



## Camossung q'emásən̓j Urban Biosphere Region Project

### RESOLUTION CARRIED AT THE BIOSPHERE RESERVE FORUM

The Greater Victoria NatureHood and the UNESCO Victoria World Heritage Group, in collaboration with those organizations who steward the diverse natural and cultural environment of Greater Victoria, meeting at Government House under the patronage of Her Honour Janet Austin OBC, the Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia, on Thursday, August 29, 2024, do resolve:

*The Greater Victoria NatureHood forward a request from this Forum to the Capital Regional District (CRD) that – in consultation with appropriate local Indigenous, political, academic and civil organizations – the CRD compile a set of supporting documents, as required, and forward same to the Canadian Commission for UNESCO for the International Coordinating Council, to nominate the Victoria Region as an Urban Biosphere Region. (Carried unanimously)*

*Proposed by Martin Segger representing the UVWHP and Bob Peart on behalf of the GVNH*

This resolution is hereby presented to the Board of the CRD in consideration of the following:

1. **Greater Victoria** should apply to join the Canadian and World UNESCO Biosphere Reserve communities as a member of the World Network of Island and Coastal Biospheres or the emerging new category of Urban Biospheres. Biosphere Regions are characterized by areas where the natural, socio-economic and cultural environments are managed as sustainable learning places. In Canada we use the term ‘region’ rather than ‘reserve.’
2. **The World Network of Island and Coastal Biosphere Reserves** foster sustainable development in islands and coastal areas and promote climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies. In Canada, Fundy and Georgian Bays and Mnídoo Gamii are members of this network. **Urban Biospheres** include Brighton, England.
3. **CRD Bylaw #4575** seeks a coordinated regional approach to environmental stewardship and protecting ecological assets. Core to this approach is community engagement, and in particular, strengthening relations with First Nations on a government-to-government level while also mobilizing Indigenous leadership and traditional knowledge.

A UNESCO Biosphere is ‘a designation only’ recognition; however, it provides an international moral force for habitat conservation and an organizational framework to coordinate the social and economic initiatives of the several hundred local institutional, civil and corporate actors in the CRD. Once established, it is able to obtain technical support from the national and international Biosphere Reserve network. (Access to Federal grant funding to Biospheres: this year: \$11.7 million).

**Biosphere designation** would support the CRD as a region in its sustainable development, including supporting the region in identifying and implementing climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies

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(DRAFT April 4, 2025, for the April 16<sup>th</sup> CRD Environmental Services Committee Meeting)

that will, by necessity, be unique to our island region. The designation also opens doors to cooperation and Reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.

There are currently **759** Biosphere Reserves globally, with a total of **19** in Canada and **3** in British Columbia: Clayoquot Sound, Howe Sound and Mt. Arrowsmith.

Biosphere reserves are organized into 3 interrelated zones (core, buffer, transition – and these may be distributed) from lowest to highest human influence on nature. Four key objectives are related to sustainable development: conserving biodiversity, honouring Reconciliation, addressing climate change and supporting science and education.



**Timeline:** As the Canadian Association of Biosphere Reserves will be hosted by the Mt. Arrowsmith-Nanaimo Malahat Biosphere Region group in **August 2026**, it has been suggested that this be the target date for the compilation of our nomination papers. A target date for Declaration would be **2029**.

**First Steps:** the organization process starts with creating a Community Roundtable, which would work with the CRD and local government to assemble the UNESCO nomination documents. To date, we have 12 individuals who have volunteered to work as a provisional “Community Roundtable”.

In 2025, the CRD established a regional Biodiversity and Environmental Stewardship Service to coordinate a regional approach to biodiversity, protection of ecological assets, and environmental stewardship. The Service can lead the process for assembling the proper UNESCO documents. Once established this Service can support a Greater Victoria UNESCO Urban Biosphere program by facilitating research, developing environmental stewardship strategies, and developing collaborative partnerships with local governments, [First Nations](#), landowners, government agencies, and community groups.

We propose that the sacred waters of **Camossung**, the Gorge Waterway, the protected grounds of Government House and Uplands Park, the Victoria Harbour Migratory Bird Sanctuary, and the Sea to Sea Green Blue Belt form core zones of Victoria’s Biosphere Region. The Lək̓ʷəŋən (X̱sepsəm/Esquimalt) community has given the organizing committee permission to use the name “Camossung” for Victoria’s Urban Biosphere.

## **BACKGROUND**

- Key elements that make a Biosphere work include: strong local government support, clear sources of funding, mapping existing stakeholders, cross-sector partnerships, setting clear, realistic goals, and

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communities working together. Estimates run as high as 400 habitat conservation groups working in Greater Victoria.

- Greater Victoria is home to the highest concentration of rare species in Canada, three federal Migratory Bird Sanctuaries, and nine Key Biodiversity Areas, all significant contributors to global biodiversity. In particular the Garry Oak/Canas (Kwetlal) traditional food system.
- Most of the CRD lies within BC's Coastal Douglas-fir (CDF) [biogeoclimatic zone](#): the smallest, most populated, and most at-risk zone in the Province. This zone contains Garry Oak and Arbutus ecosystems, unique to Canada. Lying within the rain shadow of the Olympic Mountains, the CRD experiences a cool Mediterranean climate with mild, wet winters and warm, dry summers. Mediterranean climates cover less than 3% of global land area.
- The CRD is also home to over [300 major watersheds](#). These watersheds provide food, habitat, and shelter for wildlife species that define the character of Vancouver Island: salmon, eagles, and orcas. Sustainably managed natural and urban watersheds are necessary to supply our drinking water, filter pollution from impermeable surfaces, and provide stormwater management and temperature regulation.
- The CRD's Cultural Environment: Indigenous peoples have stewarded the lands and waters of Greater Victoria for thousands of years and continue this work today. The CRD has committed to Reconciliation. The model of Biosphere regions opens close collaboration with Indigenous peoples through cooperation, recognizing leadership for understanding local nature and reconciling biodiversity conservation with its sustainable use. An Biosphere Region can support this commitment by restoring and enhancing the health of CRD lands and waters. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) serves as the framework for these actions.
- Socio-Economic Environment: An Urban Biosphere Region can foster economic development that is socio-culturally and environmentally sustainable, which enhances the quality of life and collective pride in Greater Victoria. Our "natural environment" is constantly voted as the best thing about living in the region by the Victoria Foundation's annual [Vital Signs](#) survey.
- Biodiversity also drives the CRD economy through tourism, outdoor recreation, and educational institutions, which bring millions of dollars and over 60,000 jobs to the local economy. Local universities and colleges offer world-leading research in climate, earth and ocean sciences. They also lead in Indigenous studies, biology, and environmental research programs. "Natural attractions" on land and water are also a primary focus for visitors to Victoria and Vancouver Island, according to major travel [industry publications](#), [Destination Greater Victoria](#), and the Greater Victoria Chamber of Commerce.

We recommend for consideration that the Conservation Services Committee adopt the following motion:

***"In consultation with appropriate local Indigenous, political, academic and civil organizations the CRD compile a set of supporting documents, as required, and forward same to the Canadian Commission for UNESCO for the International Coordinating Council, to nominate the Victoria Region as an Urban Biosphere Region".***