

2011 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 wellbeing 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



Rainbow over the Lower Gorge Waterway.

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 sharing information and fostering partnerships. GWI members come from community and environmental groups, landowners, local governments, local government advisory committees and recreational users, ensuring a broad array of interests are represented.

GWI is led by a consensus-based steering committee responsible for guiding the implementation of the Gorge Waterway Stewardship Strategy. GWI is facilitated by the CRD. A part-time coordinator initiates and manages projects, seeks funding and provides administrative support.

2011 Accomplishments

GWI members provided coordinated reviews of the View Royal and Victoria Official Community Plans, and gave their input to municipal staff involved in designing the Craigflower Bridge replacement. During the two-year review of the CRD Harbours Environmental Action Plan through which GWI operates, members voiced their strong support for the continuation of CRD coordination of the area-based initiatives in the harbour region.

Throughout the year GWI continued to:

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

Visit us at:

www.gorgewaterway.ca

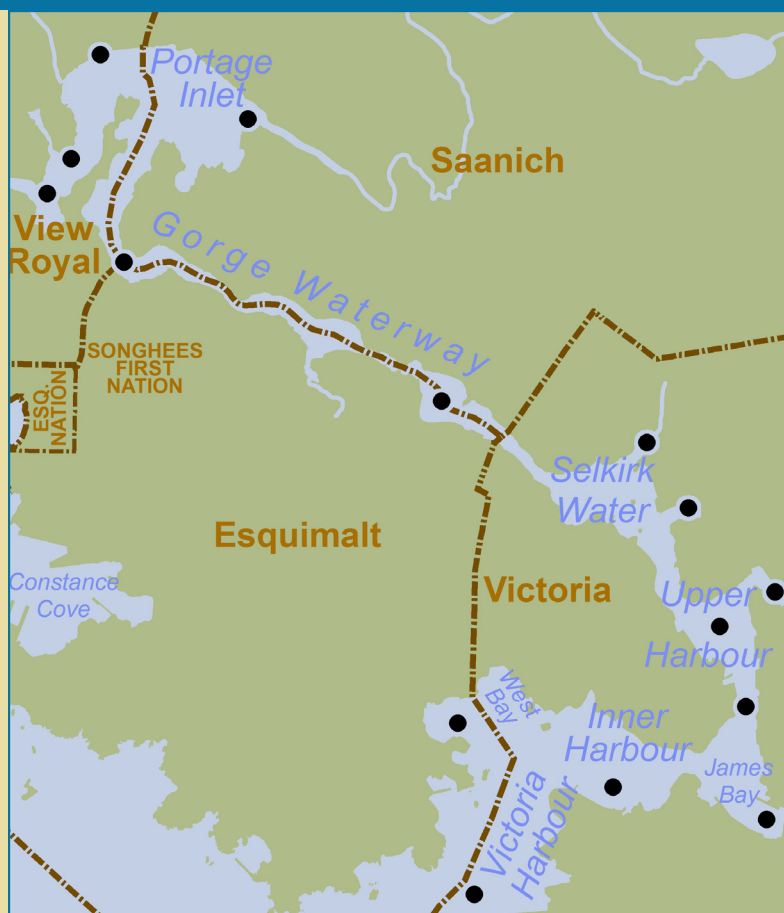
GWl Partners

Community Members

- Burnside Gorge Community Association
- Friends of Cuthbert Holmes
- Gorge Tillicum Community Association
- Gorge Waterway Action Society
- Habitat Acquisition Trust
- 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



A water quality monitoring program was established at 15 sampling sites (●).

Water Quality Objectives

A major new initiative of the CRD Harbour Environmental Action Program is the establishment of water quality objectives for the Gorge Waterway and Portage Inlet. Fifteen marine sampling sites were established along the waterway and into Victoria Harbour. These sites were sampled for contaminant levels during a high flow period in fall 2011.

Preliminary results indicated that contaminants were generally low in the Gorge Waterway and Portage Inlet. In the Upper Harbour (Johnson

St Bridge to the Selkirk Trestle) there were exceedances of nitrates, phosphates, fecal coliform and metals (notably copper, iron, zinc, lead and magnesium) and dissolved oxygen levels were low. Another round of sampling during the low flow period will be conducted in July-August 2012.

When results from both flow periods have been analyzed, GWI will play an important role in the public consultation process for developing water quality objectives for the Gorge Waterway and Portage Inlet.

Land and Water Use

GWl members continued to correspond with engineering staff from View Royal and Saanich about the planned replacement for Craigflower Bridge. A presentation was made by municipal staff at a GWl meeting, showing the three design concepts under consideration. GWl members provided input regarding ecological considerations for bridge placement, including height, passage for wildlife and mitigation for Olympia oyster and eelgrass habitat that will be affected. Members also urged BC Hydro to locate power lines underneath the new bridge.

The Official Community Plan updates for both View Royal and Victoria were carefully reviewed by GWl members and comments on the aspects of these documents that affect the Gorge Waterway and Portage Inlet were submitted to the municipalities.

Members of the public approached GWl in 2011 with concerns that boating on the Colquitz River was disturbing birds there. GWl consulted with Saanich and a sign was installed under the Admirals Bridge informing boaters that the area is a sensitive area for birds and wildlife.



Olympia Oyster Survey

A pilot project was initiated to survey and assess the thriving population of Olympia oysters (*Ostrea conchaphila*) in the Gorge Waterway and Portage Inlet. The only BC native oyster, they are federally designated as a “species of special concern” and the Gorge supports one of the few remaining populations on the coast. The survey will be conducted by World Fisheries Trust, a GWI member organization that has been conducting oyster monitoring and research in the waterway for several years. The work will add greatly to our understanding of the habitat needs of the Olympia oyster, potential threats posed by invasive marine species and other factors that affect the distribution and abundance of the Olympia oyster.



Image left: Staff monitoring the Olympia oyster habitat.

Image right: Three Olympia oysters.

Point Ellice Shoreline Restoration

GWI continued work on a major shoreline restoration project begun in 2008 at Point Ellice House. This ecologically significant site supports a unique remnant of the native forest ecosystems that once lined the shores of the Gorge Waterway. Volunteers continued the removal of invasive plants, primarily English ivy and periwinkle, and replanted with native vegetation. More than 2,500 hours of volunteer labour resulted in the removal of 20 tonnes of invasive plants from the site. Over 500 native

trees, shrubs, perennials and native grasses were planted in the cleared areas. The Fido Evergreen grant program chose this project as one of 10 across Canada to compete for funding in an online contest. As a result, GWI was awarded \$2,500 which was used to hire an experienced contractor to remove ivy and replant in the more challenging areas on the site.

The Outreach Committee of GWI undertook the creation of three interpretive signs for this significant restoration site. This project will be completed and signs installed in 2012.

Image left: Native trees and shrubs, planted by volunteers, are flourishing now that invasive plants have been removed.

Image right: Volunteer removing ivy from the rocky outcrop at the Point Ellice shoreline.



Thank you!

Community Volunteers

- St. Michaels University School
- Numerous local residents

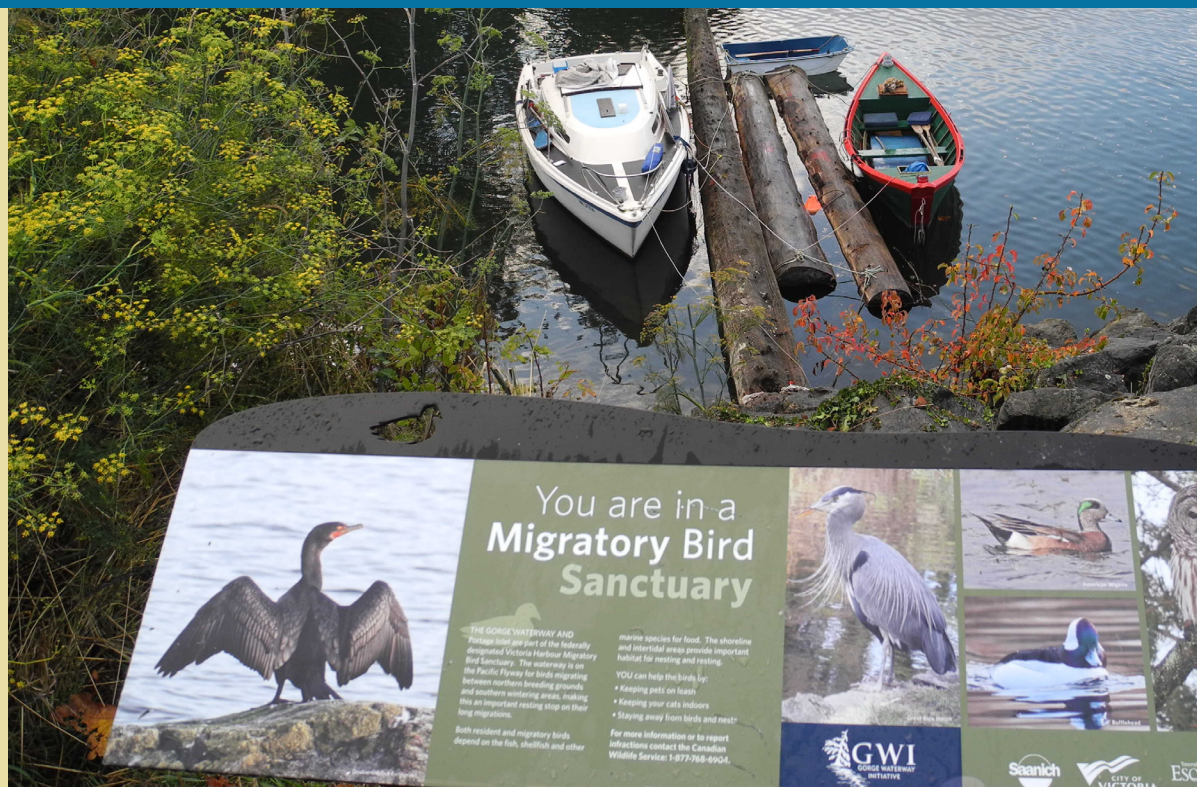
Government and Business Supporters

- Ellice Recycling
- BC Heritage Branch
- Point Ellice House staff and volunteers
- City of Victoria Parks

Financial Supporters

- Fido Evergreen
- Capital Regional District

Gorge Tillicum Community Association cited GWI as a “Local Hero” for the successful completion of the interpretive signs and other stewardship and education efforts along the Gorge Waterway.



One of 12 interpretive signs along the Gorge Waterway.

Community Outreach

GWI hosted another event in the popular Gorge Waterway Speakers Series, part of a free public lecture series on various waterway and watershed topics. Nikki Wright, executive director of SeaChange Marine Conservation Society, and Alicia Donaldson, University of

Victoria graduate student, gave a presentation entitled “Eelgrass, Oysters and the Gorge Waterway: A Living Legacy”. This well-attended event provided many residents an opportunity to learn more about these iconic species that inhabit our urban waterway.

Member volunteers hosted the GWI information display, the interactive Gorge watershed model and the Seaquaria marine touch tank at Canada Day on the Gorge in the Gorge Waterway Park in Saanich, Oceans Day in Esquimalt Gorge Park and Rivers Day in Cuthbert Holmes Park.

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Focus for 2012

In 2012, GWI will focus on:

- conducting Olympia oyster surveys in Portage Inlet and Gorge Waterway
- providing input to View Royal and Saanich regarding the replacement of Craigflower Bridge, including creation of interpretive signs for the bridge and its approaches
- establishing water quality objectives for the Gorge Waterway and Portage Inlet as part of the Harbours Environmental Action Program
- establishing a flow monitoring program for Colquitz Creek
- providing input to the Liquid Waste Management Plan Harbour Review Working Group to develop a 5-year work plan for the Gorge Waterway and other harbours
- completing the removal of invasive species and replanting with native plants at the Point Ellice shoreline restoration project and installing interpretive signs at the site
- promoting activities that engage the community in stewardship of the Gorge Waterway