

FER Board Members Meet with Minister and Deputy Minister of Environment and Senior Parks Staff

Summary by Mike Fenger

Friends of Ecological Reserves met with the Minister of the Environment, George Heyman and senior staff on October 31, 2017. Below is the agenda for this meeting as well as the meeting summary.

AGENDA

October 31st 2017

Meeting between Friends of Ecological Reserves (FER) and the Minister of Environment

1. **Introductions**
2. **Background** (Friends of Ecological Reserves and the purpose and current state of ERs)
3. **Desired Outcomes**
 - a. Shared understanding of FER's strategic goals
 - b. A path forward to achieving those goals to the benefit of BC Parks
 - c. A path forward with Kinder Morgan and the potential 600% increase in dilbit tanker traffic
4. **FER's Strategic Goals**
5. **Enhancing liaison with BC Parks**
6. **A Marine Ecosystems Monitoring and Research Framework – a response to Kinder Morgan tanker traffic**
7. **Thank you and a summary of possible future steps and communications**

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Minister of Environment &
FER Meeting Cont'd. 2,3,4,5 & 8

Tranquille ER 6, 7 & 8

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*Pacific Reef and Shore:
A Photo Guide to
Northwest Marine Life* Back Cover

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Autumn/Winter 2017/18

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The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the Friends.

Articles for publication are invited. The deadline for submissions for the Spring/Summer 2018 issue of *The LOG* is May 18, 2018.

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Attending for Ministry of Environment

George Heyman, Minister of the Environment

Mark Zacharias, Deputy Minister of Environment

Jim Standen, Assistant Deputy Minister of Parks

James Quayle, Parks Manager of Conservation

Eveline Xia, Ministerial Assistant

Attending for Friends of Ecological Reserves

Mike Fenger, President of Friends of Ecological Reserves

Garry Fletcher, Board Member and ER warden Race Rocks ER

Marilyn Lambert, Board Member and ER warden for Oak Bay Islands

MEETING SUMMARY

Approximately 15 minutes was spent on each part of the agenda. Below is a summary of what we heard and some possible next steps and follow-up. These minutes are posted on the FER website (<http://ecoreserves.bc.ca/>).

Part 1. BCs Ecological Reserves: The status quo is not working how to make incremental improvements.

1. FER believes a more robust ER system is timely in light of climate change and uncertainty with resource extraction and mitigating current practices. FER advocates that government be informed through a science-based approach and ERs are central to expanding knowledge. We understood there was some

general agreement to policy informed by a science-based approach.

2. During the meeting FER sought a greater level of commitment from the Minister and Parks senior managers and a greater commitment to ERs than currently exists. FER proposed that Parks dedicate a full staff position to revitalize the ER system. FER understands the present Parks' budget has recently been funded for a number of new Parks positions. Without direction from the Minister to staff, FER is unsure whether there will or can be a shift in Parks management with regard to management of ERs.

3. FER advocates for a provincial ER staff position within government and within Parks, to achieve a more robust ER system/network. A science-based approach means there needs to be significant increase in the areas within ERs from the current .012% of the existing Parks system. The current Parks system protects 15% of BC lands.

4. FER advocates that government set a goal where at least 1% of the current Parks system is dedicated as Ecological Reserves. Since ERs are an insurance policy for sustainability, if accepted, this new goal would better represent the diversity of BC's complex ecosystems from areas within the current Parks system.

FER believes this would be a huge commitment by the

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Minister of Environment. This would signal across government that Parks is serious about sustaining ecological values across the broader landscape and within lands under Parks control. It would also signal that the Ministry of Environment is willing to lead other Ministries and British Columbians toward a science-based understanding of natural ecosystem. This would promote a better understanding of the limits of exploitation and possible measures to mitigate the incremental impacts of resource development.



Mahoney Lake ER #130 (photo by ER Warden Kathryn McCourt)

5. FER advocates a Park's program to identify and add new ERs from areas currently managed as Parks. Candidates for ER designation that meet an agreed set of ecological criteria can be put on a path for legal ER designation if deemed worthy. Parks can lead natural ecosystem research and seek formal long-term arrangements with regional colleges, universities and First Nations. A dedicated Parks staff person would be necessary to make this happen.

Parks could form collaborative management of ERs with First Nations; the cultural values of First Nations and the purpose of ERs are very compatible.

In 2014, seven ER Candidate areas outside of Parks were made known to the Ministries of Environment and Forests, Lands and

Natural Resource Operations. FER sought and continues to seek a process within government to assess ecological values of candidate areas and their contribution to an addition to the current ER system. An across-government screening process would be transparent and help regional staff with proposals for new ER designation. Such a process would culminate in a government decision to add a new area for ER level protection.

6. The 2014 ER candidate list (see article in the Spring/Summer 2017 LOG) will be shared again with Jim Standen who will share with his counterpart in FLNRORD, Tom Ethier, the ADM of the Sustainable Stewardship Division. We hope there will be a desire to work collaboratively to create a process to

evaluate the initial seven ER candidates and that such a process will be sufficiently robust to assess any new areas put forward for ER designation. FER advocates the use of a criteria-based approach for inclusion of new ERs. A standard process is believed to be of benefit to the public and government.

7. The *Ecological Reserves Act* under section 9 provides to the Minister of Environment an option to: (1) *appoint a person or persons to advise the minister on any matter relating to the establishment and administration of ecological reserves.* (2) *A person appointed under subsection (1) has the duties specified by the minister and is subject to the regulations.* FER hopes this approach of

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an advisor is given serious consideration. FER does not believe direction in the *Ecological Reserves Act* restricts the Minister of Environment to lands currently within Parks but was intended to apply to all Crown lands. The advice consistently given to FER and to former Ministers of the Environment has been that the Minister of Environment limit his/her attention to Park lands. This is not consistent with the Minister's mandate in the *Ecological Reserves Act*. We hope that FLNRORD and BC Parks act together on a candidate screening process for government and use the provisions available in the *ER Act* to do so and that Parks lead FLNRORD towards a government process.

8. FER continues to be an advocate for maintenance of the current ERs. We believe the public interest is well served by ERs and the acquisition and sharing of knowledge gained in natural areas from a robust ER system.
9. FER is open to continued dialogue with BC Parks and accepts the invitation to meet with James Quayle to review incremental improvements that he could initiate without additional direction from senior staff and the Minister.

Part 2. Kinder Morgan and Trans Mountain Expansion.

1. FER shared insights from our final argument-in-chief as presented to the National



Mahoney Lake ER #130 (photo by ER Warden Kathryn McCourt)

Energy Board January 12, 2016. We shared our frustration that none of our permit conditions were included in the current KM permit. We based our conditions on a modest monitoring and research program (\$9 million annually) using as an example, the on-going monitoring by the State of Alaska as they continue to recover Prince William Sound after the Exxon Valdez oil spill of 26 years ago. We advocated to the NEB that KM be made responsible for research and monitoring in marine waters along the tanker route as it is a legitimate business expense. FER remains frustrated that the monitoring initiatives remain solely a taxpayer burden.

2. The Minister restated the BC government position and

approach to the KM expansion and the 600% increase in dilbit tanker traffic. The BC government does not support the project as it was approved, based on a flawed NEB process. The Minister's advice to FER was, should a new Federal review process be enabled, then FER could again engage and provide similar advice.

3. FER is encouraged that the Minister is opposing the KM project which is consistent with the BC government position. In the event that the Province is not successful in stopping the project, we hope that the conditions put forward by FER (marine monitoring and baselines) receive full government support and become adopted as conditions for approval by

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the BC government. FER received no support from either the BC government in general, during the NEB hearings, nor from the Ministry of Environment, while advocating for the 19 marine ERs at serious risk. We felt we were the sole advocates on behalf of Parks, marine ERs, marine ecosystems and ERs in general. However, FER along with other NGOs were honoured and our effort recognized by the Tsleil-Waututh Nation in a ceremony and for that we were thankful.

4. There was not sufficient time to clarify how to mitigate risks from current marine tanker and cargo ships or how to mitigate increased future risks. FER proposed to the NEB that Transport Canada change tanker routes so that shipping lanes are further from the Greater Victoria waterfront. It was FER's conclusion that the current shipping lanes are designed to be close to marine ERs and the Victoria waterfront in general, for the convenience of the tanker pilots. The current route significantly increases risk to all citizens and shoreline ecosystems in the Greater Victoria Area. We based this on modelling provided to the KM process and the fact that the time needed to avoid tanker-shore grounding is directly linked to the distance from shore.
5. Risk can be reduced when tanker traffic and shipping



Kim Beardmore came along to record the birds for the 2017 Christmas bird count at Race Rocks ER. Here, Kim on the left and the Ecoguardian Mikey Muscat, check on one of the five male elephant seals.

lanes are designated to be further off shore, as there is more time to make a course correction in the event of engine failure or a jammed rudder etc. and thus avoid tanker grounding. Transport Canada prefers the current shipping lanes and this means that all oil tankers travel parallel to the water front about one kilometre off shore. The shipping lanes were designed and agreed to by Transport Canada and the Pilots Association. When pressed and even with the encouragement of the NEB, Friends of Ecological Reserves intervenors were not able to open a meaningful dialogue with Transport Canada about the benefits of a change to the current shipping lanes. The Friends of Ecological Reserves con-

cluded that Transport Canada has put the convenience of pilots above the need to reduce risk to the public and marine ecosystems and that this is inconsistent with the Federal *Oceans Act*.

6. FER seeks support from the Minister of Environment so that when the Minister is in dialogue with the Federal Minister of Transport, he will make known that it is possible to reduce current risk of tanker grounding and oil spills along the water fronts of Saanich, Oak Bay, Victoria, Esquimalt, Colwood, Metchosin and Sooke. It seems reasonable that a mitigation strategy available to the Federal government through the Minister of Transport (Marc Garneau) be

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Report on Ecological Reserve # 29, Tranquille

By ER Wardens Kats and June Kitamura and Joan Best

This reserve is monitored by three volunteer wardens; Kats and June Kitamura and Joan Best. Joan began her duties in 2011 and soon found that the fence that encloses the reserve on three sides, the fourth not requiring fencing as it is largely cliff, claimed much of her time, so much so that BC Parks had to provide her with a fully-stocked fence repair kit! The Kitamuras joined the Tranquille ER team in 2012. Each of us has a background that prompted us to sign up for the 'job': Joan grew up in the area, and for her, the range of hills surrounding the reserve was 'part of our backyard'. Kats and June are very good amateur botanists and birders so the combined interests are, we think, a good fit for working towards the goal of the reserve's management plan.

One of the first projects we tackled was to clean up the site of an old research plot, part of the original set of reserves recommended by Dr. Krajina and his associates in the 1970s. The attributes of the general area merited its consideration as an Ecological Reserve and was established in 1971 to serve the purpose: "To preserve Ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*) and Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) ecosystems in a prominent interior valley". The old research plot, about an acre in extent, had been fenced off with heavy-gauge barbed wire which was attached to trees. When the western pine beetle's onslaught



Left to right: Kats and June Kitamura and Joan Best with tangled barbed wire that has now been cleaned up and removed.

felled the trees, a dangerous mess of tangled barbed wire ended up on the ground. Once that site had been cleaned up, our efforts were directed towards getting acquainted with the extent of 'our' reserve and its attributes.

Encompassing 235 hectares (about 580 acres) the reserve's terrain varies from a gentle slope along the south border to steep cliffs and promontories above. The slopes are cut by deep gullies and at the bases of the cliffs and for some distance toward the south, where rocks of all sizes cover the ground. Though the firs continue, very few of the pines have survived the pine beetle. In fact, the most prominent feature of the reserve, other than its striking terrain, is the hundreds of fallen mature pines, some piled helter-skelter atop each other. Nature

often finds a way, though, and there are many young pines scattered about. A few dead trees are still standing, however, which makes walking about somewhat hazardous as one must be alert to the potential for any standing dead tree to suddenly fall.

Sagebrush dominates the lower slopes interspersed with areas of grassland, especially on the bench below the cliff. In one of these areas, a team of government scientists and Parks BC personnel laid out two sets of transects as part of BC Parks long-term ecological monitoring program. These transects will be re-surveyed about every 4th year, thus enabling a record of how the plant community changes over time. We three volunteer wardens participated

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in the transect-laying exercise on a very hot day in August 2012.

About a dozen different grasses, some introduced, are scattered throughout the reserve, crested wheatgrass (*Agropyron cristatum*) having been introduced at some time in the past to augment browse. At one time diffuse knapweed (*Centaurea diffusa*) was widespread in the area but bio-control agents were introduced and, remarkably, have succeeded in almost eliminating that type of knapweed. However, spotted knapweed (*Centaurea maculosa*) is showing up and will be dealt with, hopefully, by hand pulling.

Research, going back many years in some cases, has taken place in the area, notably that carried out by retired research forester Alan Vyse on Ponderosa pine. A next stage of this research is planned and at the appropriate time, Alan's summary of this research will be published. A most interesting field trip was led by Research Ecologist Mike Ryan who took a group, including people from the Southern Interior Weed Management Committee, Park rangers, two visiting volunteer wardens from different reserves and others amongst the plants in the reserve.

Outside the reserve, which is bordered on three sides by Lac du Bois Grasslands Protected Area, and in the greater Kamloops area, cattle ranching has been carried on for many years. In Mike's estimation, the grasslands in the reserve, once overused, are now in good condition. This would indicate that modern range management



Below the washout

practices are, indeed, working well when the objective is to enhance grazing for cattle. However, ungrazed bunch grass, termed wolf grass by ranchers as, when comprised of a good deal of dead grass, it resembles fur, serves as valuable habitat for ground-dwelling birds and other creatures.

According to the original plant list, several plants considered rare in BC, are to be found in the reserve, a yellow-listed, being trailing fleabane (*Erigeron flagellaris*). Also of interest is the introduced plant, prickly lettuce (*Lactuca serriola*). Dalles milk vetch (*Astragalus sclerocarpus*), a red-listed plant, is also found there. The reserve also hosts Northern Pacific rattlesnakes (*Crotalus oreganus oreganus*), bullsnakes (*Pituophis catenifer sayi*) and other snakes. Mammals found include mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), snowshoe hares (*Lepus americanus*), least weasels (*Mustela nivalis*) and the occasional black bear

(*Ursus americanus*), coyote (*Canis latrans*) and marmot (*Marmota flaviventris*). At one time badgers dug into the bank adjacent to the southern boundary but are not listed as found within the reserve. Thus far, 28 bird species have been noted in the reserve, the highlight among them being a great grey owl, an unusual sighting as this particular owl is not a ponderosa pine specialist. The loss of the pines is, in fact, responsible for the current scarcity of birds such as Clark's nutcrackers (*Nucifraga columbiana*).

There are no streams in the reserve but on occasion fierce torrents pour down one of the cliff's gullies. The site of this astounding ground disturbance caused by one such flood is an area we monitor regularly as it affords the opportunity of noting which plants colonize the newly-barren area. In years past, some families attempted to farm

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fully explored. FER hopes that the Minister of Environment will champion FER's request that Transport Canada agree to move all shipping lanes further off shore from southern Vancouver Island. We believe the *Oceans Act* favours this type of mitigation strategy. There was insufficient time to explore this fully within time

allotted for the meeting.

7. FER will seek support from local governments and hopes there will be support from the BC government to change the shipping lanes to the maximum reasonable distance off shore. This will reduce the current risk to the shoreline from tanker traffic accidents or spills.



What's at risk from an oil spill? New migratory birds stopping by Race Rocks ER included this Marbled Godwit.



Oil Spill risk mitigation possible with shipping lane changes

Tranquille, Cont'd. from page 7

in the area as there are springs nearby but these hopefuls eventually abandoned their places due, principally, to the lack of reliable and sufficient source of water.

Kamloops Naturalist Club

members have served as volunteer wardens for this reserve since the beginning. June, Kats and Joan echo first warden Eric McAlary's words when he signed off his final report after serving 20 years by noting that he had enjoyed his years of walking

about and working in this reserve.

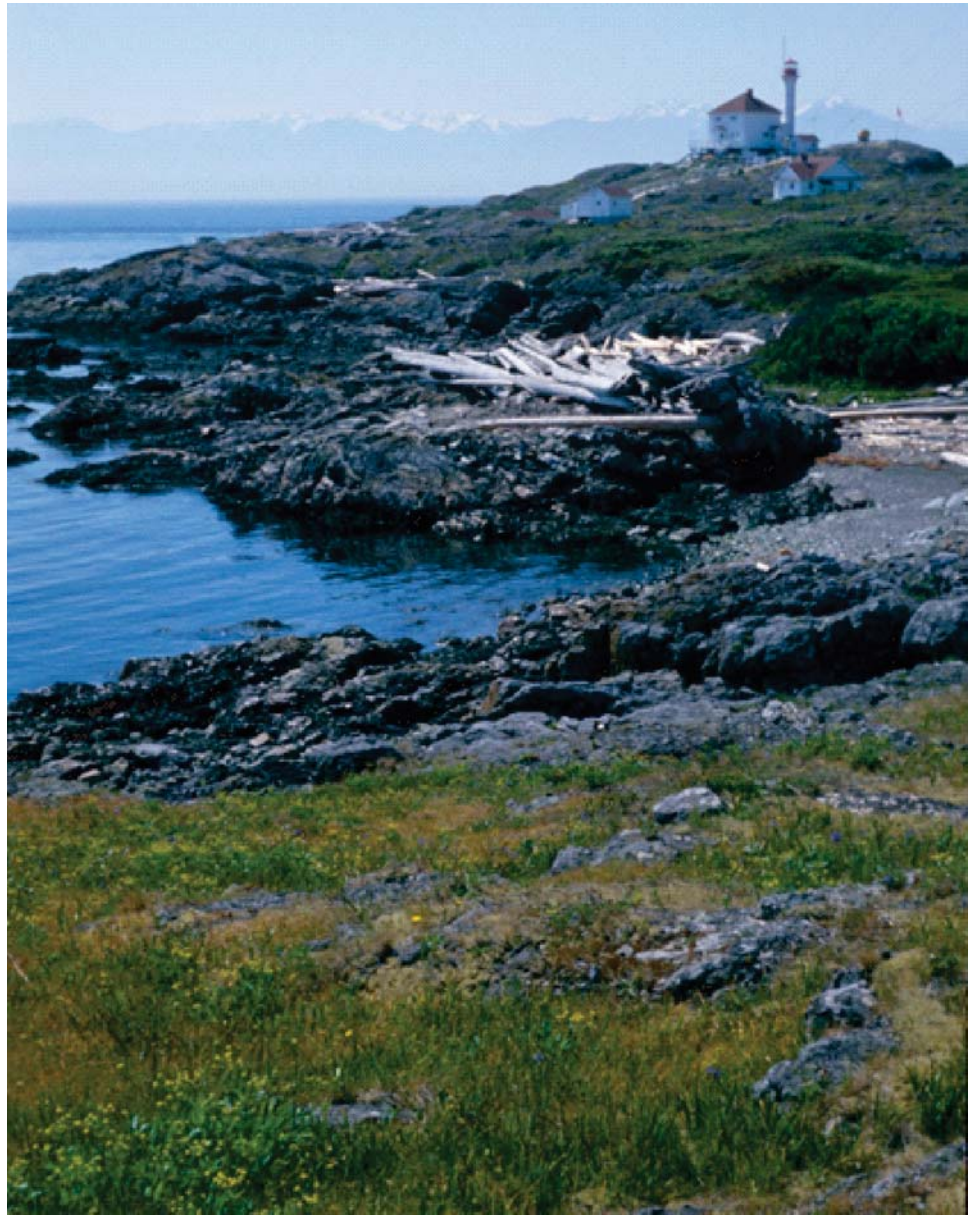
Though still getting acquainted with our reserves, we also enjoy our walkabouts within its varied and scenic confines.

Vancouver Island Wardens' Summaries

In 2016, BC Parks hosted the Vancouver Island Wardens' meeting which we covered in our Spring/Summer 2016 LOG. Due to space limitations, we did not include these summaries which contained some fascinating information and beautiful photos. We thought they should be included in this issue. I hope you enjoy them!

MATT FAIRBARN, TRIAL ISLANDS ECOLOGICAL RESERVE

Trial Island is on the southern tip of Vancouver Island, near Victoria. It was established in 1990 to protect significant populations of rare and endangered plants – some found only on Trial Islands! Matt showed stunning photos of many of these flowers. There is a light station on the island, which was first staffed in the late 1800s, and there is a communication tower there now. Invasive species are a major threat, and Matt has been working organizing volunteers, with some support from BC Parks, to manage them using grants from the Habitat Stewardship Fund.



Canada Geese are a huge problem on the Islands in the

winter, and there is an egg addling program in place.



Victoria's owl clover, (*Castilleja victoriae*)



Rosy owl clover, (*Orthocarpus bracteatus*)



Golden paintbrush, (*Castilleja levisecta*)

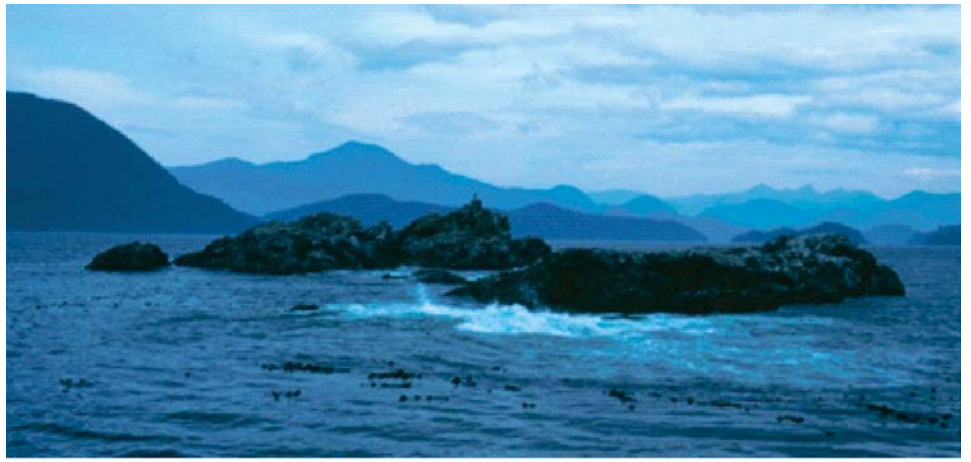


California buttercup, (*Ranunculus californicus*)

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**ANNE STEWART, BAERIA
ROCKS ER**

Baeria Rocks, established in 1971, is in Barkley Sound on the West Coast of Vancouver Island. The part above water consists of two small, rocky islets with globally significant breeding and feeding bird populations. The protected area extends down to a depth of 10 fathoms, where there is significant marine biodiversity and species at risk. Students and researchers from Bamfield have been doing under-water inventories. There are opportunities for BC Parks to work with Isabelle Côté (see article in the Autumn/Winter 2016/17 Log) from SFU, who teaches a research diving course at Bamfield every second year. Anne showed many breathtaking photos of the diversity of terrestrial and marine life protected by this ER, and also noted the need for protection of the water column.



**RISA SMITH, GALIANO
ISLAND ER**

Galiano Island Ecological Reserve was established in 1990 to preserve a unique bog in the Coastal Douglas-fir Zone. It is on the north end of Galiano Island. The locals call it "Shaw's Bog". The rare Sundew is found within this ER, and over the years beavers have come and gone, dramatically altering the ecosystem. A mystery around phragmites (common reed) populations on the island has illustrated the value of genetic research. *Phragmites australis* ssp. *australis* is highly invasive.



Some phragmites plants were treated with glyphosate before genetic analysis revealed they were, in fact, the native sub-

species – *Phragmites australis* ssp. *americanus*. Invasive yellow flag iris is spreading in the bog,

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DAVE PINEL, CHECLESET BAY ECOLOGICAL RESERVE

Checleset Bay Ecological Reserve is on the west coast of Vancouver Island, south of Brooks Peninsula. It was established in 1981 to provide sufficient high-quality marine habitat for a reintroduced population of sea otters to increase their range and abundance to the point that they are no longer endangered. This original mission was successful, and the presence of sea otters has led to increased intertidal biodiversity. There is a lot of recreational use of the area from people travelling to Brooks Peninsula Provincial Park, but these recreational users also



often report back about what is happening in the reserve. Researchers from Quest University have been studying

recently observed wolf predation on sea otters in and near Checleset Bay.

BILL IMAGE AND GERRY VAN DE WOLF, BOWSER ER

Bowser ER is just north of Parksville, BC, close to Deep Bay. It is 113 hectares and was established in 1996 to protect a highly productive forest ecosystem for research. There are active forestry and growth/yield and other studies happening within the ER. Unfortunately, there are also issues with people dumping trash or illegally removing trees from the ER. Some recent work to properly decommission access roads has been quite effective—so far, no additional wood has been removed from the ER. There is also now a trail camera in the ER. Bill and Gerry have been participating in red squirrel and red huckleberry



monitoring as part of BC Parks Long-term Ecological Monitoring project. They are

also active in invasive species management.

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**JEAN-GUY BERGERON
SAN JUAN ESTUARY ER**

In the early spring, I went to visit the reserve. I cut some Scotch Broom along the shoreline. I came back later with some BC Parks staff. We canoed from the Highway 14 bridge and took the southern branch of the river. There was no apparent disturbance along the shore. We went on one of the islands and walked around a large field probably part of an old homestead. We did not visit the ER in the summer due to the closure of the road between Cowichan Lake and Port Renfrew due to a forest fire.

I returned in September and canoed the southern branch and found that people had cleared a camping spot inside the limit of the reserve. I took pictures and contacted BC Parks.

I returned in October. Taking advantage of the fall high tide, I canoed the northern branch up to Fairy Lake. There was no log



jam on the river at the time. On the same trip, I visited the four ancient forest sites located in the valley.

There is plenty of salmon in the fall in the estuary although there is no spawning ground in the ER. Black bear and elk are present in the ER.

The main challenge facing

the ER is finding the exact boundaries of the reserve.

In 2016 I am planning to do more hiking in the San Juan Estuary Reserve and get more information about the surrounding area. An inventory of the significant species such as the red listed tooth-leaved monkey-flower still has to be done.



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**MANDY (AMANDA)
VAUGHAN), COMOX LAKE
BLUFFS ER**

Comox Bluffs Ecological Reserve was established to protect unusual dry-site plant communities within the Coastal Western Hemlock Zone. The reserve lies on the edge of Comox Lake and consists of two parts: a dark, fairly new second-growth Douglas-fir forest, and the bluffs proper. The bluffs are a steep south facing rocky outcrop with thin soil which bakes in the summer. 2015 was an exceptionally hot dry summer and conditions likely stressed vegetation on the bluffs to a harmful degree. For example arbutus, common on the bluffs, is known to be vulnerable to fungal damage as a result of drought stress and warm wet winters. Other members of the Ericaceae on the bluffs include hairy manzanita, kinnikinnick and a hybrid between the two, and perhaps may be similarly affected. In regard to the second growth forest component of the reserve, it is "hard to see the forest for the trees." Change is



not easily monitored by observation from the ground. However an issue facing this area is ATV damage, vandalism and the risk of fire from illegal campfires.

The highlight for me is that I get to visit the bluffs at least once a month from April to October. I had only ever visited them once or twice before becoming caretaker; now I get to visit them many times a year. I particularly enjoy the thick cushions of moss, the ferns and spring flowers early in the year. But as summer comes on and the bluffs

begin to bake, the trees and shrubs come to the fore and I marvel at the colour and form of the arbutus trees, hung with lichen, and the tenacity of the shrubs in the hot, dry conditions. The hairy manzanita has an almost oriental look, with its convoluted red branches. The lake sparkles a deep blue in the sun and there are glimpses of a great view down the lake to the Comox Glacier.

I drive about 50 minutes to the reserve. It is a little remote but it's popular with people who come to spend some time "at the beach." Unfortunately the beach access section of the reserve has a history as a party spot and often when I visit, I find there the dispiriting signs of ATV joyriders, wanton damage to trees, remains of large campfires and lots of garbage from overnight partiers. Cleaning up can take quite a while, so sometimes I bypass the party area and reward myself with the bluffs.



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**GARY BACKLUND &
KATHERINE BANMAN,
WOODLEY RANGE
ECOLOGICAL RESERVE**

2015 saw the updating of signage and some scotch broom treatment – it has been a good year with very few issues or concerns. *Aster curtus*, one of the reserve's rare plants, failed to bloom due to the dryness of late summer and early fall. This has happened at least one year in the past 20 without much reduction in the number of stems the following year. *Lotus pinnatus* has been in a slight decline over the last five years, but is still more plentiful than 20 years ago.

We've had mainly an observation role during 2015, and we're happy to report that human caused problems are probably at the lowest they've



Aster curtus (white-topped aster)

been for the last 20 years. Climate change may be starting to influence certain plant species and this will become a topic to start looking at more carefully in the future. We would

love to find a student to help us determine if the reserve has a subspecies of *Acer macrophyllum* (bigleaf maple).

Some current challenges facing our ER are Scotch broom and climate change.



Lotus Pinnatus (bogs bird's-foot trefoil)

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