

## Our Vision

Promotion of a healthy environment for all life in the Gorge Waterway, Portage Inlet, and their watersheds 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



Upper Gorge Waterway

## 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.**

Since formed in 2005, the GWI has provided a framework for a coordinated approach to environmental stewardship of the Gorge Waterway, Portage Inlet and their watersheds through information sharing and fostering partnerships. This collaborative group brings together a broad array of interests and its members include representatives from community and environmental groups, landowners, local governments and local government advisory committees, and recreational users.

The GWI is led by a consensus-based steering committee that is responsible for guiding the implementation of the Gorge Waterway Stewardship strategy. Working subcommittees are established to move GWI projects and activities forward. The GWI is coordinated by the CRD's Stormwater, Harbours and Watersheds program and a part-time coordinator initiates

and manages projects, seeks funding and provides administrative support.

During 2008, 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 partners hosted their display, the interactive watershed model, and the Seaquaria touch tank at community events including the Vic West Community Fest, the Canada Day Picnic on the Gorge, and Rivers Day at Cuthbert Holmes Park. The GWI was a key organizing partner for the 2008 Ocean's Day celebration held in cooperation with the Township of Esquimalt and in celebration of the opening of the new Gorge Waterway Discovery Centre in Esquimalt Gorge Park.

The GWI continued with the Gorge Waterway Speakers Series in 2008. The first event featured Nikki Wright of Seachange Marine Conservation Society speaking about the diversity and beauty of eelgrass meadows and their ecological importance in the Gorge Waterway. The second

## GW 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
- Point Ellice House Society
- POLIS Institute on Ecological Governance, University of Victoria
- Seachange Marine Conservation Society
- Seaquaria in Schools
- The Land Conservancy
- Habitat Acquisition Trust
- 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

event, held in conjunction with Oceans Day events in Esquimalt Gorge Park, featured Cheryl Bryce of Songhees Nation. Cheryl led a walk along the waterway and talked about its importance to local First Nations.

## Outreach Tools

The GWI continued to promote community stewardship of the waterway with the launch of a new website that provides information about GWI projects and initiatives and links to detailed information about the history, ecology and stewardship of the Gorge Waterway and Portage Inlet.

Three new infosheets about the Gorge were also created. The latest in the series highlights:

- First Nations and their connection to the waterway, watersheds
- watershed and the water quality in the Gorge
- a "Who Do You Call" list identifying the appropriate authority to contact for a variety of scenarios, such as oil spills, dead wildlife, fisheries violations and bylaw infractions

All six of the GWI Infosheets series can be downloaded from the GWI website.

Visit us at:

[www.gorgewaterway.ca](http://www.gorgewaterway.ca)

Gorge Waterway Discovery Centre  
in Esquimalt Gorge Park.



Cheryl Bryce of Songhees Nation discussed the Legend of Camosung and the Songhees connection to the Gorge Waterway and the reversing falls under the Gorge Bridge.

## Gorge Waterway Discovery Centre

Many of the GWI partners are working with the Township of Esquimalt and SeaChange Marine Conservation Society to renovate a building in Esquimalt Gorge Park to use for environmental programming. The partners share a common vision of a space for youth and adults to engage in environmental education and restoration initiatives centred on the connections between forest, wetland, stream and marine environments, and the urban environment.

The Gorge Waterway Discovery Centre opened to community and school programming on June 8, 2008 as part of Ocean's Day celebrations at Esquimalt Gorge Park. While only open two afternoons a week, more

than 1500 people visited the GWDC in a 6 month period, proving the feasibility and need for such a space in the Capital Region. Its location on Victoria's unique and beautiful Gorge Waterway, with a mature forest and restored creek surrounding it make the GWDC an ideal location for a regional environmental learning centre.

The long term vision of the GWDC is to retrofit the existing building to demonstrate sustainable building features that could be implemented by homeowners. Through architecture, innovative design and artistic features, the building will demonstrate water and energy conservation and 'nature by design' principles, while providing urban interpretive and learning opportunities for visitors.







Volunteers, like this crew from Diageo Canada, contributed 930 hours of their time to remove more than 10 tonnes of invasive plant species.

## Point Ellice House Shoreline Restoration

The GWI is working on a major project to restore native vegetation along 90 m of shoreline at Point Ellice House. This important restoration site, located on a diverse natural shore with pocket beaches and rocky outcrops, is a unique remnant of the native arbutus, Douglas fir and Garry oak forest ecosystem that historically lined the Gorge. The objectives of the restoration project are to:

- remove invasive plants;
- replant native trees, shrubs and ground cover; and
- improve the biodiversity and ecological functioning of the site.

Many of the mature trees on this site are nearing the end of their

life and the woodland understory is severely overgrown with invasive plants (mainly ivy, holly, spurge laurel and periwinkle), which have choked out most of the native shrubs, young trees and ground cover. Dense stands of overhanging ivy at the water's edge crowd out marine marsh plants impacting the tidal fringe marsh that used to exist along the shore. Decades of invasive species growth has resulted in a loss of habitat diversity and has compromised the ecological functioning of the site.

In 2008, the partners worked with a fantastic group of community volunteers and supporters on the removal of invasive species from the site (see side bar). From August to December, our generous volunteers spent a total of 930 hours to remove more

than 10 tonnes of invasive plants from the site. With this level of community involvement and volunteer commitment, significant progress on the removal of invasive species was achieved..

## Interpretive Signage

The GWI is partnering with parks staff at the Town of View Royal, Township of Esquimalt, District of Saanich and City of Victoria to develop interpretive signage along the waterway. This project will create and install a series of interpretive signs around the Gorge Waterway and Portage Inlet that highlight:

- key ecological features of the waterway

## Thank you!

### *Community Volunteers*

- 3rd Douglas Sea Scouts
- Esquimalt High School Leadership and ESCAPE programs
- University of Victoria Students
- Camosun College Students
- Numerous local residents

### *Government and Business Supporters*

- City of Victoria Parks staff
- Ellice Recycle Ltd.
- Heritage Branch
- Point Ellice House Staff

### *Financial Supporters*

- Evergreen Walmart Green Grant
- Diageo Canada
- Capital Regional District

Before ivy removal.



Volunteers removing invasives.



After ivy removal.





A sunny afternoon at Colquitz River

- important historical points of interest with archival photos
- First Nations cultural information
- maps of the waterway, watersheds, trails and parks along the waterway

In 2008, an overall strategy for the number of signs, their location and content was developed. Funding was received from the municipalities and the CRD to develop a graphic design template for the signs. Further funding will be required to reproduce and install the signs.

For more information, contact:

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## Land Use and Development

The GWI conducted a coordinated review of the RioCan development at Tillicum Mall and the proposed residential towers adjacent to Colquitz River and Cuthbert Holmes Park. The GWI raised concerns with RioCan. Many of the issues raised were considered and the development proposal adjusted. It is expected that this project will be submitted to Saanich for the formal review process in 2009.

The GWI submitted extensive comments on the Saanich Official Community Plan revisions. The GWI also expressed concerns regarding the berming of Panama Flats, an important agricultural floodplain for the Colquitz River, in a letter to Island Berry Farms.

## Purple Martin Nest Box Program

The Purple Martin (*Progne subis*) is currently on the BC Environment Wildlife Branch Red List as a candidate for threatened or endangered status due to its small population size, historical decline in numbers and range, and the continuing loss of nesting habitat. An active program of nest box

establishment and maintenance is considered critical to the Purple Martin's survival in the province.

The GWI is working to help re-establish nesting colonies of Purple Martins along the Gorge Waterway and Portage Inlet through the placement of Purple Martin nest boxes at four locations. Through this program, the GWI provides willing homeowners with nest boxes, helps to install them in the appropriate location and provides training on annual nest box maintenance.

In the spring of 2008, the first pair of Purple Martins made their home in nest boxes installed last year on the lower Gorge Waterway. The GWI continues to identify additional nest box sites further up the Gorge and talk with property owners interested in this program.

Purple Martin guards its two chicks which successfully fledged in the spring.



## Outlook for 2009

In 2009, GWI will focus on:

- ongoing communication and outreach with waterway and watershed residents.
- planning for public input to an overall strategy for the Gorge Waterway and Portage Inlet.
- installing Purple Martin nest boxes at three more sites in cooperation with willing property owners.
- continuing support of GWDC initiatives
- continuing the removal of invasive species and replanting of native plants at the Point Ellice shoreline restoration project.
- providing coordinated input into review of View Royal and Victoria Official Community Plans.
- completing and installing interpretive signs along the waterway.