

British Columbia's Vital Estuaries

Estuary habitats have long been a conservation priority for Ducks Unlimited Canada and partners of the Pacific Coast Joint Venture (PCJV).

In British Columbia, estuaries make up less than three per cent of the coastline, and yet are some of the most threatened ecosystems in the world.

Rivalling tropical rain forests for their productivity and diversity, estuaries provide critical habitat to a wide variety of species (marine and land mammals, birds, fish, invertebrates, and plants), as well as trap nutrients and disperse them for freshwater and marine wildlife. In addition to their habitat values, estuaries also help reduce the effects of storm surges, detoxify waste, and mitigate flooding along coastal communities.

The importance of estuaries was recently identified as one of the 23 major findings, in *Taking Nature's Pulse: The Status of Biodiversity in B.C.* completed in 2008.

Despite their importance, current estimates indicate close to half of B.C.'s estuaries are threatened and subject to habitat loss, pollution, chemical contamination, alteration, resource extraction, freshwater diversion, sea level rise, debris, and invasive species.



Chemainus Estuary

B.C.'s most important estuaries, excluding the Fraser River, are:

- Chemainus River/Bonsall Creek
- Courtenay River
- Cowichan River
- Georgetown Creek
- Kitimat River
- Nanaimo River
- Nicomekl/Serpentine River
- Skeena/Ecstall/McNeil River

Ducks Unlimited Canada is committed to securing and restoring vital estuary habitats. Protecting these areas is essential in preventing further loss of intertidal, freshwater and non-farmed floodplain. These habitats provide critical staging, feeding and roosting areas for migrating birds and other wildlife along the Pacific Coast.



Ducks Unlimited Canada
Conserving Canada's Wetlands

Active by nature.

In 2007, DUC and Environment Canada (Canadian Wildlife Service) collaborated on an estuary ranking project, using geographic information system tools to identify and map 442 estuaries covering 74,500 hectares into five importance classes (refer to estuary class map at right). The estuaries were ranked based on size, habitat, vegetation, water bird use and herring spawn.

- Most estuaries in the top two classes were located in the Vancouver area and the east and northwest coast of Vancouver Island.
- Four of the largest estuaries (Fraser, Skeena, Nass, Nicomekl/Serpentine) account for more than 63% of area; 39% of all estuarine area is found in the Vancouver Lower Mainland area alone.

