

A COOPERATIVE APPROACH

TO SUSTAINABILITY IN

THE GEORGIA BASIN

The Georgia Basin is one of the most ecologically diverse areas in North America.

The region's economic wealth was built on its abundant natural resources. Rapid population growth and associated human activities now threaten the natural ecosystems which made this area so supportive of human habitation and use. This puts at risk the quality of life and standard of living of all residents.

In response to these threats, Environment Canada and partners are developing a shared vision, shared goals and a set of actions to focus and coordinate efforts towards a sustainable future for the Georgia Basin.



MAP OF THE BASIN

Spanning two nations, the Georgia Basin/Puget Sound Ecosystem includes the marine waters of the Strait of Georgia, Puget Sound and the Strait of Juan de Fuca, all the lands that drain to these waters, and the surrounding airshed. It covers approximately 135,000 square kilometres. Over half of the fresh water flowing into the region's marine waters comes from the Fraser River.

...THE CHALLENGE

As early as 1963 land use planners in B.C.'s Lower Mainland were concerned about urban sprawl into natural habitats. In the last 25 years the population in the Canadian part of the Georgia Basin has more than doubled from 1.2 million to 2.7 million people.

Growth is forecast to continue. The environment, the economy and the social health of the Basin face enormous stresses.



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GEORGIA BASIN/PUGET SOUND POPULATION TRENDS

“In 1960, the Georgia Basin/Puget Sound bioregion was home to 2.6 million people. Today, over 6 million people live here. By 2020, there may be an additional 3-5 million people living and working in this area.”

Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, February 1996

Concerns and fears over environmental health have led to diverse actions - by governments, community groups, and individuals. The Province of British Columbia and Washington State, recognizing the transboundary nature of the issues, created the Puget Sound/Georgia Basin Task Force (under the auspices of the Environmental Cooperation Council) on environmental issues in the shared marine waters of the Basin. The Province has enacted progressive Growth Strategies legislation, created new parks and raised vehicle emission standards. Local governments have embarked on the development of comprehensive strategic growth plans. Community stewardship programs have implemented habitat protection projects. Environmental groups have raised public understanding of the Basin’s ecology. The pulp and paper industry has reduced contaminant discharges by pulp mills, allowing some fisheries to re-open. Residential and business recycling of bottles and newspapers, along with municipal composting projects, are reducing landfill requirements.

These actions to restore, support and sustain the quality of life in the Basin have achieved results. Yet, despite the progress made to date, the Georgia Basin faces a number of significant and emerging challenges that require a more coordinated approach to protect this valuable ecosystem.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN THE GEORGIA BASIN:

- ▶ Rural land converted to housing is lost for agricultural or forestry use. Habitat is altered or destroyed.
- ▶ B.C.’s Garry oak woodlands are endangered. Very little of the original range survives.
- ▶ Over 300 species of animals and plants are at risk of disappearing from the Georgia Basin.
- ▶ Most of the original saltmarshes of the Fraser Estuary, Burrard Inlet, and Nanaimo Estuary have been lost.
- ▶ The spread of Scotch broom disrupts silviculture operations and endangers rare habitats. Many other invasive exotics, such as the green crab, if established, can cause serious economic and ecological damage.
- ▶ Pollution has closed thousands of hectares for shellfish harvesting.
- ▶ Salmon stocks are seriously depleted. Only 2 of Vancouver’s 50 salmon bearing streams remain.
- ▶ With an estimated population of 150, the Vancouver Island marmot is among the rarest species of mammals in the world.
- ▶ The million plus cars in the Lower Mainland has led to poor air quality with associated health costs. Residents face increased commuting times.

ACTION TO IMPROVE WATER QUALITY IN THE GEORGIA BASIN INCLUDES A COOPERATIVE UNDERTAKING TO DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT MAINTENANCE AND RESTORATION/REMEDATION PLANS FOR SHELLFISH HARVESTING AREAS. THE PROJECT, WHICH BUILDS ON EXPERIENCE IN BAYNES SOUND, IS SUPPORTED BY ENVIRONMENT CANADA, B.C. MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, LANDS AND PARKS, B.C. MINISTRY OF FISHERIES, FISHERIES AND OCEANS CANADA, LOCAL GOVERNMENTS, AND COMMUNITY GROUPS. PILOT LOCATIONS ARE TO BE IDENTIFIED OVER THE COURSE OF THE NEXT SEVERAL MONTHS.



THE SENSITIVE ECOSYSTEMS INVENTORY IS A COOPERATIVE EFFORT BY ENVIRONMENT CANADA AND THE B.C. MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, LANDS AND PARKS AND MANY OTHER PARTNERS TO IDENTIFY AND MAP THE SENSITIVE ECOSYSTEMS ON EAST VANCOUVER

ISLAND AND THE GULF ISLANDS. THE PROJECT TEAM IS NOW WORKING WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENTS, LANDOWNERS, DEVELOPERS AND OTHERS ON WAYS TO PROTECT AND CONSERVE THE IDENTIFIED SITES. ENVIRONMENT CANADA WILL SUPPORT A SIMILAR INVENTORY FOR OTHER REGIONS IN THE GEORGIA BASIN.



...THE GEORGIA BASIN ECOSYSTEM INITIATIVE

Environment Canada has placed a high priority on the development and implementation of a cooperative ecosystem-based program in the Georgia Basin. Working with a broad spectrum of partners, the Georgia Basin Ecosystem Initiative (GBEI) will link the actions of governments and others in the Georgia Basin to achieve healthy, productive and sustainable ecosystems and communities.

The GBEI will be guided by the following principles:

- ▶ *an ecosystem approach* – recognizing the interrelationships between land, air, water, wildlife, and human activities;
- ▶ *decisions based on sound science* – including natural and social sciences, combined with local and traditional knowledge;
- ▶ *federal-provincial-regional-municipal partnerships* – governments working together to achieve the highest level of environmental quality for Basin residents;
- ▶ *a citizen/community base* – working with individuals, communities, Aboriginal peoples, industry, business, and governments in the design and implementation of initiatives;
- ▶ *pollution prevention* – avoiding the creation of pollutants in the first place.

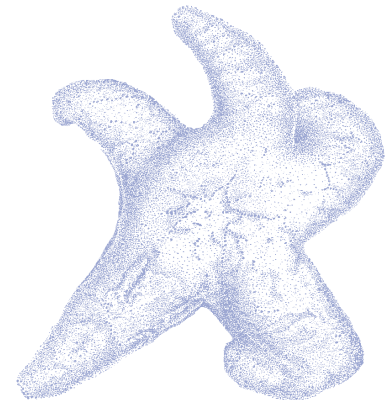
The GBEI succeeds the Fraser River Action Plan (FRAP) which ended on March 31, 1998. Environment Canada will continue to work in close partnership with the Fraser Basin Council on issues of mutual interest in the Georgia/Fraser Basin.

IMPROVING AIR QUALITY THROUGH THE DEVELOPMENT OF A LOWER FRASER VALLEY AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT PLAN IS A COOPERATIVE EFFORT OF THE B.C. MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, LANDS AND PARKS, THE GREATER VANCOUVER AND THE FRASER VALLEY REGIONAL DISTRICTS, THE NORTHWEST AIR POLLUTION AUTHORITY, AND ENVIRONMENT CANADA. THIS PARTNERSHIP WILL PLAN AND IMPLEMENT GROWTH MANAGEMENT AND AIR POLLUTION CONTROL STRATEGIES TO MAINTAIN AND IMPROVE AIR QUALITY IN THE REGION. ENVIRONMENT CANADA WILL CONTRIBUTE TO ENSURING THAT MEASURES TAKEN ARE BASED ON SOUND SCIENTIFIC UNDERSTANDING OF ALL CAUSES OF AIR POLLUTION AND THE POTENTIAL EFFECTIVENESS OF CONTROL MEASURES.



THE COMMUNITY ANIMATION PROGRAM (CAP)

IS A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN ENVIRONMENT CANADA, HEALTH CANADA AND COMMUNITIES. THE PROGRAM BUILDS THE CAPACITY OF COMMUNITY GROUPS TO MAKE LINKAGES BETWEEN, AND TAKE ACTION ON, HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES WITH THE PERSPECTIVE OF ACHIEVING SUSTAINABILITY. ENVIRONMENT CANADA AND HEALTH CANADA WILL WORK WITH OTHER PARTNERS TO BRING CAP TO GEORGIA BASIN COMMUNITIES.



...A COOPERATIVE APPROACH

Environment Canada is committed to working with provincial agencies, such as the Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, as well as regional and municipal governments. These agencies have the authorities, knowledge, and expertise to develop and implement effective land use planning and growth strategies in the Georgia Basin.

Environment Canada is working with federal agencies, such as Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Health Canada, to create and coordinate linkages and to integrate programs for the Georgia Basin. These departments have significant mandates and expertise in, respectively, the stewardship of the oceans, and human health and well-being.

Environment Canada is also seeking to establish or reinforce partnerships with First Nations, local governments, non-governmental organizations, community groups, and other stakeholders in the Georgia Basin. For example, we will continue our partnership with the Fraser Basin Council in furthering the sustainability goals for the Fraser Basin, and we will improve linkages with US interests over common transboundary ecosystem issues and concerns.

GBEI...

A SHARED VISION "MANAGING GROWTH TO ACHIEVE HEALTHY, PRODUCTIVE AND SUSTAINABLE ECOSYSTEMS AND COMMUNITIES."

SHARED GOALS

- ▶ TO ENHANCE ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH
- ▶ TO ENHANCE SOCIETY'S CAPACITY TO ACHIEVE SUSTAINABILITY
- ▶ TO ENHANCE HUMAN WELL-BEING

SUSTAINABILITY REQUIRES IMPROVED WORKING RELATIONSHIPS AMONG GOVERNMENTS. THIS IS NOT A SIMPLE TASK.

IN ADDITION TO THE FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENTS, THE GEORGIA BASIN INCLUDES 11 REGIONAL DISTRICTS, 63 MUNICIPALITIES AND THE ISLANDS TRUST, AND 40 FIRST NATIONS. PUGET SOUND AND THE SOUTHERN PORTION OF THE STRAIT OF JUAN DE FUCA ARE GOVERNED BY THE US, WASHINGTON STATE, LOCAL, AND INDIAN TRIBAL GOVERNMENTS.



... DEVELOPING ACTION PLANS

Partnerships developed to date have resulted in Action Plans for:

- ▶ **clean air** - measured through the emissions of airborne contaminants; the achievement of air quality objectives; and the visibility and clarity of mountain views;
- ▶ **clean water** - measured through the identification and prevention of threats from toxic substances throughout the Basin; the reopening of shellfish harvesting; the reduction of non-point pollution sources; and the reduction in loadings from municipal effluent;
- ▶ **conserving and protecting nature** - measured through the increase in areas of protected habitat and green spaces; the creation of marine protected areas; the adoption of community land use plans taking into account environmentally sensitive areas; and the increase in public involvement in environmental stewardship;
- ▶ **building societal capacity for sustainable decision making within communities** - measured through the increase in understanding for and the respect of the integrity of the ecosystem.

New Action Plans aimed at achieving the shared vision and shared goals for the Georgia Basin will emerge as partnerships expand.

More information on the Georgia Basin and other ecosystem initiatives is available from Environment Canada:

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