

# Gorge Waterway Initiative

Year in Review 2022

## Capital Regional District

The Gorge Waterway Initiative (GWI), supported by the Capital Regional District (CRD), is a collaborative, community-driven group of organizations and local government partners working to protect, enhance and restore the natural and cultural features of the Gorge Waterway, Portage Inlet, and the surrounding watersheds. Highlights of the GWI's work from 2022 include:

### BC Transit HandyDART Facility

BC Transit is building a new handyDART centre in View Royal, close to Craigflower Creek, to open in 2024. Through meetings and site visits, GWI members provided input into the design and construction of the facility, including components such as stream realignment and restoration, and independent environmental monitoring during construction. GWI members encouraged the facility to work towards Salmon-Safe certification, which they achieved in September 2022 through the Fraser Basin Council, becoming the first development on Vancouver Island to achieve this certification.

### Cuthbert Holmes Park Improvements

Saanich Parks continued to build on 2021's improvements to Cuthbert Holmes Park with the addition of more side channels to provide habitat for young salmon and other wildlife using the Colquitz River. A viewing area was built next to the river and will soon include an interpretive sign about the river restoration project. Restoration also continues in the trembling aspen compensation area adjacent to the river.

### Outreach and Education

In partnership with World Fisheries Trust's Seaquaria program, GWI outreach staff attended five public events in 2022: the Selkirk Waterfront Festival, World Ocean's Day, Vic West Fest, Canada Day on the Gorge, and Burnside Gorge's Clean-up. Each event included the GWI display, outreach materials, and interactive watershed model. In addition, GWI materials and the Gorge Waterway watershed model were on display at the

Gorge Waterway Nature House and use for education and programming throughout the year.

A diverse range of speakers presented at the GWI's quarterly meetings on topics including the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, herring monitoring and restoration, and Canada goose management. GWI members enjoyed tours of the restoration work at Cuthbert Holmes Park, estuary improvements at Hospital Creek, the BC Transit handyDART site, and Green Shores for Homes properties.



### Water Quality

Of the 145 stormwater discharges in the Gorge and Portage Inlet in 2022, CRD staff monitored 43 for concentrations of *E.coli* and 18 for concentrations of metals. While most stormwater discharges had low bacterial contamination, 35% had one or more elevated counts of *E.coli* (above 200 CFU/100mL). Of these, 758A (Banfield Park), 744B (Gosper Crescent) and 650 (Harriet Road) discharges were of high public health concern based on the CRD rating system.

Esquimalt and CRD staff have worked to eliminate the source of sewage in the catchment of discharge 744B, including relining sections of stormwater and sewage

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infrastructure, repairing a sewer to stormwater misconnection, and installing cleanout ports. Bacterial counts have decreased but remain elevated in some areas, highlighting the complexity of the problem. More relining is scheduled for 2023.

Results indicate that copper is the most prevalent metal contaminant in stormwater discharges in the CRD with 60% of the stormwater discharges in the Gorge and Portage Inlet having elevated copper concentrations compared to 70% throughout the larger Core Area.

In 2022, CRD staff completed enhanced sampling in the Colquitz River Watershed. Weekly data collected over the summer and fall indicate that land use activities continue to impact water quality and the parameters of concern were consistent with those measured in 2017. Aluminum, copper, iron, zinc, oxygen, phosphorus, suspended solids, temperature, turbidity, and zinc were at concentrations that could result in adverse effects on aquatic life. E. coli was also elevated, indicating sewage presence in the creek. Water quality samples were particularly poor when taken in the rain.

In 2022, CRD staff also worked with a consultant to collect in-stream flow measurements. The flow data will result in a more refined estimate of creek discharge through different water levels at the CRD hydrometric stations in Cecelia, Colquitz and Hospital creeks.

## GWl Partner Projects

The work of GWl partners to monitor, steward, and educate others is essential to the health of the Gorge and its watersheds. Though not an exhaustive list, some of these actions in 2022 included:

- Invasive species removal
- Water quality and flow monitoring
- Forage fish egg sampling and beach nourishment
- Habitat modification for Canada goose management
- Herring education and research
- Fish monitoring and streamkeeping
- Dogs-on-leash advocacy

- Salt marsh habitat restoration
- Initiation of a Resilient Coasts for Salmon demonstration restoration project
- Fundraising for an accessible fishing dock
- Demonstration of the Gorge Waterway watershed model
- Research on Olympia oysters, plankton, pollinators, heavy metal monitoring, eDNA, and more



## Partnership Building

The GWl welcomed multiple new partners to its steering committee in 2022 including the Victoria Herring Enhancement Project, Friends of Cecilia Falls Creek Park, the Stewardship Centre for BC, and the Carey and Area Residents Association.

## Focus Areas for 2023

- Review and provide input to development applications and municipal plans, as necessary/requested
- Provide outreach at community events and develop new GWl educational materials
- Organize/support public presentations related to the Gorge and Portage Inlet
- Help to celebrate the centenary of the Victoria Harbour Migratory Bird Sanctuary