

GW I info sheet

GORGE WATERWAY INITIATIVE

WORKING TOGETHER TO BALANCE CONSERVATION, RECREATION AND COMMUNITY VALUES

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POINT ELLICE: STUNNING EXAMPLE OF A WOODLAND SHORE RESTORATION

With the help of community volunteers, the Gorge Waterway Initiative is restoring the shore at Point Ellice to its original beauty and function. The project provides a powerful example for other waterfront landowners to follow.

HISTORICAL INVASION

From 1867 to 1975, the O'Reilly family lived along the Gorge Waterway in a large, one story Victorian Italianate villa, which is now the site of historic Point Ellice House. Peter and Caroline O'Reilly were avid gardeners and developed formal gardens around the house that became one of the finest examples of Victorian gardens of their time.

Little did the O'Reillys realize that many of the introduced plants featured in the gardens, such as English ivy, holly and periwinkle, would later invade and wreak havoc in the natural wooded shore,

an area they called their "wildland garden."

ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The wooded shore of Point Ellice is the largest remaining example of the forested ecosystems that used to exist along the shores of the Gorge Waterway. Large native trees such as Garry oak, Douglas-fir, arbutus, Oregon ash and Pacific yew line the bank, and shrubs such as oceanspray and snowberry are still found. This site also features a steep slope, rocky outcrops and one of only two pocket beaches left on the waterway.

Cooper's hawks nest in the overstory (canopy), and river otters use the banks in



Photos: Jody Watson

Removing the dense growth of invasive English ivy



Exposed site after many volunteer hours of ivy removal



Replanting the site with native species of plants

the understory (beneath the canopy). Migratory birds and waterfowl seek food and shelter on the clam beaches, fringe marshes and overhanging trees of this 130-metre stretch of shoreline.

Over the years, invasive, non-native plants from the original house gardens, such as English ivy, periwinkle, holly, laurel, English elm and common hawthorn, have become established in the woodland. A dense growth of these invasives has smothered the understory vegetation resulting in the loss of many of the native species such as salal, ferns and lichens, and perennials such as camas and fawn lilies. There is no new growth of young native trees because of the thick cover of ivy. New trees need to be planted as the aging forest stand is in danger of disappearing.

This wild area, rich in biological and habitat diversity, is an ecologically significant site along the Gorge Waterway. Under threat by invasive species, the site needs our help to ensure that this example of the ecosystem that used to line the shores of the Gorge Waterway is protected and restored for the benefit of future generations.

NATURAL RESTORATION

In 2006, the Gorge Waterway Initiative embarked on a Woodland Shore Restoration Project at Point Ellice. The long-term goals are to re-establish a lush, natural woodland, improve biodiversity and ecological function, increase wildlife habitat, and keep the gardens of Point Ellice House in check so invasive plants aren't allowed to recolonize the woodland.

The first step was to map and inventory the plants on the site,

followed by removal of invasive plants, mostly English ivy. To date, approximately 60 per cent of the site has been cleared of invasives resulting in the removal of over 12 tonnes of invasive plants.

Removal of invasive plants exposes the soils, so a thick layer of leaf mulch is spread to prevent soil and moisture loss, stop the establishment of weeds, and stabilize the site. The other important task is to plant native trees and shrubs, such as oceanspray and Oregon grape, arbutus, Douglas-fir and Garry oak. These new plantings need to be cared for until they become established and the area monitored to ensure invasives do not return.

The restoration of Point Ellice provides an excellent model for other landowners on the waterway to transform their yards, gardens and wooded areas into lush and vibrant natural ecosystems, teeming with birds and other wildlife.

For more information on the Gorge Waterway Initiative:
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This GWI Infosheet is one in a series on the natural and cultural features of the Gorge Waterway, Portage Inlet and surrounding watersheds

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HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Long-term restoration projects are most successful when supported by the community. Many volunteers have come and helped at Point Ellice. They've put in over 1,500 hours of hard labour, but it will take a lot more work to overcome 100 years of neglect.

Here's what you can do to help:

- Individuals, school groups, scout troops and other youth organizations can pull ivy and other invasive plants, plant native vegetation, water newly established plants, and spread mulch. Volunteers will receive training, tools and gloves, as well as the excitement of being involved in a hands-on work party that is restoring the environment to its natural state.
- Individuals, businesses and other organizations can help by sponsoring the project through contributions to the purchase of plants and the costs of vegetation disposal or by organizing a staff volunteer day at the site.
- Consider taking the Point Ellice natural restoration model and applying it to your own property along the waterway.

LEARNING MORE

For more information on helping with the restoration project, go to the Gorge Waterway Initiative's website (see box) or call 250-727-0653 or 250-360-3065. To learn more about the Point Ellice House Historic Site, visit: www.pointellicehouse.ca and www.tca.gov.bc.ca/heritage or drop by the house for tea at 2616 Pleasant Street during the summer months. Call 250-389-1211 for more information.