

# Gorge Waterway Initiative 2016 Annual Report



*Reflections on the Gorge Waterway. Photo by Aaron Lutsch.*

## Introduction

The Gorge Waterway Initiative (GWI), supported by the Capital Regional District (CRD), 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 initiates and manages projects, seeks funding and provides administrative support.

In 2016, GWI members provided input to the proposed Christie Point redevelopment in Portage Inlet, Highway 1 Admirals-McKenzie Interchange Project, Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park sewer connection project and the City of Victoria Burnside Gorge Neighbourhood Plan. Members attended many outreach events with the new GWI display, reaching over 1,500 people with conservation and stewardship messaging. GWI participated in the Urban Sanctuaries Project with other regional partners.

## 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

In 2016, CRD staff sampled 59 of the 145 stormwater flows that discharge into the Gorge Waterway and Portage Inlet. Thirty-one of the discharges had elevated fecal bacterial counts; seven of these received a high public health concern rating due to the level of bacterial counts and potential for the public to come in contact with the discharge. Sources of the bacterial contamination include aging sewer and stormwater infrastructure and sewer-stormwater cross-connections, as well as animal waste. CRD staff identified the locations of two cross-connections and one was repaired by the municipality in 2016. The CRD is working with municipal staff to identify other sources.

A number of beaches in the region have marine bacterial levels that exceed Health Canada guidelines for recreational use during and after winter rainfall events. These include the marine environments at the mouth of Gorge Creek and Cecelia Creek. CRD staff conducted further sampling in fall 2016 to observe how rainfall levels influence the data, however the results were inconclusive. CRD is working with Island Health Authority to address this issue, and it is anticipated that more data will guide public education and notification strategies.

## Land & Water Use

The BC Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure consulted GWI about environmental protection plans for the Highway 1 McKenzie Interchange Project, started in 2016. Ministry staff gave GWI members site tours to see the area within Cuthbert Holmes Park to be impacted by construction of the partial cloverleaf. GWI provided a coordinated response expressing the main areas of concern: the amount of land being removed from the park, incomplete environmental assessment and ensuring protection for Colquitz River and Portage Inlet.

A major residential redevelopment is being planned at Christie Point in Portage Inlet, and proponents gave a presentation to GWI to solicit input on the environmental aspects of the plan, followed by an on-site tour. One of the suggestions was to register the project with the Green Shores™ program. This program encourages waterfront property owners to develop their property

in an environmentally sensitive manner to maintain shoreline integrity, enhance marine riparian ecosystems on site, and mitigate negative impacts from construction, such as tree removal. GWI members had concerns about proposed building heights, increased density and impacts to surrounding marine and shoreline ecosystems during construction. Several members of GWI participated in Green Shores™ training in 2016, and the GWI coordinator encourages homeowners and municipalities to consider Green Shores™ approaches when redeveloping or altering shorelines.

The City of Victoria staff consulted with GWI during development of neighbourhood plans for the Burnside Gorge and Vic West neighbourhoods. GWI submitted a written coordinated response to the Burnside Gorge plan. GWI continued to support City of Victoria in their efforts to regulate vessel anchoring in the Gorge Waterway.

CRD engineers presented plans to connect the washroom facilities in Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park to the Saanich municipal sewer system. Staff solicited additional GWI input at a site tour afterwards. The project will involve installing a pipe along the upper reaches of the Colquitz River, under an existing creekside trail. GWI members were concerned about possible impacts to the riparian and flood plain area, amphibian access, and restoration possibilities when the project is complete.



*A new GWI display was created using 2015 orthophoto-based map with updated information and graphics.*



*Western Sandpipers rely on mudflats and other marine habitats in the Gorge Waterway and Portage Inlet. Photo credit: Stuart Clarke*

## Urban Sanctuaries Project

GWI members made significant progress in improving public awareness of the Victoria Harbour Migratory Bird Sanctuary (MBS). The Canadian Wildlife Service provided several signs that were put up throughout the MBS to let people know the extent of this significant urban sanctuary. 2016/17 marks the centennial of the signing of the Migratory Bird Convention by Canada and the USA and establishment of the Migratory Bird Convention Act in Canada. To honour this centennial and raise awareness of the three MBS in the capital region, GWI partnered with several groups in the region to create the Urban Sanctuaries Project ([www.sanctuaryproject.ca](http://www.sanctuaryproject.ca)). GWI and partners developed an informative brochure with maps and information about the three regional sanctuaries and hosted a well-attended speaking event at the Robert Bateman Centre, focused on birds and other wildlife of the Victoria Harbour MBS. The Migratory Bird Sanctuary brochure is available to download on the GWI website.

## Community Outreach

The new GWI display was completed, and put to good use at the community outreach events in 2016, including Earth Day in High Rock Park, Vic West Fest, two Oceans Day events, Canada Day on the Gorge, the Gorge Swim Fest and two new events on Harbour Road: the Vic West Street Fest and Harbour Run sponsored by MEC. Approximately 1,500 people were reached through these events. In addition, the GWI display and InfoSheets were on display at the Gorge Waterway Nature House throughout the year. The GWI coordinator gave a presentation to an urban restoration class at the University of Victoria highlighting restoration projects that members have undertaken along the Gorge and throughout its watersheds.



# GWI Partners

## Community Members

- Burnside Gorge Community Association
- Colquitz Salmonid Stewardship and Education Society
- Esquimalt Residents Association
- Friends of Cuthbert Holmes Park
- Friends of Swan Creek Watershed
- Friends of Victoria Harbour Migratory Bird Sanctuary
- Gorge Swim Fest Society
- 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
- South Island Aquatic Stewardship Society
- South Island Sea Kayaking Association
- Victoria Canoe and Kayak Club
- Victoria Golden Rods and Reels Fishing and Social 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

# Gorge Waterway Initiative

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## Focus for 2017

In 2017, GWI will focus on:

- Continuing to provide input to review processes for developments along the waterway
- Mapping and developing an inventory of shoreline, intertidal and subtidal habitats focusing on tidal marsh, eelgrass, kelp and Olympia oysters and identifying key areas for restoration, as funding allows
- Planning and initiating bird surveys throughout the waterway
- Promoting the 100th anniversary of Canada's Migratory Bird Convention Act through the Urban Sanctuary Project
- Promoting activities that engage the community in stewardship of the Gorge Waterway and Portage Inlet

*Pictured above: GWI members toured the McKenzie Interchange project site in Cuthbert Holmes Park with BC Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure staff.*

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