

PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT in saanich

a guide for saanich residents and landowners

Find out first!

Protection of the environment is provided by all three levels of government: federal, provincial and municipal. In particular, beaver dams, nesting birds, migratory birds, nests, fish habitat, water, watercourses, and riparian zones may be subject to regulations from each level of government. Find out which regulations apply and obtain approvals before you begin work! Contacts include Fisheries and Oceans Canada, the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection, Land and Water British Columbia Inc., and British Columbia Assets and Land Corporation.

WATERCOURSES

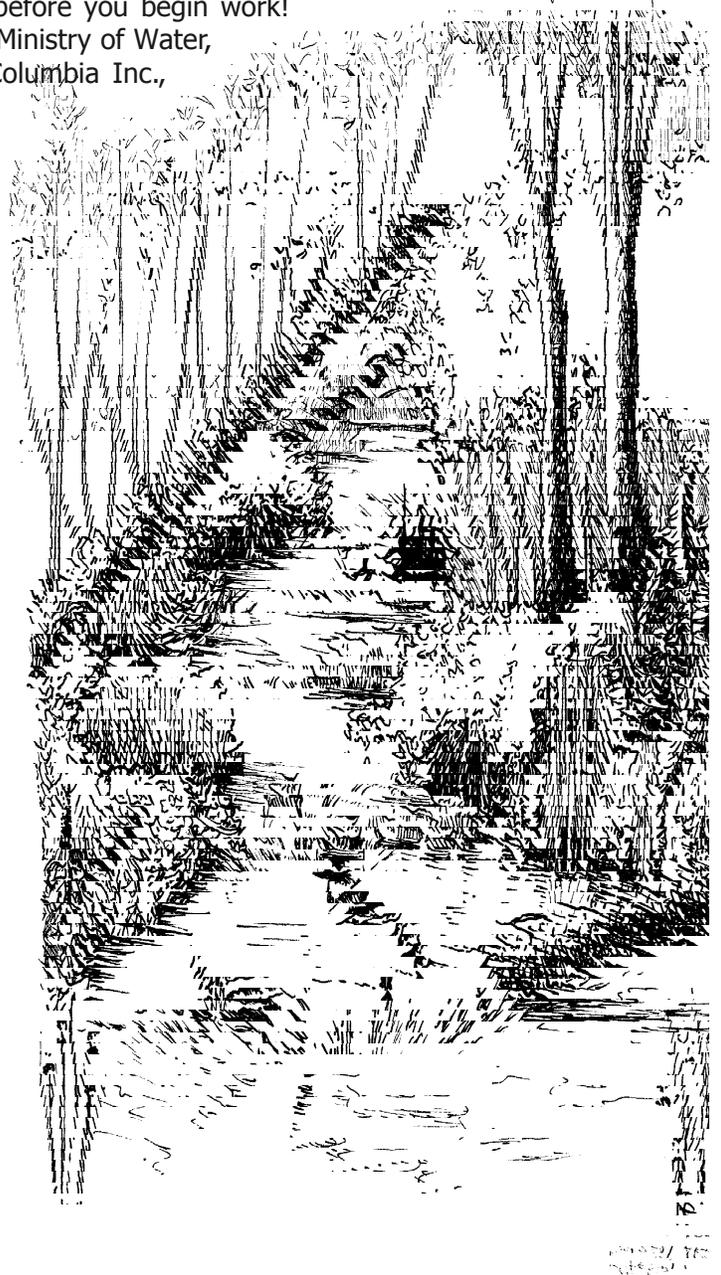
Streams, wetlands, lakes and their associated vegetation strips (riparian zones) are vital pathways and habitat for fish and wildlife. They also moderate flooding, drought, and the effects of pollution. Effective ways to protect watercourses are to control pollution, maintain the riparian zone, and plan at the watershed level. Note that floodplains are often included in the regulations.

In Saanich, the definition of watercourse includes any river, stream, creek, waterway, lagoon, lake spring, swamp, marsh, ditch, canal, reservoir, or any other body of water, whether natural or man-made, year-round or seasonal. Some well known watercourses in Saanich are Rithet's Bog, the Colquitz River, and Swan Lake.

Municipal Regulations & Protection

The **Watercourse Bylaw** prohibits activities which might pollute a watercourse or change water flows. Watercourses may not be enclosed without approval from Saanich. Approval from Saanich is required for work on watercourses that are considered part of the municipal drainage system (Schedule B of the Watercourse Bylaw).

The **Zoning Bylaw** establishes setbacks from watercourses. In Saanich, the current minimum setback for buildings and structures is 7.5 metres from the natural boundary of watercourses identified in Schedule B of the Watercourse Bylaw. Different activities and regulations may result in greater setbacks.



The **Deposit of Fill Bylaw** prohibits the deposit of fill on land within 15 metres of the centre line of designated watercourses (Schedule A of the Fill Bylaw) and the deposit of fill/soil within the designated floodplain (Schedule A). Any damage that is caused to a watercourse due to filling or grading must be repaired. Permits are required for most filling activities.

The **Tree Preservation Bylaw** protects trees within 15 metres of the natural boundary of Schedule B (of the Watercourse Bylaw) streams as well as trees within a floodplain. Before cutting down a tree, you should check the Tree Preservation Bylaw by contacting Saanich Parks.

The **Subdivision Bylaw** requires all developments to protect downstream habitat and water quality by providing drainage structures, both during and after development, to decrease the speed and volume of stormwater runoff while at the same time improving runoff water quality. These structures usually involve both filtration (gravel pits, french drains etc.) and storage (ponds, swales, wetlands) as part of their design. More sensitive watersheds (such as the Colquitz or Tod Creek/Prospect Lake) have higher standards for stormwater management.

In addition to bylaws, Saanich has established **Development Permit Areas (DPA's)** where landowners must apply for a permit before subdividing, construction, or altering the land. The **Prospect Lake/Tod Creek Watershed DPA** and the **South Wilkinson Valley DPA** are specifically designed to protect water quality and riparian habitat. The **Floodplain DPA** was established to protect the natural environment and floodplain capacity. All DPA's have environmental guidelines to protect riparian zones and limit stormwater runoff from building sites.

MARINE AREAS

In Saanich, the current minimum setback for buildings and structures over 0.6 m (including fences, docks and retaining walls) in height is 7.5 metres from the natural boundary of the ocean (excluding Portage Inlet and the Gorge) but may be greater depending on the zoning of the property. New docks and wharves are specifically prohibited on the ocean including Portage Inlet and the Gorge.

Retaining walls and other hard surfaces are detrimental to habitat. Before considering such a structure, be sure to check with all levels of government. If you plan on building anything near the ocean, including outfalls, find out what setbacks apply to your property, where your property boundaries are, and contact Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

PLANTS, ANIMALS, AND ECOSYSTEMS

There are many plants, animals and ecosystems found in Saanich that are unique to this area. From the wetlands of Quick's Bottom to the Garry oak meadows of Mt. Tolmie to the coastal bluffs of Cadboro Bay, the diversity in nature that we witness in Saanich is remarkable.

In response to the increasing threats to, and rarity of, native plants, animals, and ecosystems, Saanich has undertaken a series of initiatives to protect and restore vital habitat.

Municipal Regulations & Protection

Zoning and subdivision applications in Saanich are subject to the **Environmental and Social Review** process. The process can be used to protect native plants and animals by requiring a developer to provide an impact assessment that makes suggestions for mitigation of environmental impacts. Saanich Council, or the Approving Officer in the case of a subdivision, decides which mitigation measures will be required.

Natural state covenants and **tree protection covenants** may be placed on part of a property as a result of the above process. These covenants require the owner, and all future owners, to abide by the terms of the covenants to protect native vegetation and wildlife habitat. Covenant areas are monitored by Saanich staff to ensure that the intent of the agreement is followed. If you have a covenant on your property, be sure you are aware of the activities which are prohibited or require prior written approval.

The **Tree Preservation Bylaw** protects riparian trees beside many watercourses (Schedule B streams of the Watercourse Bylaw) as well as certain native species of trees, including Garry oak, arbutus, Pacific dogwood and Pacific yew. Larger Douglas-fir and western red cedar are also protected. The bylaw prohibits the cutting or damaging of protected trees on urban land and bans clear cut logging in rural areas. Saanich maintains a list of "significant trees" which have importance to the community as heritage trees, landmarks or for wildlife values. These trees cannot be cut down. Fines for cutting protected trees without a permit start at \$500 per tree. Before cutting down a tree, you should check the Tree Preservation Bylaw by contacting Saanich Parks.

Invasive species are those which spread aggressively into natural environments where they are not normally found. The main introduced plants in Saanich include Scotch broom, English ivy, Himalayan blackberry, gorse, holly, Purple Loosestrife and daphne. The **Noxious Weeds Bylaw** requires that property owners remove vegetation that is likely to spread to other properties.

Development Permit Areas (DPA's) require preservation, where possible, of rare and endangered plants and animal habitat that are red or blue listed by the BC Conservation Data Centre. DPA's also protect riparian zones by minimizing development and requiring restoration. Development permits can be required before subdividing, construction, or altering the land. A complete list of DPA's and guidelines are described in Development Permit Areas: Justification and Guidelines, available at the Saanich Planning Department.

The **Official Community Plan** (Saanich General Plan, Local Area Plans, and Action Plans) contains many policies to guide Council decisions regarding conservation of natural areas and features. Check to see if your proposal respects the general intent of the Official Community Plan policies.

Naturescape BC is a program that promotes providing food, shelter, and water for native animals in landscaping. The use of native vegetation is encouraged in creating habitat. Saanich Council endorsed the principles of Naturescape BC and Saanich actively promotes the use of these principles on private and public land.

Identification and Mapping

How do you know if there are natural features to protect on your property? Saanich staff use the **Saanich Environmentally Significant Areas Atlas** to identify properties with known watercourses, riparian zones, sensitive ecosystems (from the provincial **Sensitive Ecosystem Inventory**), rare plants, rare plant communities, and rare animals. You may view a copy at any of the public libraries or at the Saanich Planning Department. The CRD Natural Areas Atlas (www.naturalareasatlas.ca) has an online atlas that contains some of these features. It is important to realize that not all of the environmentally significant species or areas of Saanich appear on maps and we cannot rely on maps entirely for needed information.

Our Environmental Protocol

The Municipality of Saanich has an Environmental Protocol [When Working in Sensitive Areas] in order to increase the level of awareness of Engineering, Parks and Public Works staff to ensure that work is carried out in an environmentally responsible manner. The Protocol identifies Watercourses, Parks, Environmentally Significant Areas (as per ESA Atlas) and properties adjacent to these areas as requiring a higher level of care. The Protocol provides increased interdepartmental communications, public involvement consideration and requires all staff in these departments to complete a training session.

Stewardship and Education in Saanich

Although the Municipality of Saanich is working hard to protect our natural environment, it is at the community level that real changes can be made. Saanich encourages environmental stewardship in the community through initiatives such as the Native Plant Salvage Program, the Prospect Lake/Tod Creek Awareness Zone, the Our Backyard newsletter, the Garry Oak Restoration Project and other community restoration projects. There are many community stewardship groups centred around a conservation issue such as the Garry oak ecosystems or watercourses.

For more information on stewardship opportunities in Saanich, contact:

Carolyn MacDonald, Environmental Education Officer, Municipality of Saanich
475-5494 • ext 3477 or macdonac@saanich.ca

For a listing of CRD environmental organizations and stewardship groups, visit:

<http://www.conservationconnection.bc.ca>

For more information:

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Planning Department
The Corporation of the District of Saanich
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Victoria BC V8X 2W7
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plansec@saanich.ca



This pamphlet is only a brief summary of Saanich Bylaws and relevant legislation. Saanich Bylaws may be viewed on the web at www.saanich.ca or in person at the Municipal Hall, Clerk's Office. Policies and regulations are subject to change without notice. October 2003