

2012 Annual Update

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



Trestle with Halkett Island and Schnitzer Steel in background.

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 Capital Regional District (CRD). A part-time coordinator initiates and manages projects, seeks funding and provides administrative support.

2012 Accomplishments

The Core Area municipalities established a new bylaw and service for the Harbour Program in 2012, and GWI members provided input to the 5-year work plan for the Gorge Waterway and Portage Inlet. Flow monitors were installed in three creeks that flow into the Gorge, and water quality sampling was done to further the goal of establishing water quality objectives for the harbours.

Throughout the year 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
- participate in consultation on water quality objectives

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
- Esquimalt Parks and Recreation Committee
- Township of Esquimalt
- Town of View Royal
- View Royal Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee

Water Quality & Flow Monitoring

Investigation of surface water quality in Gorge Waterway and Portage Inlet supports the development of water quality objectives for the harbours. Sampling conducted during the fall 2011 wet season and summer 2012 dry season provided data for quantifying the effect of stormwater runoff. Dry season data represent baseline conditions, while wet weather readings include the effect of stormwater runoff events. Wet season samples were analyzed for fecal coliform, metals, nutrients, temperature, dissolved oxygen, pH, and salinity, and results compared to standard BC Ministry of Environment marine water quality guidelines. Dry season samples were analyzed for the parameters that exceeded guidelines in the preceding wet season.

In the dry season, water quality exceeded guidelines for fecal coliform, zinc, copper, lead and manganese, at the outlet of Cecelia Creek. Results upstream of this station did not exceed guidelines. Wet season data at this site exceeded water quality guidelines for fecal coliform, zinc and copper. Sampling at upstream sites did not exceed provincial guidelines.

GWl will play an important role in the public consultation process for developing water quality objectives for the harbours. Collaboration established with University of Victoria Geography Department will help develop a public consultation strategy which will be incorporated into courses planned for spring 2013.

CRD staff will maintain flow meters in Gorge tributaries and analyze continuous sensor data.



To establish realistic water quality objectives for the Gorge and Portage Inlet, it is important to understand flow dynamics of streams entering these waters. Flow meters were installed on three creeks entering the Gorge: Colquitz, Craigflower and Hospital creeks. Sensors on two of the creeks continuously measure and record pH, temperature and turbidity. Data will be analyzed after a year of recordings. Creek health in Colquitz River is also being assessed through benthic invertebrate analysis using methodology developed by Environment Canada (CABIN: Canadian Aquatic Biomonitoring Network). Results will be available in fall of 2013.

Oil Spills in the Colquitz

An unprecedented number of oil spills occurred into Colquitz River and its tributaries during 2011 and 2012, primarily from home heating oil tanks. The UVic Environmental Law Centre sponsored a community forum on this topic and prepared a report outlining suggestions for law reform that would help prevent such spills. A representative from the Centre presented their findings to the GWl and their report was distributed to the membership. District of Saanich staff were on hand to discuss lessons learned from this process.

Olympia Oyster Survey

A pilot project was undertaken to survey the subtidal population of Olympia oysters (*Ostrea lurida*) in the Gorge Waterway and Portage Inlet. This is a federally designated "species of special concern" and the Gorge supports one of the few remaining populations on the BC coast. The survey was conducted by World Fisheries Trust, a GWl member organization that has been conducting oyster monitoring and research in the waterway for several years. The project piloted several survey methods to assess population densities and map the distribution of the oysters including a surface viewer, underwater video, free swimming divers and scuba. Results showed that subtidal oyster densities were among the highest recorded on the BC coast, at 450 oysters/m². The study also determined that using scuba divers was the best survey method to reduce error from counting dead oysters whose shells can remain attached for several years.



St. Michaels University School students helped pull ivy at Pt. Ellice shoreline in November.

Volunteers spent over 250 hours in 2012 removing invasive plants from the Point Ellice shoreline.

Point Ellice Shoreline Restoration

GWJ continued work on a major shoreline restoration project begun in 2008 at Point Ellice House. This site supports a unique remnant of the native forest ecosystem that once lined the shores of the Gorge Waterway. Community volunteers and school groups joined the monthly work parties to remove invasive plants and replant with native vegetation. To date more than 2,750 hours of volunteer labour have resulted in the removal of 25 tonnes of invasive plants from the site. Re-growth of ivy each year is diminishing. The native plants are growing well and creating a natural understory layer on the wooded slopes.

Community Outreach

Member volunteers hosted the GWJ information display, the interactive Gorge watershed model and the Seaquaria marine touch tank at Gorge Waterway Park in Saanich on Canada Day and at Esquimalt Gorge Park on Oceans Day. Members also attended the annual Conservation Connection regional event at Royal Roads University with the GWJ display and outreach materials.

Gorge Swim Fest

Three community associations, all members of the GWJ, and volunteers worked together to organize a rejuvenation of the Gorge Swim Fest in August. This event attracted several hundred people to simultaneous events at three sites along the Gorge: Curtis Pt in Gorge Park, Banfield Park and Esquimalt Gorge Park. Many local businesses supported this event by providing prizes. The GWJ hosted the website for this event and helped with publicity and communications.

The Gorge Swim Fest was revived in 2012, with hundreds of people participating.



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

Financial Supporters

- Capital Regional District



GWl members were kept up to date with project planning for the Craigflower Bridge replacement, now scheduled for 2013.

For more information,
contact:

**Gorge Waterway Initiative
Coordinator**

T 250.360.3065

F 250.360.3047

E info@gorgewaterway.ca

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

www.gorgewaterway.ca



Land & Water Use

The CRD project manager for the Craigflower sewer pump station upgrade presented the updated plans for replacing the existing facility on Shoreline Rd to the GWl members. Low-impact design elements include a trenchless pipe crossing beneath Portage Inlet to avoid disturbance to the sensitive mudflats, and onsite rainwater management. Shoreline restoration will be undertaken to remove the blackberry and broom (invasive plants) that currently blanket the shore and replant the area with native riparian vegetation.

GWl members support this project which will reduce the incidence of sewage overflows into Portage Inlet and provide the opportunity to restore significant areas of sensitive shoreline.

View Royal and Saanich staff provided updates on the Craigflower Bridge Replacement Project. GWl provided input on habitat restoration plans and will participate in development of interpretive signs about the First Nations values and post-colonial history that will go on the new bridge in 2014.

Focus for 2013

In 2013 GWl will focus on:

- Working with View Royal and Saanich to create interpretive signs for the Craigflower Bridge and its approaches
- Continuing work to establish water quality objectives for the Gorge Waterway and Portage Inlet as part of the Harbours Environmental Action Program
- Collaborating with UVic Geography Department on development of public consultation strategy for the Gorge and Portage Inlet
- Completing the removal of invasive species and replanting with native plants at the Point Ellice shoreline restoration project, as well as installing interpretive signs at the site
- Promoting activities that engage the community in stewardship of the Gorge Waterway