

2010 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



Interpretive sign in Victoria near the Selkirk Trestle lets people know that the Gorge Waterway is part of a migratory bird sanctuary.

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 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.

2010 Accomplishments

A highlight for the GWI was the completion and installation of 12 interpretive signs along the waterway. Another achievement was receiving the Saanich Environmental Award for volunteer organization. Throughout the year, the GWI continued to:

- improve community appreciation and stewardship for the waterway
- protect threatened and endangered wildlife on the waterway
- provide input on development projects
- conduct habitat restoration projects

Community Outreach

The GWI continued to host the popular Gorge Waterway Speakers Series, a free public lecture series on waterway and watershed topics. University of British Columbia graduate student Cait Nelson gave a presentation about the ecology, habitat use and contaminant exposure in river otters of the Gorge Waterway and Victoria area. The second event was an evening focused on invasive plants, led by City of Victoria environmental technician Fred Hook. Fred led a walk through Cecelia Ravine, a riparian area heavily infested with many invasive species. He followed with an illustrated talk focused on life cycles and appropriate eradication and management techniques for each species.

Visit us at:
www.gorgewaterway.ca

The GWI hosted their information display, the interactive Gorge watershed model, and the

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
- 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
- District of Saanich
- Township of Esquimalt
- Town of View Royal
- View Royal Parks, Recreation and Environment Advisory Commission

Seaquaria marine touch tank at community events including Vic West Community Fest, Canada Day on the Gorge, Selkirk Waterfront Festival, Connecting for Conservation, Rivers Day and Oceans Day.

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.

Interpretive Signage

On June 15th, an unveiling ceremony for the GWI interpretive signs was held on the Galloping Goose Trail near the Selkirk Trestle. A large crowd of GWI members, community partners and the general public was on hand to celebrate as municipal councillors from the Town of View Royal, Township of Esquimalt, District of Saanich and City of Victoria unveiled the signs that were to be installed in parks and public spaces along the Gorge Waterway and Portage Inlet. The series of 12 signs highlight

key ecological and cultural features of the waterway.

Four large 3-paneled interpretive signs are being installed in public parks on the Gorge and Portage Inlet, one in each of the partnering municipalities. These uniquely designed signs feature a large map of the waterway, information about the ecology and history of the waterway and are topped with creative silhouette cutouts of waterway wildlife. The eight smaller signs each focus on a particular ecological or cultural aspect of the waterway. The GWI has received an overwhelmingly positive response about the signs from the community.

Gorge Waterway Education Centre

The GWI continued to support the Gorge Waterway Education Centre (GWEC) in Esquimalt Gorge Park. This educational amenity on the Gorge is the result of a partnership that includes World Fisheries Trust, Seaquaria in Schools, GWI and Township of Esquimalt Parks and Recreation Services.

GWEC houses interactive exhibits, including a marine aquarium and touch tank with local marine life of the Gorge Waterway, interactive watershed model and many other displays. The centre offers community and school programming delivered by local biologists, students and volunteers. Since opening in 2008, the GWEC has had more than 7,200 visitors and program participants.

Two innovative new programs were initiated in 2010 at the GWEC. The Care of the Gorge Monitoring program provides training and equipment to measure and record basic parameters such as temperature, salinity, dissolved oxygen and turbidity on a regular basis at a variety of locations throughout the Gorge and Portage Inlet. This data is important in establishing a baseline of environmental information about the Gorge. School and college groups and community volunteers have participated in this program.

The other new program at GWEC is an inventory and survey of the native Olympia oyster, a federally designated "species of special concern". Research on

this species will provide the basic information needed to help conserve and manage this urban population of oysters.

Despite these successes, funding to renovate the GWEC building and continue public programming there remains a challenge.

Municipal councillors John Luton, Victoria; Randall Garrison, Esquimalt; Paul Gerrard-Saanich; John Rogers, View Royal; unveiled the GWI interpretive signs at a celebratory event in June.



Purple Martin Nest Box Program

The GWI completed the project to provide nesting boxes for residents along the waterway to help re-establish nesting colonies of the provincially red-listed Purple Martin. Local community grants supported installation of 20 nest boxes in addition to the existing ones where Purple Martins have successfully raised fledglings. The nest boxes are now located in five locations spread throughout the Gorge Waterway, including a cluster in Esquimalt Harbour.

Land and Water Use

In 2010, View Royal and Saanich began the planning process for the replacement of the Craigflower Bridge on Admirals Rd. After consultation with local anglers' groups, GWI members made recommendations regarding provision of "bump outs" to accommodate fishers on the bridge, along with raised pedestrian sidewalks and bike lanes on both sides of the bridge. Detailed design drawings will



Esquimalt High School volunteers remove ivy from the pocket beach at Point Ellice shoreline.

be completed in 2011, and GWI will provide recommendations for compensation for habitat loss due to construction.

Point Ellice Shoreline Restoration

The GWI continued working on a major shoreline restoration project started in 2008 at Point

Ellice House. This ecologically significant site supports a unique remnant of the native arbutus, Douglas-fir and Garry oak forest ecosystems that once lined the shores of the Gorge Waterway. Located in a heavily industrialized part of Victoria's waterfront, this forested urban oasis is especially critical for wildlife (e.g. river otters, raptors) that depend on an increasingly fragmented landscape for survival.

Volunteers continued the removal of invasive plants, primarily English ivy and periwinkle, and replanting with native vegetation. To date, more than 2,000 hours of volunteer labour have gone into removing 15 tonnes of invasive plants from the site. Over 400 native trees, shrubs and perennials have been planted in the cleared areas, and the soil enhanced with leaf mulch provided by the City of Victoria Parks.

Point Ellice pocket beach heavily overgrown with ivy and other invasive species, prior to restoration.



Thank you!

Community Volunteers

- Esquimalt High School
- Eves of Destruction roller derby team
- St. Michaels University School
- Numerous local residents

Government and Business Supporters

- Coca-Cola
- Ellice Recycling
- BC Heritage Branch
- Point Ellice House staff and volunteers
- City of Victoria Parks
- Dave Polster Environmental Services

Financial Supporters

- Evergreen Walmart Green Grant
- Capital Regional District

GWI wins
Saanich
Environmental
Award for
volunteer
organization!



Kitty Lloyd, June Pretzer and Jody Watson received the award on behalf of the GWI.

GWI Five-Year Review

GWI members undertook a coordinated review and summary of the goals and objectives outlined in the original Gorge Waterway Stewardship Strategy developed in 2005. The strategy was developed to help achieve the GWI vision of a healthy environment for all life in the Gorge Waterway, Portage Inlet

and the surrounding watersheds. GWI partners reviewed the 2005 goals and objectives, and updated the document with activities and projects undertaken in the past five years that have helped fulfill those goals and objectives. This process provided a good opportunity to review the breadth and depth of accomplishments the members have individually

and collectively achieved through a variety of projects.

The updated document is available on the GWI website at: <http://www.gorgewaterway.ca/plans-strategies/index.htm>.

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Outlook for 2011

A review conducted in 2010 determined that a bylaw and cost-sharing formula were required to formally establish the service delivered by the Harbours Environmental Action Program, through which the GWI is funded. This bylaw has a two-year lifespan, during which a review of the service will be conducted and recommendations made regarding the continuation and focus of this program. After 2011, the CRD will no longer coordinate the GWI and efforts will be redirected to focus on contaminant inputs to the harbours.

In 2011, GWI will focus on:

- completing the removal of invasive species and replanting of native plants at the Point Ellice shoreline restoration project
- providing coordinated input into the review of the Victoria Official Community Plan
- discussing options with partners to determine if the GWI will continue without CRD participation