

Brackman Island Ecological Reserve # 121

Management Issue 1

I find the easiest way to begin this report is by listing some of my observations on visitation since becoming the Warden for Brackman Island based mostly on the last 35 visits.

Visitation by boaters is definitely on the rise with no signs of slowing down. The heaviest traffic time is between April and October with most visitors coming from Portland Island or the Sidney area. I have come across people on many occasions trampling the wildflowers in the meadows. Due to the prolific abundance of some species you can see where they have walked throughout the meadows. You can easily see the majority of wildflower species represented on this island by staying in the spray zone high tide area without setting foot onto the island itself. In regards to trampling by people, my concern goes to the wildflower species that are represented in some cases by only one individual. The existing pathways within the reserve are getting wider, more worn down and littered with garbage (toilet paper, candy wrappers etc.)

I am concerned for the river otters and mink that live on Brackman Island. My concern is due to the amount of people who bring their dogs to this island. I feel the otters play an important role in relation to the wildflowers because of their excretements throughout the meadows all year round. Most people row over to Brackman from their moored boat around Portland Island with their dogs because they know dogs have to be leashed on the Marine Provincial Park. They also fear confrontation with sheep there. On the last visit to Brackman Island, while talking to a man with his dog, a couple with their big dogs passed us on the beach coming from the other direction. On some occasions I have come across people sunbathing, picnicing or just beach combing while their dogs were off in the forested areas unattended.

Before becoming the Warden, I noticed on Brackman Island that sometimes the harbour seals would venture up onto the spray zone on the southern tip of the island. Today, the harbour seals seem to only sun themselves at the waters edge so, when necessary, they can retreat to the ocean swiftly. The pictures you have of the dead baby harbour seal were taken early on Sunday afternoon. Because of the fresh pool of blood and the seal's location on the beach the seal must have been shot just hours before my arrival. Fishermen of all sorts have been seen within the 200 meter buffer zone on many occasions throughout the year. On one visit in the winter, I was hiding behind a small Rocky Mountain Juniper counting the harbour seals sunning themselves on the southern tip. The total count that day was 59. I have not seen that many since. The average number is between 30 and 40 harbour seals. I had just finished counting them and a helicopter, flying very low, flew over the seals (I have never seen seals move that fast) and landed in front of me. Bob went over and talked to the pilot while I took pictures. "Engine trouble" he said. They then took off and landed on the low tide area of Portland.

I have removed all the Ecological Reserve signs that had bullet holes through them. Four signs are presently situated on strategic landing locations around the island with no bullet holes in them so far. Speaking about guns, here is a scary observation Bob and I witnessed: We had just landed the kayaks on the shell beach on Brackman Island and turned to see a young man on Portland Island (camping area) with a rifle, shooting down the beach in the direction of other campers he could not see. I immediately yelled at him "Put the rifle away, now!" Before the echo of my yell stopped, this man and about 14 others had hastily packed their camping gear in their boats and within minutes they were heading towards Sidney.

All excursions to Brackman Island are launched from Isabella Point. The 3.2 Km voyage across Sattelite channel averages around 45 min. depending on the tidal action and boat traffic that day. The majority of the trips are planned around being on Brackman Island when the low tidal action is taking place. Sunday is the preferred day of travel with the average stay of around 5 hrs. I have travelled to Brackman on the other days of the week and was amazed to find out that visitation by boaters is not limited to Sundays only. All visitors know they are on an Ecological Reserve but no one knows about the 200 meter buffer zone.

I feel that Brackman Island is experiencing a surge in boaters due to the continued rising loss of native wildflower habitats in SW British Columbia.

Management Issue 2

On 3 occasions I have seen the remains of driftwood that was turned into firewood and removed from Brackman. On 5 visits I have come across log salvagers sizing up driftwood to be hauled away. I explained to all of them about the 200 meter buffer zone. To avoid a confrontation, I did not ask any of them if they had a license to remove logs off beaches. They all left Brackman heading towards Portland. On one occasion returning back to the kayak to have some lunch, I found a couple loading up their boat with driftwood. I stated my name and that I was the Reserve Warden and asked if they had read the ER sign. "Yes we have and driftwood is not part of the reserve." was the reply. I kindly explained about the 200 meter buffer zone surrounding Brackman. Once again the lady stated "driftwood is not part of this reserve" and continued to collect wood. The only comment from the man was: "This island is only good for shooting the small birds" and he too continued to load the boat. Throughout our short conversation a song sparrow was singing its song beside us. I went back to enjoying my lunch and watched as they packed their boat to the hilt with driftwood and left, heading towards the Sidney area.

On one occasion I came across a person inside a Rocky Mountain Juniper breaking branches. After my introduction, I asked that person to please remove himself from the tree. He did.

It looks like the parts taken from the Rocky Mountain Juniper was done many years ago. The largest section taken is well beyond the shoreline. Bob and I believe that some of the remaining Rocky Mountain Junipers are will over 250 years old.

Management Issue 3

I assume that where the Douglas Firs show browned branches that the cause is thin soil and drought conditions of the past. In their weakened state insects and fungus species continue to drain the living tree, eventually to its death. In two small localized areas on Brackman there are dead snags that stand beside the Firs that have browned branches. I noticed on one occasion, not in those localized areas, a young Douglas Fir with what looks like tiny white tufts of cotton on the needles (Wolly Aphid?).

Management Issue 4

Bob and I in the past 2 years have been taking pictures of the marine species and are very interested in continuing to do so throughout 1991. We are there every summer waiting to explore the lowest low tides and would like to do some diving beyond this area in the future. I have found 2 areas in the high tide zone where fossilized marine life is exposed in the sandstone.

Management Actions Required and their Priority

1) I am going to try to visit this island at least once a month throughout 1991 with frequent visits around the peak of the wildflower season. This year I am going to write a report on every visit, listing observations like the number of seals seen, wildflowers in flower at that moment, birds observed etc. I will be glad to give you a copy of that information.

2) I strongly recommend additional educational information signs posted on the preferred boat landing sites. the lettering on these signs should be much larger than the regular ER signs and include this information: No Hunting, No Fishing Within 200 Meters, No Dogs Permitted, No Picknicking, No Trampling of the Native Plants, No Driftwood Removal etc.

I would be happy to assist the Park staff in posting these signs on the preferred boat landing sites sometime this winter (1991). If these additional educational signs are made and posted on Brackman and IF abuse by casual boaters continues to increase then I will recommend at that time that Brackman become a "Permit Only ER".

3) I will keep you posted on the browned Douglas Fir syndrome and if it increases I will call in the Canadian Forestry Service.

4) Bob and I would like to supply you with the information on the biological description of this reserve on the portions below the mean high tide line. As I mentioned earlier, we are interested in doing some diving and would like to discuss this with you in more detail.

Fire and Insect Disease Contingency

1) Chainsaws could become a potential fire hazard due to the accumulation of dried grasses throughout the driftwood. From the evidence seen, the last fire on Brackman may have started in the driftwood zone in an area close to the southern tip. A man who has been visiting this island for 60 years, told me he has not seen a fire in that period of time. Definitely avoid using chemicals and machinery if a fire does start.

2) I would be glad to hang some insect traps throughout the island, collect and return them to you if someone is interested in studying the information.

Additional Comments

I would be very honoured to have Hans Romer come to Brackman Island to observe the population explosion of the plant Cytisus scoparius (Scotch Broom). Is this plant a threat to the native wildflowers on Brackman. In the lower portion of the Mount Maxwell ER Cytisus scoparius is so thick you cannot penetrate through its density and the area taken over is quite large.

Bob and I, with the assistance of the ER Branch and the Canadian Forestry Service would like to set up a scientific experiment involving hanging insect traps throughout the Garry Oaks on Mount Maxwell, Mt. Tuam and Brackman Island Reserves.

I Paul Linton, would be glad to discuss the comments herein with you, Ecological Reserve Branch, in further detail at your request.

End Report on Brackman Island Reserve # 121