

DRAFT Environmental Policy Framework

Environmental Policy Context

Note to reviewers: The text in brown is text that is yet to be drafted.

1. INTRODUCTION

a. Background (or how the Environmental Policy Framework (EPF) initiative was born)

Challenges and opportunities of our time: 1) Biodiversity/habitat loss; 2) Climate change adaptation and mitigation; 3) Loss of stewardship of the environment.

Previous Policy Experience

There are a few factors that helped launch the EPF initiative. From a concern that Saanich was losing species and ecosystems at risk, a development regulation bylaw (*called Environmental Development Permit Application or EDPA*) was adopted and then after a few years, rescinded, due to vocal public opposition. There was also a substantial segment of Saanich in favour of retaining the policy.

This prompted Council to look for ways to accomplish the same goal with more public support, and an overarching framework for improved coordination of environmental programs and policies was initiated.

Motion from Council

The motion from council that initiated the program was the following:

That Council direct staff to bring Council a report as soon as possible on the potential of developing a Saanich program which includes the topics of Climate Adaptation, a Biological Conservation Strategy, and Stewardship Program to serve as a policy framework for other Saanich environmental policies and programs, and a new Environmental Development Permit Area be considered part of this program;...

This led to the creation of an independent Technical Committee of natural resource practitioners and specialists that was asked to assist in developing an Environmental Policy Framework. Council requested a program that included the topics of climate change, biodiversity conservation and enhanced stewardship to serve as the core pieces of environmental policy for Saanich, and that a way to address the function of the Environmental Development Permit Area (EDPA) be considered for the program. This report is the initial result of that work.

Purpose, Rationale, and Scope

The intent of the Environmental Policy Framework is to produce a more coherent body of plans, policies, bylaws and strategies in support of a Resilient Saanich. It is intended to enable and unify environmental policy and programs and provide key policy filters for existing, new or revised policy or programs. Currently, environmental programs are split among various departments with varying degrees of capacity.

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Also included within the Framework’s environmental purview are the cultural, legal and economic relationships that Saanich maintains; these include local First Nations and community stakeholders (residents, businesses, learning centers and ENGOs), suppliers, contractors, and inter-agency commitments. The intention/purpose of the Framework is to promote all elements of society working together to sustain the environment and not degrade it.

The Environmental Policy Framework is intended to apply to the entire body of Saanich policies and practices that touch on the environment. The term environment is used here to denote all the terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems and landscapes within Saanich and their associated components, functions, and processes.

The framework is intended to promote changes necessary for Saanich, the organization, and the communities it supports to become more resilient, inclusive, and effective in adapting to climate change, reversing biodiversity loss, and addressing pandemics and other environmental challenges that might arise.

What would a “Resilient Saanich” look like?

A Resilient Saanich will be able to adapt to change. The focus of this resilience is environmental systems. In Saanich, we are experiencing complex change because of a warming climate, and population growth. There are currently rapid changes to the urban forest canopy, to the rate of development, to the loss or degradation of natural habitats and the biodiversity they support, and more severe drought and rain events. A more environmentally resilient Saanich would be more biodiverse and would be able to maintain that biodiversity. It would have enhanced environmental services such as shade, water infiltration and retention, reduced loss of soils, and improved ability to withstand storms and droughts. Achieving a resilient Saanich will involve cooperation across society, but as an initial step, Council has asked for this enabling and unifying framework for environmental policies and programs.

The Environmental Policy Framework is consistent with the OCP. The elements of the EPF fit together as illustrated by the diagram in section 5.

2. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The principles described below are intended to situate the Environmental Policy Framework and the associated policies and practices firmly within the moral, cultural and aspirational norms of current society. Within the context of the EPF, the two imperatives of our current society are to achieve reconciliation with our Indigenous nations, and to slow and reverse the rapid environmental degradation of past decades, while ensuring quality of life for future generation.

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1. **Recognize the intrinsic value of nature.**
2. **Learn from and appropriately apply Indigenous knowledge, perspectives, and practices** to better protect lands, water, plants and animals: Indigenous knowledge offers deep understanding of the environment. Indigenous knowledge, cultures and traditional practices are recognized for their contribution to environmental and social sustainability.
3. Use **best available management and decision-making tools** in support of the future environment. Evidence-based decision-making and being precautionary in the absence of evidence can both support good decisions. Adaptive management is the continuous evolution of practices based on careful observation. Learn from the past and plan for the future.
4. **Lead by example** through innovation and improving on best practices;
5. **Look beyond our borders** to achieve results at a bioregional scale;
6. **Address climate adaptation and mitigation** in all that we do;
7. Collaborate with diverse interests to achieve outcomes that **realize multiple values and benefits**;
8. Safeguard **diversity, equity and inclusivity**: Create safe and welcoming public services and spaces for everyone including open environmental data for public oversight and research.
9. **Enhance community capacity and knowledge** – Create a passionate, informed and skilled community that can help to create a more resilient Saanich.

3. FRAMEWORK GOALS:

Specific objectives can be found within each policy area (Section below). For instance, the Climate Plan, Urban Forest Strategy and Biodiversity Conservation Strategy will have their own objectives.

Goal 1. Protect, rehabilitate and enhance the ecological function and biological diversity of Saanich.

In the past decades, rapid growth of the municipality has led to a decline in biodiversity and environmental quality. Metrics such as air and water quality have declined, soil has been lost, green spaces reduced, and introduced species have decreased the abundance of the

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unique native fauna and flora of southern Vancouver Island. This goal aims to manage the natural and built environments to adapt to climate change and enhance biodiversity and other essential ecosystem functions. This goal cannot be achieved without the commitment of residents, businesses, and landowners to be active stewards.

Goal 2. Develop and implement complimentary and coordinated policies, strategies, regulations, and incentives grounded in and consistent with the Environmental Policy Framework guiding principles.

This overarching goal is essential to promote the culture of environmental stewardship and resilience within Saanich staff and the public. The principles will assist in evaluating existing policy and provide guidance for the development of future policy.

Some of the actions that could result from this goal are:

- Assess existing regulatory, management and administrative tools to identify gaps and inconsistencies.
- Develop a strategic approach that encourages effective use of limited resources.
- Increase community understanding of policies, plans, programs, bylaws and partnerships encompassed by the Resilient Saanich Environmental Policy Framework.

4. POLICY FILTER

Text and table to be developed.

5. POLICY AREAS

Pillars of the Environmental Policy Framework

Climate Plan

Biodiversity Conservation Strategy

Enhanced Stewardship is also a “pillar” but will be described as an integral part of the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy

Environmental Policy Gap Analysis

A broad gap analysis to identify gaps in how the environment is addressed in Saanich. This will help identify policy areas that need more attention and help avoid redundancy. It will assist Saanich in seeing how their environmental policies work effectively together to support a Resilient Saanich.

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Additional Strategies and Policy Areas (fluid)

The following policy areas are not necessarily packaged the way they appear in this list. The Park Management Strategy may be part of the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy or green space conservation may be in several strategies, etc.

- Urban Forestry (includes soil and green space conservation)
- Water Management (includes storm water and watershed health)
- Land Use Planning & Development
- Marine Shoreline
- Saanich's Ecological Footprint
- Park Management Strategy (restoration, invasives management)
- Agriculture (includes sustainable practice & food security)
- Green Economy
- Transportation (environmental aspects)
- Governance and Administration

Each of the policy areas will be covered by a plan or strategy that adheres to the Framework principles and have an outline that typically includes the following elements. This is where SMART objectives will be found along with strategies and actions.

Sample Policy Area Plans or Strategies

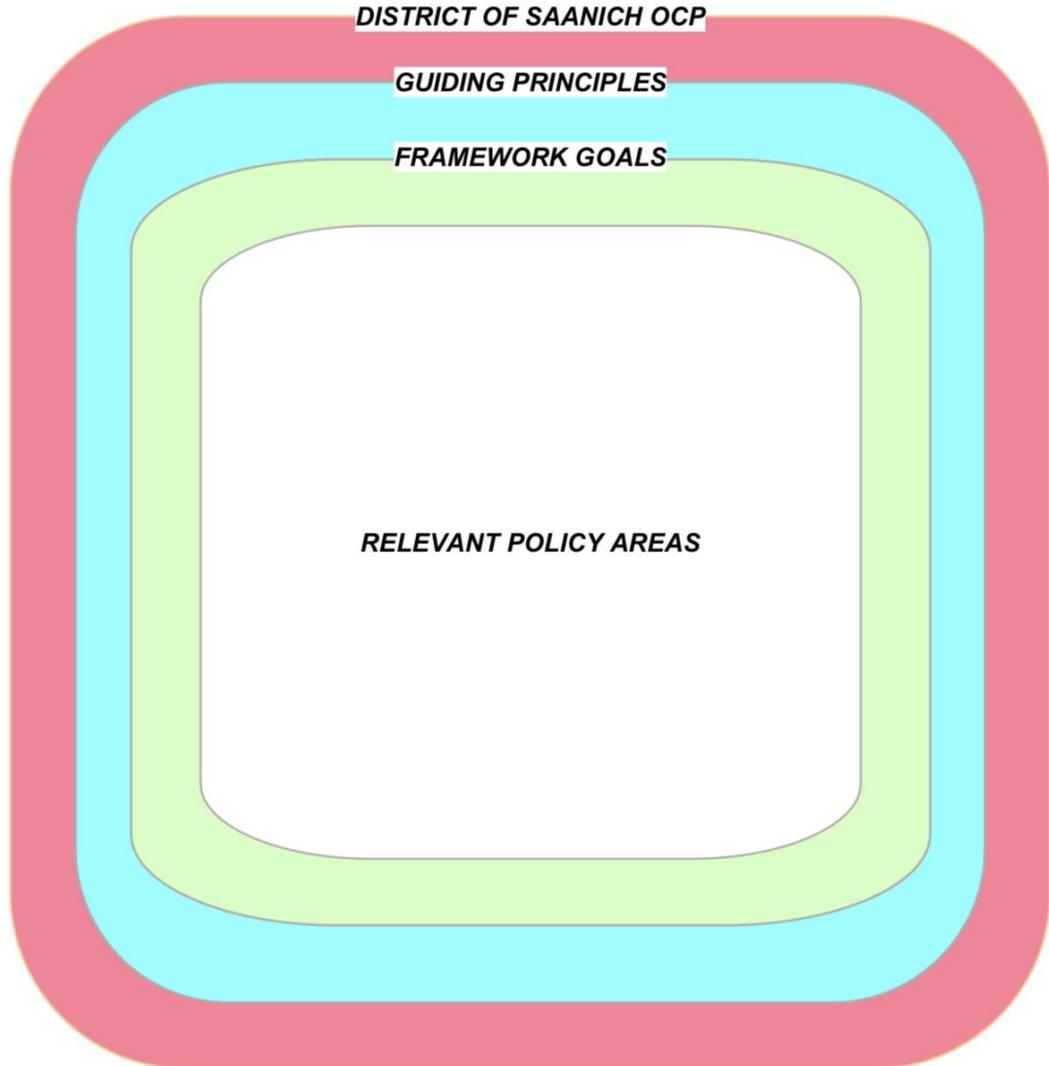
(outline can vary depending on the policy area)

1. Relevant Landscapes and Scales
2. Evaluation of ecosystem health and functional condition
3. Indigenous interests and relevant knowledge
4. Desired future condition
5. Data gaps
6. Policy gaps
7. SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) assessment
8. Policies and program objectives
9. Strategies (approaches)
10. Tools
11. Action Plan (tasks, timelines, lead department, resources)
12. Monitoring and Assessment

The following is a schematic of how policy elements in the Framework fit within existing strategic policy in Saanich. Note that Framework principles and goals are nested within the Official Community Plan. The specific policy areas such as climate change, stewardship and biodiversity are nested within the Framework principles and goals. Each policy area will have its own set of goals and objectives specific to that policy area but will be consistent with the strategic direction set in the OCP, and with the Framework principles and goals.

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ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY FRAMEWORK MODEL



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6. ADDITIONAL ELEMENTS

Additional policy and procedures, and support structures will be needed for the full implementation of the EPF and its associated strategies. These include but are not limited to:

- i. Standards for mapping, environmental assessments, and reporting; and
- ii. Some effective means to replace the EDPA.

7. IMPLEMENTATION

The following are steps that Saanich could take to help implement the Environmental Policy Framework.

- Staff to develop an implementation plan for how the Framework will be used as a guide for future policy and to amend existing policy where needed.
- Saanich Council to appoint a working group to review existing environmental policy, regulations and bylaws to see how they fit with the principles and goals of the Framework, and bring back a report on gaps.
- Saanich to roll out a public information campaign to enable the public to understand the directions set by the Framework.
- Saanich to undertake an annual review of compliance with the Framework and report publicly on achieving Framework goals.