

2009 Annual Report

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



Sea Scouts receiving the World Conservation Award for their efforts restoring Point Ellice Shoreline.

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.

GWI provides a unique framework for a coordinated approach to environmental stewardship of the Gorge Waterway, Portage Inlet and their watersheds through information sharing and fostering partnerships. GWI's members include representatives from community and environmental groups, landowners, local governments, local government advisory committees and recreational users, ensuring a broad array of interests are represented.

The GWI is led by a consensus-based steering committee that is responsible for guiding the implementation of the Gorge Waterway Stewardship strategy. The GWI is facilitated by the Capital Regional District (CRD) and a part-time coordinator initiates and manages projects, seeks funding and provides administrative support.

During 2009, the GWI improved community appreciation and stewardship for the waterway, provided input on development projects, conducted projects to restore habitat and worked to protect threatened and endangered wildlife on the waterway.

2009 Accomplishments

Community Outreach

The GWI continued to host the popular Gorge Waterway Speakers Series, a series of free public lectures on various waterway and watershed topics. The first event featured Jeremy Gye and Judith Cullington, from the Urban Forest Stewardship Initiative, who presented on the Woods of our Waterway. At the "Heron on the Gorge" event, Trudy Chatwin, species at risk biologist from the BC Ministry of Environment, discussed heron biology and provided a close-up look at adults, chicks and nests during a tour of the heron rookery at Cuthbert Holmes Park. The third in the 2009 series showcased Grant Keddie, curator of archaeology at the Royal BC Museum, who shared stories and evidence of First Nations use of the area for the past 25,000 years. Over 300 people attended these events.

The GWI also hosted their information display, the interactive watershed model of the waterway, and the Seaquaria marine touch tank at community events including Vic West Community Fest, Canada Day Picnic on the Gorge, Connecting for Conservation, Rivers Day and Oceans Day.

An information sheet highlighting the shoreline restoration efforts at Point Ellice was developed. This is the seventh in a series of GWI Infosheets providing detailed information about important ecological and cultural values of the waterway. The whole series is available on the GWI website.

GWI 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
- 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 Commission

The GWI continued to promote community stewardship of the waterway through the website. It 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.

Visit us at:

www.gorgewaterway.ca

Gorge Waterway Discovery Centre

The GWI is a proud supporter of the Gorge Waterway Discovery Centre (GWDC), located in Esquimalt-Gorge Park. The Centre houses interactive exhibits such as a marine aquarium and touch tank filled with underwater creatures from the Gorge Waterway, watershed model and many other displays.

The GWDC offered community and school programming delivered by local biologists, students and volunteers throughout 2009, bringing a total of 2200 people through its doors during public hours. Another 650 students participated in school programs at the GWDC.

This educational amenity on the Gorge is the result of partners including the World Fisheries Trust, Seaquaria in Schools, GWI,

and Township of Esquimalt Parks and Recreation Services working together for environmental education programming.

The partners share a common vision of a space for youth and adults to engage in environmental education and restoration initiatives focused on the connections between forest, wetland, stream and marine environments.

In 2009, an Infrastructure Planning Grant made it possible to develop conceptual drawings for expansion of the center, however multi-year funding for programming has been challenging.

Purple Martin Nest Box Program

The GWI is working to re-establish nesting colonies of Purple Martin (*Progne subis*) along the Gorge Waterway and Portage Inlet. Purple Martin is a provincially red-listed species due to its small population size, its historical decline in numbers and range, and continuing loss of its nesting habitat. Through a Purple Martin nest

box 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 2009, five pairs of Purple Martins successfully fledged 13 young from nest boxes installed as part of this program. Two additional sites for nest box installation were also identified.

Land & Water Use

Members of the GWI participated in community consultation with the District of Saanich regarding the replacement of Admirals Road Bridge over the Colquitz River. GWI raised concern over the loss of several Garry oaks, amount of fill required, bridge design and recommended that service cables be located under the bridge rather than overhead to prevent bird strikes, and the use of rain gardens in the overall design.

GWI kept partners and members updated regarding the berming of Panama Flats, an important agricultural

GWI outreach programs partner with Seachange and Gorge Waterway Discovery Centre to teach about marine life in the Gorge.



floodplain for the Colquitz River.

Concern was raised about the increasing number of derelict boats anchored in the Gorge. Inquiries to different government agencies show a major gap in jurisdictions and unwillingness to address this issue. The GWI is investigating what other regions are doing (Sidney, Esquimalt Harbour, Vancouver) and will follow this issue up in 2010.

Members were kept up to date on developments and community meetings regarding the Victoria International Marina proposed for the Victoria Harbour. Members are concerned that a large marina will have significant environmental impacts and would severely restrict access to and use of the waterway by non-motorized boats. Individual members were encouraged to



The volunteer appreciation event on April 24, 2009 was fun for all ages.

attend community meetings and send their concerns directly to the appropriate agencies.

2008, more than 1500 hours of volunteer labour have removed nearly 15 tonnes of invasives from the site.

Point Ellice Shoreline Restoration

The GWI is working on a major project to restore native vegetation along 130 meters of shoreline at Point Ellice House. This important restoration site, located on a diverse natural shore with pocket beaches and rocky outcrops along the Gorge Waterway, supports a unique remnant of the natural arbutus, Douglas fir and Garry oak forest ecosystems that once lined its shores. In early 2009, volunteers removed massive amounts of invasive plants and replanted with native vegetation. Since the project started in

In April, GWI partners hosted an Appreciation Event to honour the many volunteers who have generously donated their time and energy to this project and to thank organizations who have supported the project. Tours of the restoration site and of the historic Point Ellice House were offered to volunteers. Local politicians and Heritage Branch staff were on hand to thank the 75 volunteers and sponsors in attendance for their efforts.

In the fall, volunteers began planting native trees and shrubs in the cleared areas to help restore this beautiful place. Work to remove remaining invasive species and replant with native vegetation will continue over the next few years.

After invasive species removal, volunteers planted native trees and shrubs along the Point Ellice Shoreline.



Thank you!

Community Volunteers

- Esquimalt High School Leadership and ESCAPE programs
- University of Victoria Students
- Community Service Workers
- Numerous local residents

Government and Business Supporters

- Deloitte
- Ellice Recycle Ltd.
- BC Heritage Branch
- Point Ellice House Staff

Financial Supporters

- Evergreen Walmart Green Grant
- Capital Regional District

You are in a Migratory Bird Sanctuary

THE GORGE WATERWAY AND Portage Inlet are part of the federally designated Victoria Harbour Migratory Bird Sanctuary. The waterway is on the Pacific Flyway for birds migrating between northern breeding grounds and southern wintering areas, making this an important resting stop on their long migrations.

Both resident and migratory birds depend on the fish, shellfish and other

marine species for food. The shoreline and intertidal areas provide important habitat for nesting and resting.

YOU can help the birds by:

- Keeping pets on leash
- Keeping your cats indoors
- Staying away from birds and nests

For more information or to report infractions contact the Canadian Wildlife Service: 1-877-768-6904.

All images courtesy of Marie O'Shaughnessy



Pictured above is one of the interpretive signs to be located in Victoria.

Interpretive Signage

The GWI and municipal staff partners at the Town of View Royal, Township of Esquimalt, District of Saanich and City of Victoria made significant progress on a project to create a series of 12 interpretive signs around the Gorge Waterway that will highlight key ecological and cultural features of the waterway.

A large 3-paneled interpretive sign will be located in each of the four partnering municipalities. These colourful and uniquely designed signs will feature a large

map of the waterway, general ecology and history information and will be topped with an artful metal structure. Design and manufacture of these signs was completed in late 2009.

Eight smaller signs focusing on the key ecological and cultural aspects of the waterway were also designed. These signs will be placed in specific areas according to their interpretive values with two small signs in each municipality.

The small signs will highlight the following features:

- The Gorge: Recreation Destination

- The Gorge Narrows
- The Working Waterway
- Migratory Bird Sanctuary
- Underwater Bounty
- Early Settler History
- The Natural Shoreline
- Invasive Species

Manufacture of the small signs will be completed in early 2010 and the entire series will be installed around the waterway following a public unveiling ceremony for the whole project.

For more information, contact:

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Outlook for 2010

In 2010, 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.
- planning for public input to an overall strategy for the Gorge Waterway and Portage Inlet.
- continuing the removal of invasive species and replanting of native plants at the Point Ellice shoreline restoration project
- continuing support of GWDC initiatives
- installing Purple Martin nest boxes at two new sites on the waterway
- providing coordinated input into review of View Royal and Victoria Official Community Plans.
- completing and installing interpretive signs along the waterway.