

WHY ARE ESA'S IMPORTANT?

For centuries the First Nations people of Southern Vancouver Island were the stewards of this unique ecosystem. Their traditions and teachings embraced the natural environment as a vital element of their culture. As a result of an increase in population over the last century, the loss of many ESA's has dramatically impacted the lifestyle of the First Nations people. With increasing developmental pressures and a perceived higher standard of living the further loss of ESA's affect all our lifestyles.



Fraser Spring

Whether we are new arrivals to Saanich or long-time residents, we all benefit from our precious ecosystem. We are all intrinsically linked to the health of our community. A healthy human community needs a healthy ecosystem. We need trees and other plants to clean the air and regulate the temperature; wetlands to clean and hold water; healthy soils to grow our food in; healthy oceans for fish and other marine life. We also need quiet, natural places to enjoy our earth and to embrace the opportunity to reaffirm our link with it. The ample opportunities for viewing and experiencing the natural spaces within Saanich, contribute to the quality of life for its residents and its reputation as a very desirable place to live.

"Let us permit nature to have her way; she understands her business better than we do."

Michel Eyquem de Montaigne (1553-1592)
French essayist, courtier



For more information on Saanich's ESA's or on alternatives to current practices please contact Saanich Environmental Services at (250) 475-1775

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This project has been supported by:
The Corporation Of the District of Saanich
The Real Estate Foundation of British Columbia
Fisheries and Oceans Canada
Ministry of Environment Lands and Parks
The Veins of Life Watershed Society



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Portage Inlet near the mouth of the Colquitz River

The municipality of Saanich is part of a diverse and unique ecological region. It boasts an exceptionally high biodiversity, with rare and endangered plants, plant associations and wildlife. Included in this special part of Canada's west coast is a rich kaleidoscope of Environmentally Significant Areas (ESA's).



Normandy Creek

ESA's are sites or areas that have environmental attributes worthy of retention or special care. ESA's in Saanich include: streams, riparian areas (streamside vegetation), lakes, wetlands, forests, meadows, rock outcrops, marine shorelines and mountain sides. Some of these areas are well known and mapped in Saanich's ESA Atlas while others are hidden in backyards, vacant lots and forgotten corners of developed and rural areas. Places such as majestic Mount Douglas, tranquil Rithet's Bog and the peaceful Colquitz River cover relatively large areas while other ESA's are mere pockets in the maze of urban development. You will have many around where you live, work and play.

ESA INVENTORY AND ATLAS

In 1996, The District of Saanich initiated an inventory of all streams, wetlands and other riparian areas within the municipality. This was supplemented by data from the provincial Sensitive Ecosystems Inventory and rare plant communities and species information. The results of this process were published in early 1999 as the *Saanich Environmentally Significant Areas* atlas and inventory. In late 1999 an inventory of Portage Inlet and the Gorge Waterway added to the information base. During 2000 a survey of Saanich's outer coast will enhance the inventory even further. The inventory and atlas project is ongoing and will continue to be a valuable tool for planners, developers, homeowners and anyone thinking of undertaking projects that may affect natural areas no matter how large or small.



Camas and Pine on the coastline



Remnant Garry oak ecosystems are a prominent feature of Saanich

WHAT DO SAANICH'S ESA's HAVE?

Some of the watercourses of Saanich provide habitat for coho Salmon and cut-throat Trout. Protection and enhancement of these watercourses and their watersheds will result in sustaining the population of these species. Their recovery can only contribute to the economic and cultural livelihoods of this region. Rare species in Saanich range from the tiny plant Macoun's meadow-foam to the reclusive bird, the green heron. Rare plant associations in Saanich include the combinations of: western red cedar/snowberry, Douglas fir/grand fir/Oregon grape and Garry oak/Arbutus.

The Garry oak ecosystems range from meadows to woodlands and occupy only a small portion of the coastal Douglas-fir zone which itself comprises only 0.2 percent of the land in British Columbia. These ecosystems are unique in the world and provide a community for many plant and animal species including: blue camas, white Easter lily, ocean spray, Cooper's hawks and the western bluebird. Remnant Garry oak ecosystems are a feature of many Saanich properties.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR ME?

As a mosaic of cultures we have impacted our ESA's in many different ways. We need to change some of our practices if we are to preserve and restore what we have. Inappropriate development, invasive species, pollution and our tendency to "tidy up" natural areas are all contributing to a negative impact on our ESA's. It's time to think outside the box and look for alternatives to many of our current practices. Already there are leaders within our community who have done that. Some species and habitats have been saved, some development has been sensitive to the natural world and many people are involved in positive environmental projects. **We can make a difference. Take the time to explore some ESA's. Have a look at the ESA Atlas and participate in the preservation and restoration efforts. Re-think your practices and discover ways to have a positive impact.**



Porters Creek