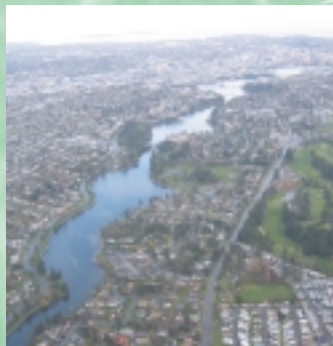
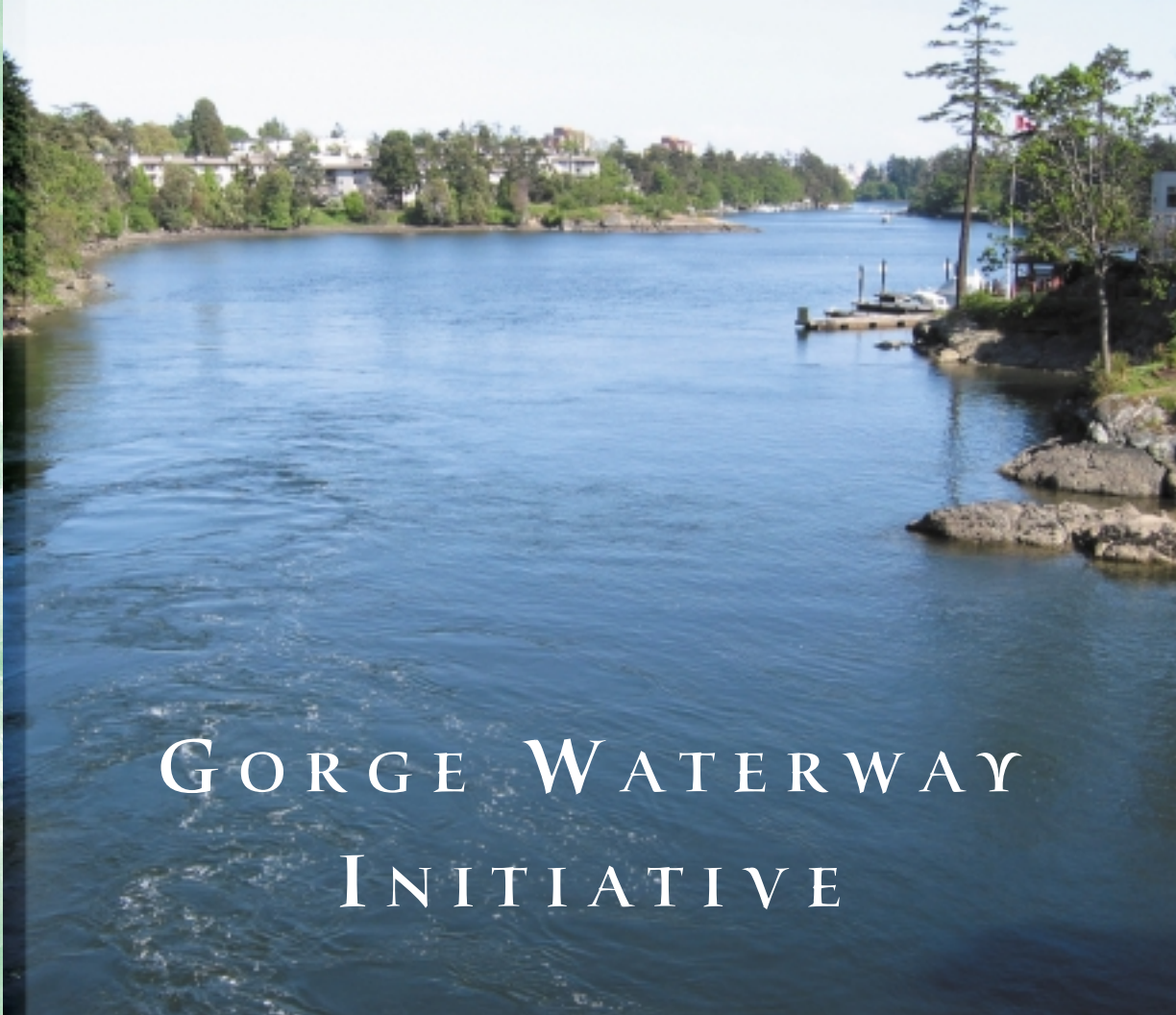




Working together
to balance
conservation,
recreation and
community values



GORGE WATERWAY INITIATIVE



MISSION

To protect, enhance and restore the health of the Gorge Waterway, Portage Inlet, their watersheds and communities, for the enjoyment and well-being of present and future generations

VISION

A healthy environment in perpetuity for all life in the Gorge Waterway, Portage Inlet and surrounding watersheds

WHAT IT IS

The Gorge Waterway Initiative (GWI) is a collaborative, community-driven group of organizations concerned with protecting and enhancing the natural and cultural features of the Gorge Waterway, Portage Inlet and surrounding watersheds.

In January 2005, a diverse array of non-government groups, landowner organizations and local governments came together to develop a common approach to environmental stewardship of the waterway. They have been meeting regularly ever since.

Canada Day event >
Kitty Lloyd

WHAT IT DOES

GWI's role is to:

- Promote education and awareness programs on appropriate land and water use
- Serve as a hub for information sharing and act as a point of contact on issues



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

As a “group of groups” that represents a broad array of interests, membership in GWI includes representatives from community and environmental groups, landowner organizations, local governments and local government advisory committees, and recreational users.

Operating by consensus, GWI is well positioned to help coordinate different jurisdictions and foster partnerships between municipalities, community groups, landowners, universities and colleges, and others.



Gorge Bridge

Jody Watson



The Gorge Waterway Initiative has an area of interest that includes the Gorge Waterway, a six-kilometre arm of the sea that stretches from Victoria Harbour to Craigflower Bridge, Portage Inlet, and associated watersheds. Spanning four municipalities – Victoria, Saanich, Esquimalt and View Royal – the area is a tidal estuary and a federal migratory bird sanctuary that supports a biologically diverse population of plants and animals.



Eelgrass along the Gorge
Jody Watson

WATERWAY PRIORITIES

Protect habitat

The waterway is critical to the survival of a number of species. Sea-run cutthroat trout and chum and coho salmon come into the Gorge and spawn in Colquitz River and Craigflower Creek.

GWI will help identify key habitat such as the extensive eel grass beds in the waterway, build awareness of these areas and work together to protect them. Not only does eel grass provide habitat for young salmon but it also helps prevent erosion by anchoring shifting sands and dampening the force of waves.

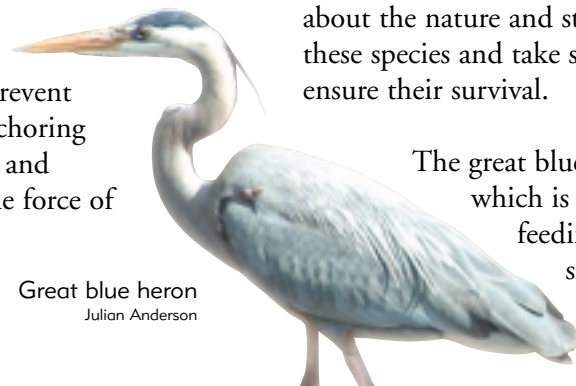
The migratory bird sanctuary is a significant area for feeding, nesting and roosting of great blue herons, cormorants and other species. Enforcement and signage for boat speeds in the sanctuary are some of the ways that this important habitat can be maintained.

Look after species at risk

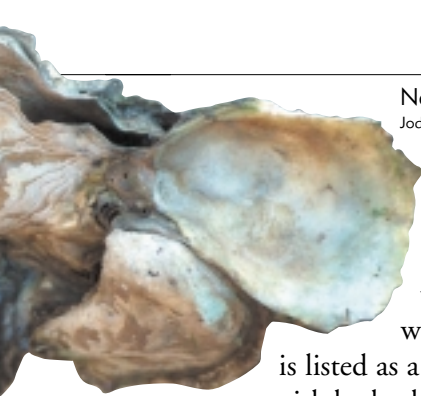
The Gorge is home to a number of rare and endangered species. The GWI needs to inform people about the nature and status of these species and take steps to ensure their survival.

The great blue heron,
which is often seen
feeding in the
shallows

Great blue heron
Julian Anderson



Native oysters
Jody Watson



along the waterway, is listed as a species at risk by both the federal and provincial governments. This large and distinctive heron is highly valued as a symbol of a healthy, natural ecosystem.

The small, native oysters that live along the waterway are likely the largest population of this species on the West Coast. Their numbers have been declining rapidly and they are listed as a “Species of Concern” by the federal government.

The herring population of the waterway is genetically distinct,

and herring numbers have decreased considerably over the past few decades. Historically, crowds of anglers used to line Craigflower Bridge during the annual herring migration to spawning grounds in Portage Inlet.

Restore natural shorelines

Heavily developed shorelines in the waterway provide little in the way of natural habitat for wildlife and don’t necessarily protect, filter or buffer the land/water interface like natural shorelines do. GWI supports programs to “naturalize” the shoreline, some of which are already underway.

Non-native, invasive species such as Scotch broom and Himalayan blackberry displace native species



Colquitz River

Jody Watson

and disrupt the local ecological balance. A number of groups are already involved in both removal of non-native plants and planting native species that are more in harmony with the environment and often require considerably less maintenance.



Portage Inlet

Julian Anderson

Protect natural areas

The kinds of development and land-use decisions that take place along the waterway have profound effects on the plants and animals including the people who live there. GWI is playing an active role in commenting on official community plans and other development proposals in the waterway to ensure they are in the best interests of the community and the environment.

One of the first steps in protecting natural areas is identifying them and making local governments, shoreline residents and waterway users aware of these significant areas.

Improve water quality

In the past, the waterway was a key destination for recreation, including swimming, boating and even diving contests. Throughout the fifties and sixties, water quality became so degraded that activities other than boating all but disappeared. In recent years, concerted efforts by local groups and governments have led to marked improvements in water quality.

Water quality is a complex issue and GWI is taking an interest in

everything from monitoring storm drains and adjacent streams to encouraging the reduction and responsible use of pesticide and fertilizer application on public and private land, all of which have a profound effect on the health of the waterway.



Promote stewardship and educate public

A key part of GWI's mission is to educate people about the Gorge and all its wonders. GWI volunteers provide information at events and activities along the waterway. The GWI also participates in shoreline and watershed clean-ups.

GWI is organizing historical, environmental and cultural tours of the waterway. Speakers have been invited to address the community on subjects such as the history of the Gorge, bird watching along the waterway, and First Nations' interests.

< Gorge Park and
amusement area: 1918

Esquimalt Municipal Archives



Kayakers on the Gorge

Jody Watson



GETTING INVOLVED

All GWI meetings are open to the public. You can volunteer on any of GWI's projects or join one of its member groups.

Groups with a direct interest in the waterway are encouraged to join the GWI. In order to have representation on the GWI, groups must have:

- Geographic area of interest that includes Portage Inlet, Gorge Waterway or adjacent watersheds
- Mandate consistent with vision and purpose of GWI
- Goals and objectives supportive of GWI



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Watershed model Todd Carnahan

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