

Preet Chaggar

From: TED LEA [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, November 17, 2024 10:15 AM
To: Mayor Dean Murdock; Zac De Vries; Susan Brice; Councillor Judy Brownoff; Nathalie Chambers; Karen Harper; Teale Phelps Bondaroff; Colin Plant; Mena Westhaver
Cc: Clerksec
Subject: (External Email) ITEM G8. FUNDING OPTIONS FOR THE BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION AND URBAN FOREST STRATEGIES
Attachments: BCS Expanded implement.. June 2024.png

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Saanich Mayor and Council

November 17, 2024

ITEM G8. FUNDING OPTIONS FOR THE BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION AND URBAN FOREST STRATEGIES

I am aware that this issue in front of Saanich Council Monday is dealing with a funding mechanism for dealing with these two strategies, and it is good to see this policy going forward.

However, I also believe that this is an opportunity for a full reconsideration of funding for the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy (BCS) and that direction can be given to staff regarding the Implementation Plan that was previously provided to Council.

Attached is page 20 of a staff Presentation that was shown to Council for the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy meeting on June 17, 2024. The staff member providing this presentation stopped at page 16 at the Council Meeting, without showing this critical funding page. The same staff member indicated at the NAPT meeting this past week that they "ran short on time". This presentation can be found at https://saanich.ca.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=1&clip_id=888&meta_id=69220

Yet this was only one more page to present to Council, and this significant page dealt with financial needs for the type of comprehensive Saanich programs which many experts had recommended to staff and Council. These experts included the Resilient Saanich Technical Committee (RSTC), multiple Pulling Together stewards and volunteers, and many highly regarded, expert University of Victoria professors, including Dr. Nancy Turner.

Instead, the staff report presented budget information from Appendix 4 of the Strategy document, which only provided for the tinkering of existing programs. The attached table was not provided or referred to in the Staff Report. As it now stands, the highly recommended programs needed to deal with significant issues in Saanich Parks, will not even be considered by Council going forward. Appendix 4 can be found at https://saanich.ca.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=1&clip_id=888&meta_id=69213

This issue is why I have written the Focus Magazine article which I shared with all of you earlier. See <https://www.focusonvictoria.ca/commentary/102/>

The experts quoted in this article called for a comprehensive program dealing with species at risk management, a comprehensive program regarding restoration of significant areas of degraded ecosystems in Saanich Parks, a comprehensive private land stewardship program, new ecosystem mapping within the UCB, including covering Saanich Parks, which would include ecological condition assessments in order to determine restoration needs, and multiple other recommendations, including the need for access restrictions in Parks.

I am hopeful that Council will take this issue out of the Consent Agenda and deal with it with a renewed sense of concern for our very special biodiversity in our Parks system. The attached table provides an excellent starting point.

I request Council have staff provide you with a full understanding of the requirements of the comprehensive programs that these multiple experts recommended, and that significant resources are provided long term to deliver these programs. This request to staff could be done Monday evening, or when the Implementation Plan comes forward at a later date. I believe Council should direct staff to provide a revised Implementation Plan that includes these comprehensive programs.

Sincerely,

Ted Lea, Vegetation Ecologist and Pulling Together volunteer



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New Biodiversity Strategy fails to address crisis in Saanich Parks



By Ted Lea
October 9



Saanich's new Biodiversity Conservation Strategy ignores key recommendations from experts

IN JANUARY 2022, I wrote the following article for Focus Magazine: **Saanich Park Report Card indicates failure by Saanich to steward Garry Oak ecosystems and species at risk.**

At that time, most report card categories received a failing grade. Little has changed,

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and it appears that little will change in the Saanich Parks system moving forward, even after significant resources were provided by Saanich Council, to engage a group of experts, the Resilient Saanich Technical Committee (RSTC) to provide advice, and to hire consultants to write a State of Biodiversity report and a Biodiversity Conservation Strategy (BCS). Most of the significant recommendations made by the RSTC have not been addressed in Saanich's new Biodiversity Conservation Strategy and Implementation Plan.

Saanich updated its 2008 Official Community Plan (OCP) in 2024. The latest OCP still states, under the heading Environmental Integrity that:

“Saanich is a model steward working diligently to improve and balance the natural and built environments. Saanich restores and protects ... the biodiversity of existing natural areas and ecosystems.”

The new Biodiversity Conservation Strategy (BCS) ignores the comprehensive programs put forward by the Resilient Saanich Technical Committee (RSTC). The RSTC recommended the following comprehensive programs; a private land stewardship program, a species at risk management program, new ecosystem mapping to replace

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inaccurate mapping, and a comprehensive ecosystem restoration program. This last program would include significant access restrictions in Saanich parks to protect special ecosystems. Mapping would include doing an ecological condition assessment to determine restoration needs for each park.

Instead of the bold vision and comprehensive programs recommended by the RSTC, the strategy provides tinkering around the edges, with only minor adjustments to existing programs. No significant new funding or comprehensive programs appear to be proposed.

If the RSTC recommendations had been adopted, the OCP vision and other issues listed above, could have been achieved.

Large areas of Garry oak ecosystems in Saanich parks are severely degraded. Using existing resources while not requesting significant funding for restoration in Saanich parks will not be effective. The RSTC indicated in their latest letter to council that “current budgets devoted to biodiversity conservation and the maintenance of ecological health of Saanich Parks is **woefully inadequate.**”

Saanich provides \$97 per citizen funding for its parks system (for both capital and

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December 1, 2023



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November 30, 2023



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By Judith Lavoie
September 26, 2023



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operating expenditures) while Kelowna, a jurisdiction similar in size, provides almost double that at \$186 per citizen to its parks system.

Our natural area parks and biodiversity, particularly PKOLS (Mount Douglas Park), are exhibiting significant degradation. I have witnessed this degradation first-hand during the 40 years that I have lived in Saanich, and it has been particularly noticeable in the last decade as our population and park use increases, with a lack of access restrictions for people and pets.

Summary of Preliminary Assessment of Ecological Condition by Sensitive Ecosystem*

Sensitive Ecosystem Type	Condition Rank			
	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Garry oak woodland	0	<5%	<5%	>95%
Terr-Herbaceous	0	<5%	<5%	>95%
Coastal bluff	0	<5%	<5%	>95%
Wetlands	0	<5%	<5%	>95%
Riparian	0	<5%	<5%	>95%
Douglas-fir forest OF-SG	0	Approx. 50%	Approx. 5%	Approx. 45%
Sparsely vegetated	0	10%	25%	65%

*Based on parts of each park that was observed

Figure 1 Summary Table Ecological Condition Assessment, from *The Victoria Naturalist* Vol.79.2 (2022) page 11: Results of Assessing the Ecological Condition in Major Saanich Parks Using a Rapid Assessment Technique.



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An assessment of 18 major parks in Saanich, by a member of the RSTC and I, found that most, if not nearly all, natural area parks are covered with invasive species, and severely degraded by overuse, due to limited access restrictions (see Figure 1). Bold actions will be required to restore these globally imperilled ecosystems. Significant resources are required, not the limited amounts that are indicated in the BCS Implementation Plan. Examples of the predominance of invasive species are provided in Figure 2, Figure 3, and Figure 4.



Figure 2 Knockan Hill Park, June 2024. Inside the post and rope fenced area, multiple species of invasive grasses and yellow-flowered hairy cat's-ear dominate and are expanding rapidly. Limited restoration action is occurring. (Photo: Ted Lea)

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Figure 3 Knockan Hill Park, April 2021. The globally imperilled Douglas-fir ecosystems within this park are covered in invasive spurge laurel (*Daphne*), English ivy, Himalayan blackberry, periwinkle and many other invasive species. (Photo: Ted Lea)



Figure 4 Swan Creek Park, September 2024. This natural area park (P-4N) south of McKenzie Avenue is extensively covered in English Hawthorn (red berries) as well as other invasive species. (Photo: Ted Lea)



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Jonathan Huggett's Greatest Hits

Many highly regarded experts have written to Saanich Council and indicated that a far more comprehensive approach is needed than was approved by Council. These experts include, in addition to the RSTC, multiple University of Victoria professors, including Dr. Nancy Turner in a separate letter, and multiple Pulling Together volunteers.

A group of Pulling Together volunteers provided a presentation to Saanich council in March 2023, indicating that Saanich parks are in “crisis” and that the volunteers in the Pulling Together program cannot deal with the significant areas of invasive species in Saanich parks, including up to 30 species of invasive grasses in Garry oak ecosystems.

A group of UVic professors in May 2024 wrote to Saanich council regarding the strategy and indicated that: “Saanich must also place significant effort on effective protection and restoration,” and that “many of the beautiful parks in the district are experiencing intense pressure from invasive species and high levels of recreational use.”

The group of UVic professors went on to write that “Given the rich biodiversity in this region, and in the District of Saanich, we are in need of a cohesive, comprehensive species-at-risk management program across the district.”

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By Briony Penn
May 7, 2020

Saanich does not have a species at risk management program and there is no mention of the need for a comprehensive species at risk management program in the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy. There are many species at risk in Saanich parks, including species whose numbers are rapidly decreasing. At the council meeting on June 17, 2024, Saanich staff stated that Saanich follows “Best Practices” in terms of species at risk management, and presumably, ecosystem restoration, however, both programs are critically underfunded.

Dr. Nancy Turner, a long-time Saanich resident, a University of Victoria professor and internationally-distinguished scholar and scientist, provided a June 14, 2024 letter to Saanich Council providing recommendations for biodiversity in Saanich (pg. 96).

Dr. Turner’s list includes pointing out the irreplaceable biodiversity, rare ecosystems in Canada, many species at risk, importance of protecting and restoring biodiversity, threat of unregulated trampling by people and pets, the need for updated ecosystem mapping and inventory of species at risk, signage to educate users regarding biodiversity values, and the need for significant funding and expertise.

Dr. Turner provided a 100-to-200-year vision that is critically missing in the Implementation Plan for the Biodiversity Strategy.

Most of the ecosystems in PKOLS and other natural area parks in Saanich are considered “critically imperilled” or “imperilled” by global conservation standards, according to the international NatureServe database. This includes most of the Douglas-fir ecosystems and all Garry oak ecosystems in Saanich.

Pulling Together volunteers have spent over two decades removing invasive plant species in the south end of PKOLS which had allowed the native understory in the forested areas to recover. Saanich Council has seen multiple videos of off-leash dogs, off-trail in PKOLS and elsewhere in Saanich Parks. Damage to the natural understory of these ecosystems is extensive and expanding (Figure 5).



Figure 5 PKOLS (Mount Douglas Park)
south end, 2023. This area was fully restored
by Pulling Together volunteers; native
vegetation used to grow to the edge of the
main trail, however, it has been used as an
off-leash, off-trail dog park for many years,
resulting in extensive damage over this time.
(Photo: Ted Lea)

Saanich Council approved the People, Pets and Parks Strategy in October 2023, which planned for signage and fencing in a significant area of PKOLS. At the time of this writing (early October 2024) no signs and no fencing have been provided to protect these globally imperilled ecosystems.

The 2011 District of Saanich Park Natural Areas Management Guidelines indicate that:
“Our ecosystem management goal is to preserve, restore, and enhance ecological integrity while providing for appropriate use

and access”. These Guidelines also state to restrict access for areas of high ecological integrity, protect critical habitat for species at risk, manage trail use with markers and signs, and educate the public about the importance of natural areas and ecosystems.

These Guidelines are not being followed, despite the obvious indication in this document, and statements from the public in the BCS, that they care about these ecosystems and species.



Figure 6 *Blenkinsop Trail in PKOLS (Mount Douglas Park), December 2023. No clear delineation of the main designated trail is visible resulting in multiple rogue trails. Access restrictions are required to protect these ecosystems at risk. (Photo: Ted Lea)*

An example of lack of trail delineation and access restrictions is the Blenkinsop Trail, developed in 2012 to access the west side of PKOLS (Mount Douglas Park). Many parts of this trail lack clear delineation of the main path. As a result, multiple braided routes, and many rogue trails have been created, allowing people and their pets to go wherever they wish (Figure 6). These are special ecosystems that were of “highest ecological integrity” which are not being protected and continue to become more degraded each year. There are many methods of protection, such as post and rope fencing or using rope and weight delineation that are used in numerous provincial parks.



Figure 7 *Glencoe Cove – Kwatsech Park, April 2016. Bearded Owl-clover habitat (small white flowers). There were 90,000 Owl-clover plants in 2009. This entire park is considered Federally Designated Critical*

Habitat for three different species at risk.

(Photo: Ted Lea)



Figure 8 *Glencoe Cove – Kwatsech Park, April 2024. This is the same area as in Figure 7, showing significant damage and further loss of habitat and species since 2016. Only hundreds of individuals of the Federally Endangered Bearded Owl-clover remain. Access restrictions are required to protect species at risk and their habitat.*

Little is being done to protect species at risk locations in Saanich, even in areas that are mapped as Federally Designated Critical Habitat, despite what the 2011 Guidelines indicate. Glencoe Cove – Kwatsech Park has three species at risk. Despite this, full access to the whole park is allowed year-round to people, dogs, bicycles, and events such as weddings. No fencing or trail delineation is

provided and as a result, the population numbers of these species at risk continue to decline. Figure 7 and Figure 8 show the changes to this species at risk habitat from 2016 to 2024. This is not “Best Practices.”

There is an opportunity to correct these directions going forward, especially when the Implementation Plan is brought back to Saanich Council. Saanich Council needs to take bold action to implement comprehensive, fully funded programs to restore Garry oak ecosystems and other ecosystems in Saanich parks and provide effective management for the many species at risk in Saanich Parks. Otherwise, the ecosystems in Saanich’s parks system will continue to become more and more degraded, and Saanich’s species at risk will continue to decline.

Ted Lea is a retired ecologist and provincial expert in ecosystem inventory and mapping, and Garry oak ecosystems.

Report Comment



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2 Comments



Ted Lea



Posted October 14

Dr. Nancy Turner (posted with her approval) indicated the following to Saanich Council:

- “1. Saanich parklands – including Mount Tolmie, Mount Douglas, Cedar Hill, Blenkinsop Lake, Christmas Hill, Playfair, and so many others – are irreplaceable treasure-troves of biodiversity, with many species and habitats that are restricted to our region*
- 2. As emphasized in Saanich Parks’ website: “Saanich is home to some of the rarest ecosystems in Canada!” and “The natural areas in Saanich provide unique ecological characteristics and are home to many rare and threatened species.”*
- 3. It is so important to retain, protect and restore these biodiverse habitats, and to ensure that the Saanich Biodiversity Strategy is not only strong in its wording and conceptually, but that it provides the practical and ongoing support required for the protection and restoration of the native species and habitats in the long term.*
- 4. The indigenous and endemic species are also threatened by unregulated trampling by park visitors, unaware of the destruction*

they or their pets might be causing. I have personally witnessed the impact of trampling, and resulting eradication of species.

5. Each of the Saanich parks featuring native species and ecosystems needs detailed updated mapping and full inventories of all native species, including, and especially species and habitats at risk.

6. These need to be specially cared for, with signage to educate park users about the value of these natural areas and potential damage from unregulated use. Trails through many of these parks need to be more carefully delineated.

7. All this work, of course, requires financial support and trained personnel, but will be an important long-term investment for Saanich, and I urge you to provide the necessary budget for these ongoing initiatives.

8. It is my hope that, 100 and 200 years from now and beyond, Saanich citizens and visitors will still have the pleasure of experiencing these beautiful and unique natural areas, the wetlands, camas meadows, and oak woodlands that are so special to many of us. Ensuring that the full value of Saanich's natural parks is maintained is, I hope, a priority for all of you as well."

+ Quote



Leonard



Posted November 5

I find Ted Lea's article to be very enlightening and informative with its presentation of facts, photos and references. It is strikingly obvious that the concerns addressed have been brought to the attention of decision makers over a significant period of time with compelling evidence. The article provides access to key documentation including Management Guidelines, Strategies and Implementation Plans, letters and other references that substantiate these concerns and validate the critical need for action.

It is baffling how matters of such significance to us all can be ignored, dismissed and abandoned by the few with the means to react proactively and significantly.

Perhaps there would be even more public engagement in the care and maintenance of these environments if officials displayed their concern and appreciation through substantiated action that all can witness and acknowledge.

Inaction is not easily concealed
and is, in fact, woefully blatant.

T.E. Leonard

Kelowna, B.C.

+ Quote

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Appendix 4

Priority Action	Next steps	Estimated implementation	Estimated Resources required 2025
Regularly update ecosystem data (i.e., terrestrial, aquatic, marine, invasive species, and species at risk) as new information becomes available. Continue to refine the precision of terrestrial ecosystem polygon boundaries through ground-truthing and air photo analysis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to assist in assessing and updating environmental layers in the GIS as data becomes available. Develop and submit resource request for field biologist to carry out ground truthing. 	Year 1	\$110,000/a
Develop park plans to help manage natural area parks in Saanich. Begin by creating a priority list.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop assessment process and carry out assessment with a focus on natural area parks. 	Year 1	Existing staff
Promote and expand programs to encourage biodiversity stewardship and education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop stewardship program on private lands focused on residential lots, in partnership with local stewardship groups. 	Year 1	\$90,000 grant received until March 2025. \$50,000 needed to continue past March 2025
Review and update the Invasive Species Management Strategy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Issue contract to carry out. 	Year 1	\$75,000
Collaborate with Indigenous communities to incorporate their values and caring for lands and waters into Saanich's biodiversity management.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to build relationships and implement ATOL/NEUEL with WSÁNEĆ <i>Leadership Council</i>. Continue to work with and build relationships with indigenous groups to carry out restoration projects in parks. 	Year 1	Undetermined
Continue to protect and restore Garry Oak ecosystems on public lands.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to support existing restoration sites and Pulling Together program Add restoration sites capacity allows 	Year 1	Existing
Prioritize, protect, and restore freshwater habitats in natural parks such as wetlands, riparian areas and ponds.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review work completed along with assessment of condition of other key freshwater habitats. 	Year 1	\$50,000
Identify and remove barriers to fish migration. Coordinate these efforts with Indigenous, nonprofit organizations and stewardship groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Closely tied to action related to protecting and restoring freshwater habitats. Barriers will be identified and removed as 	Year 1	NA

	restoration projects are implemented.		
Develop an incentive program to support protection of natural features through development inside the UCB.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research elements that could be built into a program, including a cross jurisdictional scan. 	Year 1	\$25,000
Complete a review of existing environmental and natural state covenants and their condition.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carry out condition assessments and begin to develop program options. 	Year 1	NA
Develop a monitoring program to assess effectiveness of actions and regularly report to public and Council.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research and develop a framework for monitoring and reporting. 	Year 1	\$20,000
Subtotal		Ongoing	\$110,000
		One-time	\$220,000
Implement a Marine Shoreline Development Permit Area (DPA) or zone to mitigate waterfront development impacts and restore degraded foreshore zones.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete a Marine Shoreline assessment in Saanich in partnership with CRD. 	Based on CRD timeline	Funded
Identify and prioritize areas within the Biodiversity Habitat Network for protection and enhancement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop process at appropriate scale to test. 	Year 2	NA
Educate private landowners regarding their obligations with respect to natural state covenants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop education materials for landowners based on program noted above. 	Year 2	NA
Acquire and restore the land within the Biodiversity Habitat Network.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify parcels for acquisition/protection and add to the Park Acquisition Guide. Develop a suite of tools beyond Saanich purchase to support land conservation. 	Year 3 and beyond	NA
Implement a development permit area or zone for the protection of the natural environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop process that would include broad engagement. 	Year 3 and beyond	NA