

**REPORT TO ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES COMMITTEE
MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, JULY 15, 2026**

SUBJECT Harbours Environmental Action Service Summary

ISSUE SUMMARY

To provide a five-year summary of accomplishments of the Harbours Environmental Action Service (Harbours Service) (Appendix A) and highlight the updated Harbours Ecological Inventory and Rating project (Appendix B).

BACKGROUND

The Capital Regional District's (CRD) Harbours Service works with partner organizations to implement the region's environmental work in local harbours. This work is guided by the Core Area Liquid Waste Management Plan (LWMP), which commits the CRD to coordinate environmental protection and improvement efforts with partner organizations. It also works with federal, provincial, and local governments to reduce pollution and protect and restore habitats in Portage Inlet, the Gorge Waterway, Victoria Harbour, Esquimalt Harbour, and Esquimalt Lagoon (core area harbours). The Harbours Service was formally established in 2010 through CRD Bylaw No. 3743, Harbours Environmental Action Service Establishment Bylaw No. 1.

The Harbours Service focuses on coordination of stewardship initiatives and partnerships, building partner capacity, and ecological data collection. The CRD coordinates multi-stakeholder initiatives in the Gorge Waterway, Portage Inlet and Esquimalt Lagoon through the Gorge Waterway Initiative (GWI) and the Esquimalt Lagoon Stewardship Initiative (ELSI). These initiatives provide collaborative forums for government partners, community associations and environmental groups to share information, collaborate on ecological monitoring and habitat restoration projects, and provide coordinated responses on planning and development proposals. CRD representatives also participate in the Tri-Departmental Revitalization Working Group for Victoria and Esquimalt Harbours with Transport Canada, the Department of National Defence (DND), Public Services and Procurement Canada, and Esquimalt and Songhees First Nations.

In 2025, the CRD updated the Harbours Ecological Inventory and Rating (HEIR) Project, which was originally completed in 2000. The updated HEIR systematically inventoried biophysical features in the backshore, intertidal and subtidal areas of the included core area harbours and assigned ecological ratings that reflect spatial variation in ecological value across the project area.

IMPLICATIONS

Service Delivery Implications and Alignment with Existing Plans & Strategies

The Harbours Service coordinates and implements environmental protection and improvement initiatives within included core area harbours. Service activities include:

- monitoring, mapping, reporting and public education on the harbour environments,
- coordination and collaboration with public authorities, community groups and others on issues relating to the marine and shore area environments, and
- implementing programs to rehabilitate and improve the marine and shore area environments.

Section 18 of the LWMP outlines the Harbours Environmental Action program. The goals are to advocate for environmental protection, decrease contaminant inputs, protect and enhance habitat

quality, set environmental objectives, achieve environmentally protective land use, and monitor environmental quality.

Financial Implications

The 2026 Harbours Environmental Action Service operating budget is \$383,960, which is collected through requisition & grants in lieu of taxes under the mandate of the LWMP. A service review in 2010 expanded the mandate of the service to include support for watershed initiatives connected to the core area harbours which fall outside a direct wastewater mandate. The current operating reserve is \$444,968, which is used strategically to support the subtidal and intertidal inventories that inform environmental monitoring and stewardship initiatives across multiple levels of government.

Environmental and Climate Implications

Currently, the harbours service supports partner programs and volunteer citizen science initiatives addressing key issues including monitoring invasive European green crab, and native cutthroat trout, mapping Olympia oyster and eelgrass habitat, and sampling for emerging contaminants such as 6PPD-quinone (tire wear toxin). The service also provides free public and professional capacity building opportunities through a Harbour Stewardship Speaker Series. The CRD participates in the Local Government Green Shores working group and co-hosts regular level one and two training workshops with priority registration for local government and First Nations staff. Green Shores, a program of the Stewardship Centre of BC, promotes natural and resilient shoreline design to protect ecological and physical function, enhance habitat, and reduce climate change risks such as sea level rise and storm surge (Appendix A).

For the updated HEIR, the biophysical features were inventoried along 100 kilometers of intertidal and backshore, and 110 kilometers of subtidal transects in the core harbour areas (Appendix B, Maps 1-3). Changes since the 2000 inventory were estimated for eelgrass, widgeon grass and bladed kelp. In Esquimalt Harbour, survey coverage was limited to the Songhees and X^wsepsem First Nations water lots due to data sharing constraints related to DND datasets.

Ecological ratings were assigned based on species diversity, habitat diversity, degree of naturalness, and presence of key life cycle areas (Appendix B, Map 4). These ratings help identify areas of comparatively high or low ecological values, support prioritization for conservation and restoration, and can inform planning, development application review and stewardship opportunities. Additional indicators (priority for protection or restoration, vulnerability to coastal squeeze, fisheries values, habitat connectivity and blue carbon potential) were assessed and can support management and planning decisions related to protection, restoration and climate adaptation.

HEIR datasets, along with compiled existing “Valued Fish and Marine Bird Habitat” layers, will be made publicly available through an update to the CRD Harbours Atlas in September 2026. Data will be accessible as Geographical Information System layers through a web-based mapping interface and can be shared with partners under data use agreements. The updated Harbours Atlas is an important tool supporting partnership organizations in their efforts toward coastal management, stewardship, land use planning, ecological restoration, habitat protection, environmental research, and public education.

Local government staff have enquired about expanding the intertidal and subtidal inventory to other shoreline areas to support their biodiversity inventories, however, these areas fall outside the service boundaries.

Intergovernmental Implications

Municipal representatives from Colwood, View Royal, Victoria, Saanich, and Esquimalt participate in the GWI and ELSI steering committees. A collaborative staff working group, led by the City of Victoria, is supporting the development of the Gorge Coastal Flood Adaptation Strategy with CRD staff providing technical and environmental input. The updated HEIR dataset informs this project.

In 2025, a Tri-Department Revitalization Working Group for Victoria and Esquimalt Harbours was established with representatives from Transport Canada, DND, Public Services and Procurement Canada, Esquimalt First Nations, Songhees First Nations and the CRD. This group is working to address stormwater and sanitary waste source control, including defining responsibilities, outlining the timing for monitoring, identifying needs for source tracking and control of outfalls, reducing chemical and bacterial pollutants, and resuming shellfish harvesting in targeted areas.

First Nations Implications

Esquimalt and Songhees First Nations have expressed strong interest in resuming food harvesting in the harbours and restoring critical herring and salmon habitat. Both Nations are active participants in the Tri-Departmental Working Group for Victoria and Esquimalt Harbours.

While representatives from Esquimalt and Songhees First Nations have been invited to participate in GWI and ELSI, capacity limitations have prevented ongoing participation on the steering committee. CRD staff provide regular updates on initiatives and engage on a project-by-project basis. Songhees First Nation participated in HEIR workshops and fieldwork to collect inventory data within their water lots. The CRD continues to nurture these staff relationships through various aspects of the Harbours Service.

CONCLUSION

The Harbours Environmental Action Service continues to demonstrate success through coordination of stewardship initiatives, partner capacity building, and ecological data collection and monitoring. The updated Harbours Ecological Inventory and Rating (HEIR) project provides comprehensive, up-to-date information on ecological conditions across the included core area harbours. The HEIR supports informed decision making regarding coastal management, stewardship, land use planning, ecological restoration, habitat protection, biodiversity inventories, environmental research and public education.

RECOMMENDATION

There is no recommendation. This report is for information only.

Submitted by:	Glenn Harris, Ph.D., R.P.Bio., Acting General Manager, Parks, Recreation & Environmental Services
Concurrence:	Ted Robbins, B. Sc., C. Tech., Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENTS

Appendix A: Harbours Environmental Action Service 2021-2026 Program Accomplishments
(July 2026)

Appendix B: Harbours Ecological Inventory and Rating Project Summary (July 2026)