

SKAGIT RIVER RHODODENDRONS

ER #106

ORIGINAL PURPOSE To preserve stands of the rare Pacific rhododendron in a site unlikely to be disturbed by recreational use

OVERVIEW

Date established:	9 July 1981	Location:	Skagit River Valley, 40 km SE of Hope and 8 km NNW of Ross Lake
ORC #:	3106		
Map number:	82 E/8	Latitude:	49°04'N
		Longitude:	121°08'W

Total Area:	70 ha	Elevation:	525-1,125 m
Land:	70 ha		

Access: Access only by foot from the Silver-Skagit Road which is about one km away.

Biogeoclimatic Zones: Coastal Western Hemlock (CWH); Interior Douglas-Fir (IDF)
Biogeoclimatic Variants: CWHds1 Southern Dry Submaritime; CWHms1 Southern Moist Submaritime; IDFww Wet Warm
Ecosections: Eastern Pacific Ranges; Hozameen Range
Region: Lower Mainland
Management Area: South Fraser

COMPOSITION

Physical: The reserve consists of two blocks, the lowermost on the gently sloping fan of St. Alice Creek on the floor of the Skagit Valley, the upper block on northeast oriented mountain slopes between St. Alice and McNaught creeks. Surficial materials between bedrock outcrops on the steep slopes are colluvium and till; those on the old creek fan are of glacio-fluvial origin.

Biological: The most significant feature is a large population of the showy, pink-flowered, Pacific rhododendron, a rare plant which in British Columbia is restricted to the Skagit River watershed, possibly the Chilliwack River valley, and two small sites on Vancouver Island. Its characteristic habitat is shaded evergreen forest on dry gravelly terraces.

Rhododendrons in the reserve are growing in two quite different habitats. The lower block contains typical habitat, predominantly Douglas-fir and lodgepole pine forest on strongly-drained alluvial and floodplain deposits. Western hemlock and western redcedar occur as sub-dominant trees; Pacific rhododendron, falsebox and Oregon-grape are abundant shrubs; the mosses *Rhytidiadelphus loreus* and *Hylocomium splendens* provide extensive ground cover. In the upper, steeper block, the forest is dominated by western hemlock and western redcedar, and Douglas-fir is less common. Dominant understory shrubs are red huckleberry, falsebox, Oregon-grape and Pacific rhododendron, although the latter is restricted to open forest stands near rock outcrops. Seedlings and older specimens of rhododendron are present in both blocks of the reserve. Rhododendrons in this area appear to be associated with sites having a history of forest fire.

Cultural: The Historical Whatcom Trail traverses the reserve. It was used by First Nations as a trade route and also provided Americans a route to gold discoveries in British Columbia during the 1800s.

MANAGEMENT CONCERNS

SIGNIFICANT SPECIES/ECOSYSTEMS	BC LIST STATUS	COSEWIC STATUS	CF PRIORITY
Douglas-fir – western redcedar – beaked hazelnut association	Blue listed		2
lace fern			4

THREATS

Climate Change: It is difficult to assess the impact of climate change on rhododendrons; they require a habitat that is regularly disturbed and is characterized by well-drained soils. A dry and warming climate may not heavily impact these populations, although increased growing degree days and progressive succession may lead to the expansion of forest systems, resulting in the rhododendrons possibly becoming out-shaded. The restricted range of this plant may limit its capacity for adaptation through migration.

Recreation: Recreational fishers are going through reserve to access the river.

RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES The reserve protects excellent stands, including seedlings, of the Pacific rhododendron, a species of very restricted range in British Columbia.

SCIENTIFIC NAMES OF SPECIES MENTIONED IN THE SKAGIT RIVER RHODODENDRONS ER ACCOUNT

Flora

Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*)
 falsebox (*Paxistima myrsinites*)
 fern, lace (*Cheilanthes gracilima*)
 hazelnut, beaked (*Corylus cornuta*)
 hemlock, western (*Tsuga heterophylla*)
 huckleberry, red (*Vaccinium parvifolium*)
 moss, lanky (*Rhytidiadelphus loreus*)
 moss, step (*Hylocomium splendens*)
 Oregon-grape (*Mahonia* spp.)
 pine, lodgepole (*Pinus contorta* var. *latifolia*)
 redcedar, western (*Thuja plicata*)
 rhododendron, Pacific (*Rhododendron macrophyllum*)

Fauna

None mentioned