

Environmental Planning for the Lakes District Neighbourhood Plan

The Lakes District Neighbourhood Plan represents a comprehensive approach to planning for future development within the Fairwinds Urban Containment Boundary, as designated by the Regional District of Nanaimo. The Plan is being considered by the RDN as an amendment to the Nanoose Bay Official Community Plan.

The Lakes District Neighbourhood Plan for Sustaining The Lakes District Ecosystems

The Lakes District Neighbourhood Plan sets new standards for environmental sustainability, meeting and exceeding the requirements of the Regional District of Nanaimo and the Provincial Ministry of the Environment.

The Lakes District Site

- The proposed development is on a 700-acre portion of the Coastal Douglas-fir ecosystem, which covers a 280 kilometre stretch along eastern Vancouver Island from Bowser to the Island's southern tip.
- The site includes sensitive habitats such as Garry oak ecosystems, Enos Lake, creeks and wetlands, and riparian ecosystems.
- No old growth forests exist on the site. A significant portion of the second growth forest will be protected in the Plan's objective to leave almost half of the site in its natural state, as public park.

Scientific Mapping of Sensitive Ecosystems

- In 2007, Cascadia Biological Services established baseline knowledge of the various ecosystems on the site, adding to the Terrestrial Ecosystem Mapping done in 2005, in order to refine boundaries of sensitive areas. Cascadia's work was based on provincial standards to identify the boundaries of ecosystems, paying special attention to sensitive areas.
- The mapping of the Garry oak ecosystems was matched against the data compiled by the Province's Sensitive Ecosystem Inventory mapping, and wherever necessary, the boundaries of protection were extended to include appropriate buffers.
- In 2010, Pottinger Gaherty Environmental Consultants Ltd. conducted a third-party review of Cascadia's work, and prepared an Environmental Impact Assessment that recommended a series of environmental management measures. The Ministry of Environment has stated that, "Thanks to the

additional information provided in the Pottinger Gaherty Environmental Assessment Report of February 2010, [the Ministry is] more comfortable about the background information and intention of the developer to preserve species and ecosystems within the Lakes District Area plan.”

Achievements in Environmental Protection

- Environmental planning considered the relative sensitivities on the site and achieved balanced protection of the various ecosystem values, including designating the following as proposed park:
 - 100% of the Garry oak meadows;
 - 73% of the Garry oak/arbutus ecosystems;
 - 90% of riparian ecosystems; and
 - 33% of Douglas-fir & western red-cedar ecosystems.
- The Lakes District site includes 14.1 hectares of Garry oak meadow which received the highest priority for protection. This rare and valuable habitat will be protected in its entirety, with an overall average buffer of 35.3m surrounding the protected Garry oak meadows
- The average riparian buffers around Enos Lake, the wetlands and creeks far exceed the required setbacks determined under provincial Riparian Areas Regulation, including an average riparian buffer of 44.3m on Enos Lake.

An Ecosystems-based Approach to Protecting Species

- By protecting the ecosystems of highest sensitivity, the integrity of the plant and animal species within those areas are protected. This ecosystem-based approach is commonly used and promoted by the Ministry of Environment for effective protection of biodiversity in landscape planning.
- The Lakes District Neighbourhood Plan has given special attention to ensuring the protection of wetlands and the provision of travel corridors for wetland wildlife such as beavers and red-legged frogs, which will both have continued access to upland forest habitats.
- The Plan’s broad wildlife corridors (30 metres or more in most cases) and a system of wildlife barrier plantings and underpasses where roads intersect with corridors comprise a thoughtful and effective means of conserving ecological integrity.

Protecting Sensitive Bird Species

- Through balanced ecosystem protection, The Lakes District Neighbourhood Plan protects habitats of many birds species that currently use the site, including species associated with the wetlands, riparian habitats, forests and meadows.
- The Lakes District Neighbourhood Plan protects large patches of second growth fir forest, including the Notch and Lookout, to provide habitat for woodland species such as the Ruffed Grouse and Sooty Grouse. The Neighbourhood Plan provides abundant contiguous forested land for the use of the grouse on the Nanoose Peninsula. According to PGL biologists, grouse will continue to inhabit the forests of Nanoose and may use the connected forests of the Lakes District.
- The Lakes District Neighbourhood Plan will protect wildlife trees within the proposed parkland, which are currently in the highest concentration in the proposed riparian protection areas. These areas will be further enhanced with nest boxes, providing birds with nesting and roosting locations as well as prey for raptors.

For more information on environmental aspects of the Lakes District Neighbourhood Plan, please contact:

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