

Gorge Waterway Initiative

Year in Review 2020/2021

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. Despite COVID-19 restrictions, GWI members held nine virtual steering committee meetings between 2020 and 2021 and kept moving forward on actions to improve the Gorge, Portage Inlet, and the surrounding watersheds. GWI's highlights and updates from 2020 and 2021 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 have provided input into the design and construction of the facility, including components such as stream realignment and restoration, independent environmental monitoring, and Salmon-Safe certification.

Cuthbert Holmes Park Improvements

District of Saanich staff and community stewards together with Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure contractors and consultants have been working hard to improve Cuthbert Holmes Park through trail relocation, stormwater treatment, and habitat enhancement. Specific restoration features include the use of woody debris to provide habitat and reduce erosion, establishment of new ponds and wetlands, and creation of side channels in the river estuary. Parks projects include trail relocation to prevent flooding, invasive English hawthorn removal, and in-stream and riparian area improvement to the Colquitz near SilverCity Theatre. This work is being carried out under the Cuthbert Holmes-Tillicum Park Management Plan.

Water Quality

CRD staff monitored over 50 of the 145 stormwater discharges in the Gorge and Portage Inlet in 2020 and

2021. While the majority of the stormwater discharges had no bacterial contamination, results indicate that about 14% had one or more elevated counts of E.coli (over 200 CFU/100mL). Of these, three discharges 758A (Banfield Park), 744B (Gosper Crescent) and 650 (Harriet Road) were of high public health concern based on the CRD rating system. The discharge at Gosper Crescent has had recent repairs and Esquimalt staff are looking at relining a section of sewer infrastructure.

Staff evaluated 21 of the discharges for the concentration of metals in water. Results indicated that copper is the most common metal contaminant in stormwater in the Gorge and Portage Inlet. Eight discharges had no exceedances of a BC Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy guideline for protection of marine aquatic life. 13 exceeded the copper guideline, and four of the 13 had excessive levels of cadmium, iron or zinc.

Weekly data was collected over the summer and fall of 2020 in Craigflower Creek. The parameters of concern are aluminum, dissolved oxygen, phosphorus, temperature, suspended solids and turbidity. Comparison of the 2015 and 2020 data did not indicate significant changes in the parameters of concern. However, compared to the 2015 data, there were temperature increases in two locations downstream of Prior Lake in 2020, likely due to beaver dam removal.

Benthic invertebrate data from Craigflower Creek indicated that the water quality was good with some organic pollution present and no change or possibly a slight improvement in organic pollution between 2015 and 2020. CRD staff will be focusing monitoring efforts on the Colquitz River in 2022.

Outreach and Education

Despite COVID-19 restrictions, GWI partners looked for ways to share information and provide educational opportunities. The Gorge Waterway Action Society shared GWI information and hosted the watershed model at the Gorge Waterway Nature House. A diverse range of speakers were hosted at GWI's quarterly meetings on topics including abandoned boats, Salmon-Safe certification, Elk-Beaver lake remediation, and more.