Environment Advisory



Aerial view of the Gorge Waterway

waterway and nearby creeks. They discussed the local and global conditions that are impacting local fish populations and how our community can help protect these species. The second event, entitled "Underwater World of the Gorge", featured marine biologist Kitty Lloyd, Cathy Carolsfeld of the Seaquaria in Schools program, and Jody Watson, CRD Harbours and Watershed coordinator.

They explored the underwater habitats in the Gorge and the fascinating creatures that live there. A live aquarium full of species in the Gorge was set up for the public to discover these wonderful creatures. Both events were attended by more than 70 members of the public.

The GWl partners participated in the Vic West Community Fest and the Canada Day Picnic on the Gorge Waterway.

The GWl brought the interactive model of the watershed that drains to Portage Inlet and the Gorge Waterway in conjunction with the GWl display

Volunteer working on the purple martin nest box program

and the Seaquaria live marine touch tank. The watershed model demonstrates how and where pollution occurs around the watersheds and the waterway, promotes watershed awareness and aquatic stewardship, and educates children and adults on things they can do to help protect and restore our waterways.

Outreach Tools

The GWl is interested in promoting community stewardship and restoration of the waterway and focused much effort in developing outreach tools and events to achieve this goal.

The GWl partners are developing infosheets that provide more detailed information about important ecological and cultural values of the waterway and offer

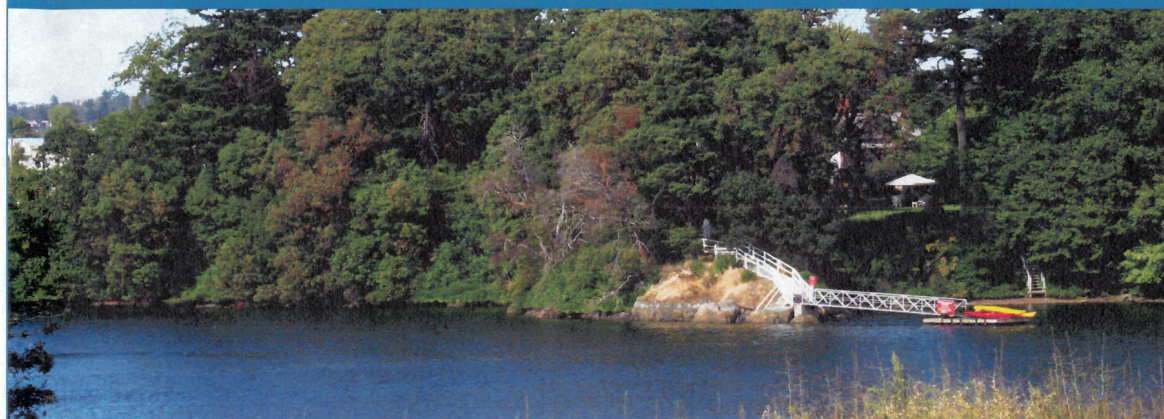
tips to help waterway users and residents protect those features. In 2007, three new information sheets were developed that highlight First Nations, which connection to the waterway, the watersheds and the water quality in the Gorge and a "Who Do You Call" contact list for the appropriate authority for things like oil spills, wildlife and fisheries concerns and bylaw infractions.

The GWl continued work on an extensive website for the initiative that provides links to detailed information about the history and ecology of the Portage Inlet and the Gorge Waterway and to community stewardship information. Visit us at www.gorgewaterway.ca

Purple Martin Nest Box Program

The GWl is helping reestablish nesting colonies of Purple Martins (*Progne subis*) along the Gorge Waterway. Historically, Martins bred in Vancouver and the Lower Fraser Valley and





Point Ellice House woodland shore restoration site (photograph by Kitty Lloyd)

eastern Vancouver Island from Sooke to Campbell River; today they are restricted to six sites on Vancouver Island (Victoria Harbour, Esquimalt Harbour, Cowichan River Estuary, Nanaimo River Estuary, New Castle Island and Ladysmith Harbour).

Purple Martins are currently on the BC Environment Wildlife Branch Red List as a candidate for threatened or endangered status due to its small population size, its historical decline in numbers and range, and the continuing loss of its nesting habitat. An active program of nest box establishment and maintenance is considered critical for their survival in the province.

The GWI initiated a nest box establishment program to install purple martin nest boxes at four new locations along the waterway. Through this program, the GWI provides willing homeowners with nest boxes, helps to install them in the appropriate location and provides training on nest box maintenance. The homeowner is responsible for the annual maintenance which includes cleaning the nest boxes,

plugging the entrances in the fall to prevent starling or sparrow from taking over the nest, and reopening the nest when the martins return in the spring.

In 2007, the GWI identified potential locations for nest box placement and discussed the program with interested homeowners. Four purple martin nest boxes were installed on the docks of an eager homeowner on the Lower Gorge. The hope is that young adult martins from the successful nest site at the Gorge Rowing Centre will use this new site in 2008.

Point Ellice House Shoreline Restoration

The GWI is working with the Capital Mental Health Association and the Point Ellice House (PEH) Society to restore native vegetation along 90 m of shoreline at Point Ellice House historic site. The restoration site a steeply sloped natural shoreline with pocket beaches and rocky outcrops along the Gorge Waterway and is a unique remnant of the natural arbutus, Douglas fir, big leaf maple for-

est ecosystems that historically lined the shores of the Gorge.

The forest is nearing the end of its life and the native woodland understory is severely overgrown with invasive ivy, holly, laurel and periwinkle. Dense stands of ivy overhanging the shoreline crowd out marine grasses and compromise the stability of the clay banks. The objectives of the restoration project are to create an overstory with trees of multiple age classes, remove the invasive species, and replant native understory vegetation and ground cover to improve the biodiversity and ecological functioning of the site.

In 2007, the partners completed the inventory and mapping for the site, developed a restoration plan, completed an Heritage Alteration permit and submitted funding applications to continue with the next phases of the project.

Net Pen Fishery

In 2007, the Gorge Waterway Initiative initiated discussions with the Amalgamated Salmon Enhancement Society, the prov-

The Gorge Waterway Initiative has an area of interest that includes the Gorge Waterway, a six-kilometre arm of the sea that stretches from Victoria Harbour to the Craigflower Bridge, Portage Inlet and their watersheds. Spanning four municipalities – Victoria, Saanich, Esquimalt and View Royal – the area is a tidal estuary and a federal migratory bird sanctuary that supports a biologically diverse population of plants and animals.



Kayakers enjoying the Gorge Waterway

initial Ministry of the Environment and Department of Fisheries and Oceans regarding a pink salmon net pen that is proposed for Ogden Point, Victoria Harbour. The objectives of the proposed net pen are to revitalize a near-shore salmon fishery, encourage renewed public interest in fishing and promote community involvement with salmon. The GWI raised concerns regarding the protection of the existing salmon and herring stocks, and the potential establishment of pink salmon run in local creeks.

The waterway provides important eelgrass and estuary habitats which function as nursery and rearing habitat for existing runs

of wild coho and chum salmon, and sea-run cutthroat trout. Two streams that flow into Portage Inlet – the Craigflower Creek and the Colquitz River – support spawning populations of these fish which is a rare asset for urban streams.

Pink salmon have always migrated along the Victoria waterfront on their way to the Fraser River; however, they have never spawned in our local creeks. The proposed net pen at Ogden Point raises a major concern that the fry, which imprint to their release site, will return to Ogden Point in search of a creek to spawn.

The GWI has requested assurance from senior levels of government that the release of pink salmon will not have a negative impact on native salmon populations in local creeks.

Consideration of the proposed net pen fishery was voluntarily delayed by the proponents until further consultation with local groups was completed and a response from senior levels of government received.



Colquitz River supports spawning populations of wild salmon and cutthroat trout (photograph by Rob Boech)

For more information, contact:

Gorge Waterway Initiative Coordinator
250.360.3065
info@gorgewaterway.ca
www.gorgewaterway.ca

625 Fisgard Street
PO Box 1000
Victoria, BC V8W 2S6



Outlook for 2008

In 2008, GWI will focus on:

- ongoing communication and outreach with waterway and watershed residents
- promoting activities that engage the community in stewardship of the Gorge Waterway
- obtaining funds to implement the Point Ellice House Shoreline Restoration project
- installing Purple Martin nest boxes at three more sites in cooperation with willing property owners
- consulting with senior levels of government and the Amalgamated Conservation Society regarding the concern on the proposed pink salmon net pen
- providing coordinated input into the review of Saanich Official Community plan.