

Great Blue Heron fishing - Image courtesy of Julian Anderson

# Underwater Bounty

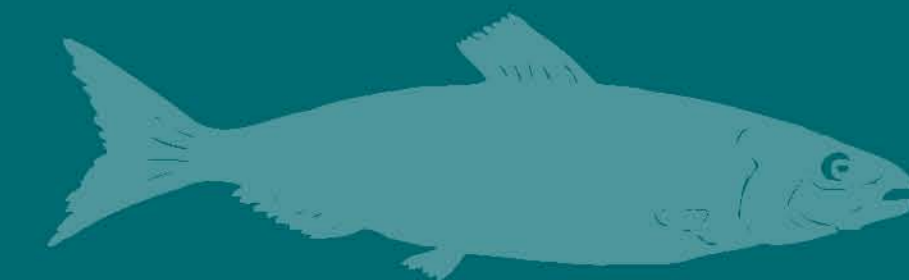
THE SHALLOW NUTRIENT-RICH WATERS of Portage Inlet and the Gorge Waterway support more than 80 hectares of eelgrass meadows. Eelgrass filters out pollutants from urban run-off, and their roots form a mat that reduces shoreline erosion by trapping sediments. These lush underwater meadows are an important marine habitat, providing food and oxygen for fish, birds and invertebrates.

Large beds of BC's only native oyster (*Ostrea lurida*) live on the extensive mudflats. They perform many ecosystem services by filtering large volumes of water and providing habitat and food. Oysters were an important food source for First Nations, and were harvested commercially in the early 1900s. Over-fishing has decimated their numbers, and survival in

the Gorge is now threatened by pollution and sediments from urban run-off, and competition from introduced species such as the Pacific (Japanese) oyster.

In the past, large schools of herring swam up Portage Inlet to spawn on the eelgrass, providing a feast for herons, cormorants and seals. Over-fishing and habitat damage have severely reduced herring populations, and there has been no known spawning in the inlet since the 1970s.

Sea-run cutthroat trout can still be found, along with runs of chum and coho salmon that migrate up the Gorge Waterway to spawn in tributary creeks.



Young gull eating crab - Image courtesy of Marie O'Shaughnessy



Sea stars at low tide



Herring fishing on the Gorge 1957  
Image I-26674 courtesy of Royal BC Museum, BC Archives

