

View Royal is defined by the parkland, natural areas and waterways within its boundaries. These areas provide local and regional recreation opportunities, significant habitat, beautiful scenery, and space for generating important resources — fresh water and clean air.

The diversity and beauty of the landscapes and vistas in View Royal are impressive. It has ocean shoreline, rocky hills, grasslands, forest, and a network of lakes and streams. The many parks — most notably Thetis Lake Regional Park — allow for recreational access while protecting sensitive ecosystems and regionally significant ecological resources. However, many of the Town's natural areas, including the shoreline and waterways, have limited public access. Improved connections could increase the public's enjoyment, awareness and sense of stewardship of the local natural environment.

Geography

View Royal has a diverse set of geographic features. To the south it borders the ocean along Esquimalt Harbour and Portage Inlet. Farther north, bedrock hills reach elevations of over 135 metres. The hilly topography provides many expansive views of the ocean, neighbouring municipalities, and beyond. There are also a number of fresh water creeks and lakes within View Royal.

Ecosystems

View Royal is located within the Coastal Douglas Fir (CDF) Zone — one of BC's sixteen major biogeoclimatic zones. This zone is characterized by having warm dry summers and mild wet winters. Common plant species include Douglas Fir, Western Red Cedar, Grand Fir, Arbutus, Garry Oak, Red Alder, Oceanspray, Oregon Grape, Salal, and Snowberry.



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Much of View Royal is covered with mixed deciduous-coniferous forest but it also has rare Garry Oak ecosystems, which are only found in the CDF Zone. The diverse ecosystems in View Royal range from moist low-land creeks and estuaries to dry meadows. These include the saltwater environment of Esquimalt Harbour and Portage Inlet, the estuarine environment where Craigflower and Millstream creeks meet the ocean, and the fresh water environments of Thetis, Prior and McKenzie Lakes.

The ecosystem of Portage Inlet and the Gorge waterway provides habitat to a rich diversity of species. It supports spawning herring, cutthroat trout and coho salmon, as well as dense colonies of sponges, anemones, sea squirts, and large areas of eelgrass. This area is also a sanctuary for migratory birds. Many species of birds depend on the waterways and their shores for roosting and nesting. A healthy ecosystem is essential to support the fish and shellfish that these seasonal and year-round birds feed on.

Sensitive Ecosystems Inventory

In the mid-1990s government agencies conducted the first Sensitive Ecosystems Inventory (SEI) for East Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands through a combination of air photo study and field observations. The study identified eight percent of the area as being one of nine sensitive ecosystems. When the study was updated in 2004, a loss of 11% of the original sensitive ecosystem was observed.

The 2004 study showed almost 13 hectares of sensitive areas had been lost in View Royal over the previous decade. Within Thetis Lake Regional Park about 9.6 hectares were lost to road and trail development, and in northern View Royal, about 3 hectares of forest was cleared.

Seven of the nine Sensitive Ecosystems are found in View Royal. These are identified and described in the Town's Parks and Trails Master Plan (2007).



- Terrestrial Herbaceous – open wildflower meadows and grassy hilltops. Twenty-seven hectares located primarily in Thetis Lake Regional Park, some in Mill Hill Regional Park and some in and around Knockan Hill Park.
- Older Forest – average tree age 100 years +. Area of 385.3 hectares, principally in Thetis Lake Regional Park and northwestern View Royal.
- Riparian – on floodplains adjacent to lakes and streams. The total area of riparian ecosystem in View Royal is identified as 7.4 hectares, along the creeks in Thetis Lake Regional Park and along Millstream Creek in the area of Wilfert Park.
- Woodland – dry, open forested areas, comprised of pure stands of Garry Oak and mixed stands of Douglas Fir / Garry Oak and Douglas Fir / Arbutus. The total area of woodland is identified as 21.8 hectares, principally in Mill Hill and Thetis Lake Regional Parks.
- Wetland – seasonal or year-round water, either at or above the soil surface, or within the root zone of plants. All wetlands in View Royal – 28.7 hectares – are in the northern reaches, either in Thetis Lake Regional Park or in close proximity to Pike, McKenzie and Prior Lakes.
- Older Second Growth Forest – previously logged or used for human settlement. A total of 152.5 hectares is identified in View Royal, principally in Thetis Lake Regional Park.



- Seasonally Flooded Agriculture Fields – land used for agriculture but with important wildlife habitat value during specific times of the year. View Royal has 6.8 hectares of this ecosystem, located in the rural areas of the northwest.

OTHER IMPORTANT ECOSYSTEMS

The research undertaken as part of View Royal’s 2007 Parks and Trails Master Plan identified additional land and water ecosystems that had not been identified by the SEI. Specifically, these include:

- Portage Park, Nursery Hill Parks – valuable flora and fauna habitat
- Criagflower Creek, Millstream Creek – essential fish habitat
- Stoneridge Wetland, Tidewater Marsh – productive estuarine habitat

Local Conservation Initiatives

Environmentally sensitive areas in View Royal have been compromised and threatened by over a century of forestry, agriculture and suburban development. In recent decades, community and environmental groups, and government have worked to restore and protect the View Royal’s natural resources.

Several initiatives are underway to improve water quality and habitat areas in Portage Inlet and the Gorge Waterway. These include work being undertaken by the Portage Inlet Protection Society — an association of waterfront residents – and an inter-governmental partnership titled Victoria and Esquimalt Harbours Environmental Action Program (VEHEAP). The latter organization is conducting the Harbours Ecological Inventory and Rating (HEIR) project, a major initiative to identify and rate the biological and physical features of the backshore, intertidal and subtidal portions of the harbours.

Local conservation initiatives include expanding protected areas through conservation covenants and parkland dedication, removing invasive plant species, and encouraging native planting and responsible waste management. The CRD’s Regional Growth Strategy also supports conservation in View Royal through the establishment of an urban containment boundary and conservation strategies, and the encouragement of compact development forms.

Sources

Official Community Plan, Town of View Royal
2008 Annual Report, Town of View Royal
Strategic Plan 2009-2011, Town of View Royal
Gorge Waterway Action Society website (www.gorge.ca)
Conservation Challenges in BC’s Coastal Douglas Fir Zone
BC Ministry of Forests and Range
BC Ministry of Environment
Parks Canada



Key Planning Considerations

- How can new growth and development be distributed and designed to ensure the long-term integrity of the natural environment?
- How can public access to the shoreline and natural areas be improved to support increased public awareness and enjoyment of these resources?
- What innovative techniques should be encouraged to reduce the impact of human activity on the natural environment?



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