

Gorge Waterway Initiative 2013 Annual Report



Introduction

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 coordinated approach to environmental stewardship of the Gorge and Portage Inlet and their watersheds. GWI is led by a consensus-based steering committee responsible for guiding the implementation of the Gorge Waterway Stewardship Strategy. A part-time coordinator, funded through the Capital Regional District (CRD), initiates and manages projects, seeks funding and provides administrative support.

In 2013 the GWI helped distribute a Harbours Survey, for the Gorge Waterway/Portage Inlet, redesigned the website and initiated a project with municipal partners to design interpretive signs for the new Craigflower Bridge. Throughout the year GWI continued to improve community appreciation and stewardship for the waterway, helped protect threatened and endangered wildlife on the waterway and conducted habitat restoration projects.

GWI welcomed three new groups to the partnership: Friends of Swan Creek Watershed, Colquitz Salmonid Stewardship and Education Society and the Esquimalt Residents Association.

Vision

A healthy environment for all life in the Gorge Waterway, Portage Inlet, their watersheds and communities for the well-being of present and future generations.

Goals

Goal 1:

Provide a forum for the exchange and sharing of information regarding the Gorge Waterway, Portage Inlet and their watersheds.

Goal 2:

Promote education and awareness programs on appropriate land and water use.

Goal 3:

Establish and encourage activities that show care and concern for the natural environment.

Highlights

Water Quality Objectives

Data collection for the development of harbour water quality objectives continued with CRD staff collecting more robust data on water quality, flow dynamics and benthic invertebrate communities in the creeks entering Portage Inlet and the Gorge Waterway. The first full year of continuous monitoring of flow, pH, temperature and turbidity in Cecelia and Colquitz creeks was completed. The creek data, along with the harbour water quality data collected in 2012, were submitted to the BC Ministry of Environment for interpretation and development of recommended objectives. The report should be available in fall of 2014.



Sampling in recent years at the mouth of Cecelia Creek showed elevated levels of fecal coliform, zinc, copper, lead and manganese entering Gorge Waterway.

Harbours Survey

CRD Harbours Program staff conducted a public survey in summer 2013 to support development of water quality objectives for the harbours. GWI members provided input on the questions about the Gorge Waterway and Portage Inlet, and helped distribute the surveys at outreach events. The survey covered how people use and value the waterway and adjacent lands, issues of concern and visions for the future. Close to 500 people provided input about the Gorge Waterway and Portage Inlet. Results will be available in 2014.

GWI collaborated with the University of Victoria Geography Department where students in several geography courses focused on the Gorge and Portage Inlet as case study areas. Results are now posted on the GWI website.

Land & Water Use

The Craigflower Bridge replacement project was started in 2013, and municipal staff kept GWI members informed of the progress of bridge construction. GWI members provided valuable input regarding environmental mitigation and compensation efforts. Utility conduits were installed under the bridge deck to eliminate bird kills on aerial hydro wires, hundreds of native Olympia oysters were transplanted from the old bridge pilings, new piers were constructed with oyster-friendly attachment surfaces and marsh vegetation was transplanted. GWI partnered with View Royal, Saanich, Esquimalt Nation and Songhees Nation to develop interpretive signage for the new bridge. The design will be based on the template developed for the existing GWI signs along the waterway.

The GWI began discussions with Shoreline Middle School about working together to restore the Portage Inlet shoreline along the new pipeline route during the Craigflower sewer pump station relocation. This project provides an opportunity to restore and improve habitat along 150m of shoreline, including a large marsh area.

GWI provided feedback to local government regarding anchored boats in the Gorge Waterway. This has been an ongoing issue as many boats have been anchored near Banfield Park in Selkirk Arm for several years. GWI and other community members are concerned that untreated sewage and other contaminants may be entering the Gorge from some of the boats and that eelgrass beds could be impacted by anchoring.

GWI members provided input and received regular updates about a proposed community allotment garden in Gorge Park.

A big thank you to our dedicated community volunteers, St. Michaels University School, Rotaract Club of Victoria and our government and business supporters: Ellice Recycling, BC Heritage Branch, Point Ellice House staff and volunteers. The CRD provided financial support.

Community Outreach

Member volunteers hosted the GWI information display and the interactive Gorge watershed model at these community events: Vic West Fest in Banfield Park, Selkirk Waterfront Festival, Oceans Day Festival at Fishermen's Wharf, Canada Day Picnic in Gorge Waterway Park and at the Gorge Swim Fest. Volunteers also distributed the Harbours Survey at these events.



For the second year, the GWI hosted the Gorge Swim Fest website and helped with publicity and communications for this popular event.

New GWI Website

The GWI website was fully redesigned and updated in 2013. It is now easier to view on tablets and smart phones. Check it out at www.gorgewaterway.ca

Point Ellice Shoreline Restoration

GWI is in the final stage of work on a major shoreline restoration project begun in 2008 at Point Ellice House. Monthly work parties were held with service club, school and community volunteers to remove invasive plants and replant with native vegetation. More than 2870 volunteer hours to date have resulted in the removal of 26 tonnes of invasive plants from the site. Native shrubs and perennials now create a diverse understory regularly used by river otters, birds and other wildlife.



GWI installed three interpretive signs that explain the Point Ellice shoreline restoration project and the important ecological values of the unique native forest ecosystem remaining at this site.

GWI Partners

Community Members

- Burnside Gorge Community Association
- Colquitz Salmonid Stewardship and Education Society
- Esquimalt Residents Association
- Friends of Cuthbert Holmes
- Friends of Swan Creek Watershed
- 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
- 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

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Focus for 2014

In 2014, GWI will focus on:

- Working with View Royal, Saanich, Esquimalt Nation and Songhees Nation to complete interpretive signs for the Craigflower Bridge and its approaches
- Working with Shoreline Middle School and other partners to restore shoreline habitat along the pipeline route for the new Craigflower sewer pump station in Portage Inlet
- Analysis and reporting of the harbour survey results and creek flow data, and establishing water quality objectives for the Gorge Waterway and Portage Inlet
- Finalizing the Point Ellice Shoreline Restoration project
- Promoting activities that engage the community in stewardship of the Gorge Waterway and Portage Inlet

GWI is working with municipal and First Nations partners to create interpretive signage for the new Craigflower Bridge that opens in May 2014. GWI member World Fisheries Trust is monitoring the native oyster population at the site during and after construction. Photo credit: C. Barlow