

Strait of Georgia Lowlands

Unrepresented: Pacific Marine Heritage Legacy Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed in July 1995 provides for establishment of a national park



Gulf Islands

LIFE IN THE RAINSHADOW

Tucked under the rainshadow of the mountains of Vancouver Island and Washington's Olympic Peninsula, this region basks in a balmy Mediterranean climate. Warm dry summers and mild winters that rarely see snow, a frieze of islands and a fertile sea combine to create habitats found nowhere else in Canada

THE LAND:

From the air, the flat plains of the Fraser Delta and the southern corner of Vancouver Island stand out from the forests, mountains and glaciers that fence them in: a mosaic of rectangular fields, two major cities with spreading suburbs, roads, towns, hydro lines and a spattering of green and brown islands in the blue waters of the Strait of Georgia. This is the Strait of Georgia Lowlands Natural Region, the smallest and most urbanized natural region in Canada. Although the region makes up about 2% of the area of the British Columbia, it contains two-thirds of its population.

The range of physiographic forms in this small region, in combination with the region's mild Mediterranean climate, has resulted in a diverse and abundant array of plants and animals. Many of these plants and animals are at the northern extreme of their range and not found elsewhere in Canada.

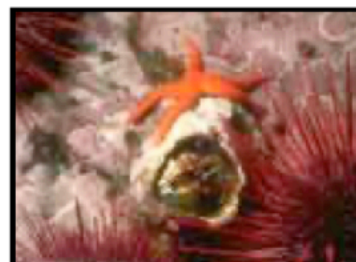


Gulf Islands

VEGETATION:

The vegetation of this area is, in a word, unusual. Arbutus, with its constantly shedding smooth red bark, leathery evergreen leaves and twisted, muscular form; Garry oak, gnarled, dark and rough - these species are found nowhere else in Canada. Prickly pear cactus are abundant on some of the Gulf Islands. The dominant vegetation is more familiar - coastal Douglas fir, grand fir, western red cedar, lodgepole pine, Pacific dogwood (British Columbia's provincial flower), big leaf maple and red alder.

WILDLIFE:



At the bottom of Active Pass

Bendires shrew, California bat, Townsend's chipmunk, Douglas squirrel and western spotted skunk, among



Killer whales, also known as Orca, swim the waters of Georgia Strait (below). These flamboyant creatures impress tourists, overshadowing the more laid-back sea lions (above) and harbour seals found along the coasts.



Natural Region 2

many others, are found only in this region in Canada and are at the northern most limits of their ranges here. The black-tailed deer, a small sub-species of mule deer, is the most conspicuous large mammal and is abundant throughout the region. The mud flats and salt marshes of the Fraser River Estuary are critical areas for waterfowl and shorebirds. Millions of migrating birds flock here each year, feeding and resting before completing their journeys. Hundreds of thousands spend the winter. Alaksen Migratory Bird Sanctuary, covering 5.2 square kilometres of the Fraser Delta, is of such significance that it has been listed as a Ramsar site - a wetland of international importance. It is one of thirty such sites in Canada.

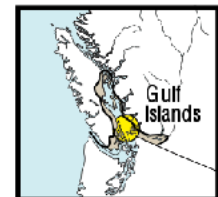
STATUS OF NATIONAL PARKS:

Canada and British Columbia announced the Pacific Marine Heritage Legacy in July, 1995. A foremost objective of the Legacy is the acquisition of land before the year 2000



Pelagic Cormorant

for a new national park and provincial protected areas in the Southern Gulf Islands, which encompass the highest concentration of the most ecologically significant and least disturbed properties within Region 2. Land acquisition is underway, and interim protection will be provided to the purchased lands. This joint land acquisition process represents an exciting new partnership approach suited to such a highly developed natural region.



At the bottom of Active Pass

The following table summarizes the status of system planning for each step toward establishing a new national park in this natural region.

Steps in the Park Establishment Process	Status
Representative Natural Areas Identified:	done
Potential Park Area Selected:	done
Park Feasibility Assessed:	done
Park Agreement Signed:	MOU signed
Scheduled under the National Parks Act :	0

Scraps of green space are at a premium in Canada's most densely populated neighbourhood, Vancouver's West End. The popular beach with its view across the outer harbour make up for more traditional parks.

Major Land Uses

Urban & industrial development
Export of coal & other commodities
Import of manufactured goods from Asia
Intensive agriculture (vegetables, berries)

Main Communities

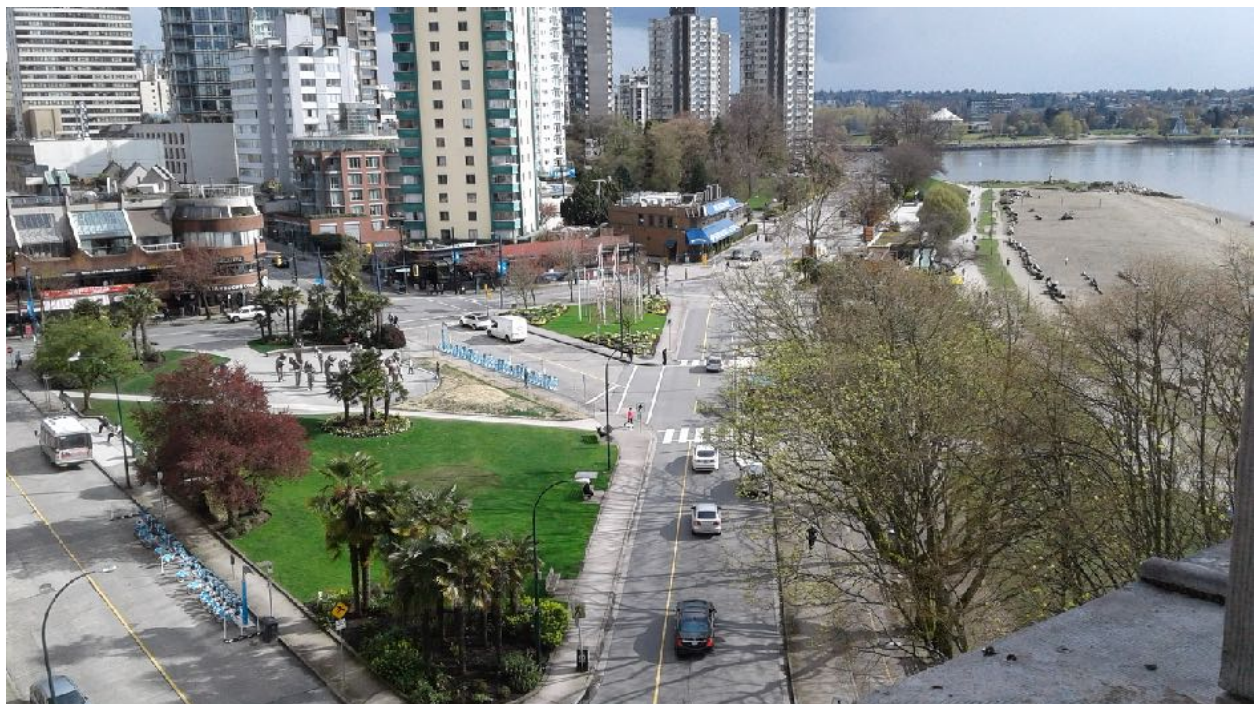
Vancouver, Chilliwack and nearby suburbs
Victoria
Nanaimo
Gulf Islands

Aboriginal Peoples

Parks and Natural Areas

Ft Langley National Historic Site
Reifel National Wildlife Area
Gulf Islands National Park
Numerous parks maintained by Greater Vancouver Region

Further Information





Extensive mud flats of Boundary Bay tempt thousands of migrating shorebirds to rest for a while. (I'm glad you asked: The international boundary passes through this picture, with the dark ridge being in Washington State, United States. Americans need to enter Canada to drive to the rest of the state.) Salt Spring Island, in Canada, is barely visible in the distance. Yes, the boundary is confusing!



Ferries bring traffic from the mainland to Vancouver Island and back. This semi-isolation gives “the Island” a more relaxed vibe.

This particular passage is Active Pass, a narrow gap between Mayne and Galiano Islands. The water here is particularly “active”, since the tide from the entire Georgia Strait sloshes through here four times a day (twice inbound, and twice outbound). The currents can be treacherous, especially for smaller boats.



The marine ecosystem is hard to view, but is beautiful. The Vancouver Aquarium makes this fascinating habitat accessible for everyone. Canada's west coast is well known for its great variety of shellfish and other invertebrate species.