



CREATING THE SEA-TO-SEA GREEN BLUE BELT

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The recent acquisition by the Capital Region District of the 1,973 ha. Kapoor Lands fills a critical gap in Victoria's northern protected Green Belt. The Green Belt includes green space, forests, farms, and wetlands stretching from Sooke to Salt Spring Island. It also includes the "blue spaces" of Sooke Basin and Saanich Inlet.

The Green Belt's existence is intimately connected to the cessation of the commercial logging operation in the Greater Victoria Water District in 1994. It would have been more difficult to achieve without local advocates winning a court case that terminated commercial clear-cut logging. The Perry Commission (1995), which was subsequently created by the provincial government, recommended in its 1996 Report that some of the GVWD land be transferred to Capital Regional District parks. That land transfer in 1997 was the first to be in the Green Blue Belt's interests. Now that area is considerably larger than 10,000 ha. And the CRD watershed forest is a further 20,500 ha.

The water district forest is a sanctuary for flora and fauna unequalled on Vancouver Island. The Green Blue Belt contains a water and forest reserve intimately connected

geographically. It took a continuous effort to assemble the pieces over the past 35 years. In combination with the Agricultural Land Reserve (over 10,000 ha.) in the CRD, we have the basic requisites for a community bioregion that preserves habitats and improves local food security. In addition to the Green Belt, there are many other protected environmental jewels in the region: intact smaller watersheds, three bird sanctuaries, the largest remaining old-growth coastal Douglas Fir forest, and the longest remnant of protected coastline on the east side of Vancouver Island. All these fit well with the idea of a UNESCO Biosphere Region.

A 40-year history of community advocacy to protect this landscape on Southeast Vancouver Island is marked by several crises and achievements.

A 1988 algae bloom in Sooke Lake/Reservoir prompted the Greater Victoria Water District (GVWD) to critically examine the practice of clear-cut logging in a forest that provides drinking water. Many people and organizations worked diligently over the years to create the Green Belt.



In 1990 the Saanich Inlet Protection Society was formed to promote the designation of the Inlet as a Marine Park. Four years later, local governments collectively voted to support the Green Belt concept. The Gowland Foundation together with the Sea-to-Sea Green Belt Society

worked with the CRD and Provincial Government to raise \$17 million to purchase the Gowland lands for use as a major park, now the heart of the Green Belt.

A logging awareness campaign undertaken by the Western Canada Wilderness Committee was critical to the community effort. A six-year campaign culminated in a case heard by the Supreme Court of British Columbia. The plaintiffs were local community members Rainer Zimmermann, Dr. Janet Ray, Ruth Clay, Susan Watt, Edo Nyland, Dr. Joan Rosenberg, the Western Canada Wilderness Committee (Victoria Branch), and the Sierra Club of Western Canada. In January 1994, Justice D. A. Hogarth ruled the logging illegal. In that year, a coalition of local governments formed to support the initiative.

The subsequent acquisition of the Leech River watershed increased the water district forest to 20,500 ha. This created the largest refuge for flora and fauna on Vancouver Island, an area where human access and commercial activities are now restricted. Satellite images now show the forest recovering from logging.

The campaign to stop the logging increased the awareness of who controlled the lands between Finlayson Arm and Sooke Basin. Using the concepts of contiguity, complete watersheds and those lands under public control, the rationale for the Green Belt came together.

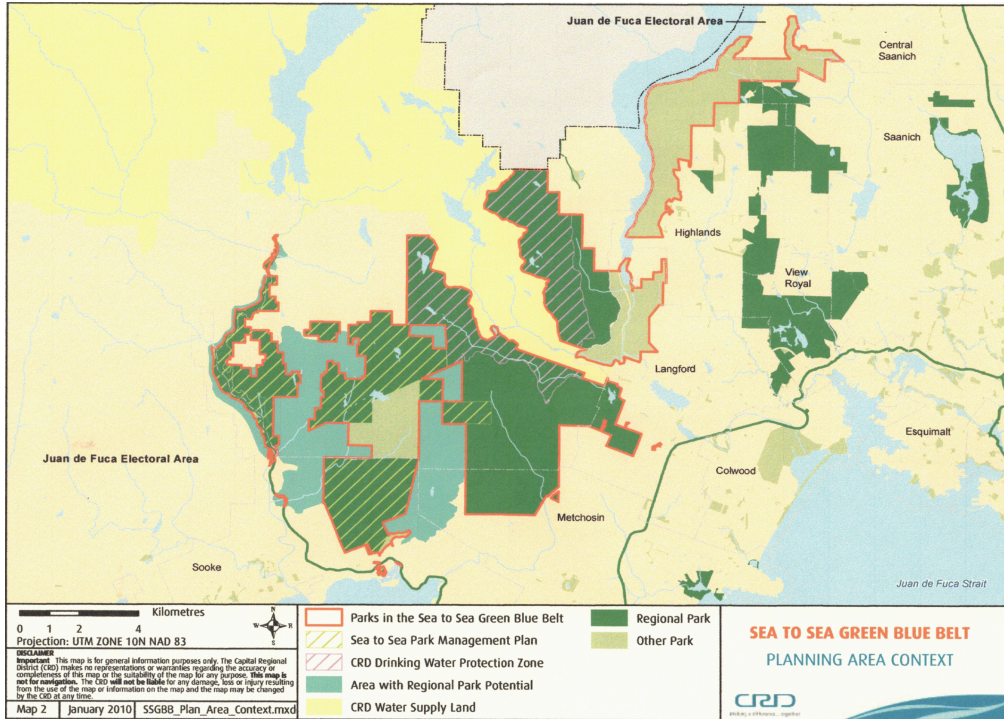


The successful court decision in April of 1994 stopped the logging as public pressure from many individuals and organizations heightened politicians' awareness of public support for protecting the forest. In addition, dissatisfaction among local municipalities with GVWD's management practices led the provincial government to instruct the Perry

Commission to examine GVWD's governance. As a result of the Perry Report's recommendation, control of the GVWD was transferred to the Capital Regional District. Some land was transferred to CRD Parks. That first land transfer increased the potential to link Saanich Inlet via forested land to the Sooke Basin. The Green Belt now consists of over 10,000 ha, and the effort continues. In 1995, the Provincial and Federal Governments made a joint commitment “to preserve and enhance the ecological, cultural, recreational, and economic values of British Columbia’s coastal and marine environment.” The local community realized the idea of a Green Belt was a complete fit with those declared values.

In the summer of 1998, 13 groups formed an alliance to work on completing the Green Belt, the “The Sea-to-Sea Green Belt Alliance”. The founders list included the Association for the Protection of Rural Metchosin, Cowichan Community Land Trust Society, Garry Oak Meadow Protection Society, Habitat Acquisition Trust, Hagen Creek Restoration Project, Rural Association of East Sooke, Saanich Inlet Protection Society, Salt Spring Island Conservancy, Sea-to-Sea Green Belt Society, Sierra Club of B.C., Society for the Protection of Ayum Creek, The Land Conservancy of British Columbia and the Western Canada Wilderness Committee

Also in 1998, the Federal Government announced a feasibility study for the Southern Strait of Georgia National Marine Conservation Area. The Society for the Protection of Ayum Creek and the Habitat Acquisition Trust purchased estuary lands of Ayum Creek, a key southern part of the Belt. In 1999 the Land Conservancy of BC purchased the connecting property on Ayum Creek, and the draft Capital Region District Parks Master Plan identified completion of Sea-to-Sea Green Belt as an acquisition priority.



These parks now contained within the Sea-to-Sea Green Blue Belt: Burgoyne Bay Provincial Park, Butchart Gardens National Historic Site, East Sooke Regional Park, Goldstream Provincial Park, Gowland Tod Provincial Park, Mount Maxwell Provincial Park, Mount Wells Provincial Park, Sea to Sea Regional Park, Sooke Mountain Provincial Park, and Sooke Potholes Provincial Park.

The Capital Region District Sea-to-Sea Green Blue belt is now a treasure protected for all Greater Victoria residents and the nation.

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