

What We Found

What We See

C-2 VEGETATION AND TERRESTRIAL HABITAT

C-2.1 Vegetation

The Sunshine Coast, including Gibson's Landing and environs, falls into the Coastal Western Hemlock biogeoclimatic zone. With annual rainfall in the 1500mm range and mild year-round temperatures, biomass production and plant growth is well above average. Second growth forest of Western Hemlock, Douglas Fir, Western Cedar, and Annabalis Fir form the upper canopy, while Lodgepole Pine, Western Flowering Dogwood and Arbutus are found on drier sites in the region. Several uncleared lots and smaller groves comprised of these species are found within the Gibson's townsite.

Under this shade-producing canopy, the lower vegetation layer consists typically of salal, foamflower, skunk cabbage, blueberry, red huckleberry, Oregon grape, sword and deer ferns. Mosses are found within the trees and underfoot. Near the coast, shore pine and arbutus grow where drier and more exposed conditions limit the other species.

Several species of wild mushroom are found growing here. Itinerant pickers in a somewhat elusive industry harvest the pine (matsutake) and chanterelle mushrooms. Market prices vary with supply, with local ethnic and specialty shops competing with the export market for the highest grades. No annual crop statistics are available, so the extent or value of this market is undetermined.

Recently disturbed sites, where activity has removed the existing coniferous forest cover, are regenerated by typical 'pioneer' species such as alder and Himalayan blackberry. The blackberry is a particularly invasive non-native species and tends to choke out the competing native species of understory plants, until the emergent upper canopy shades it out. For this reason it is usually found along forest edges and within clearings. It is extremely prolific along the edges of agricultural fields in the area.

C-2.2 Mammals

The coastal Western Hemlock forest is home to several larger species, and blacktail deer, cougar, Roosevelt elk and black bear inhabit the Sunshine Coast. Wolf, coyote, raccoon, red squirrel and red fox are expected here and many of these smaller species are found to typically live and travel within the corridor forests of a developed townsite.

C-2.3 Birds

Eagles, hawks and ospreys are common sights on the Sunshine Coast. The Great Blue Heron, once numerous here, are thought to be in decline with few breeding pairs known on the coast. Disturbance of breeding habitat and cycles through both human development and the increase in local Eagle populations are contributing factors.



High vegetation retention on steep slopes of riparian corridors

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C-2.4 Environmentally Important Sites

Land For Nature, funded by many regional, national and international wildlife conservation organisations, have identified 5 environmentally important sites around the area of Gibsons. These sites each have their own characteristics, outlined below (the identification numbers correspond to the classification map produced by Land For Nature):

14 – *Ocean Beach Esplanade* : Bird and wildlife habitat provided by shrub thickets, berry bushes and tall seaside trees. While not in a wholly natural state, this site still retains some significant natural values.

19 – *Gospel Rock Property* : Eagle trees, including a nest tree, have been identified on this site. Berries on the Arbutus trees provide food for birds through the winter. Dryland forest and rocky clearings also provide habitat for alligator lizards.

50 – *Gibsons Heritage Trail System* : This site is important deer habitat. It has downstream fisheries values, and is critical habitat for tailed frogs and non-migratory cutthroat trout (highly sensitive and threatened species).

55 – *Bonniebrook Wetland* : Wetland shrub thicket, crabapples for birds.

59 – *White Tower Park* : Good owl habitat, some passerines and waterfowl. Many large stumps, wetland shrub thicket, 2 small ponds.

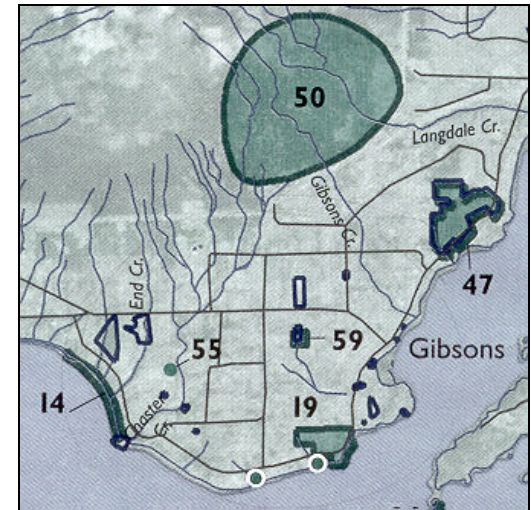
While only 2 of these sites are directly within the municipality of Gibsons, the future development of Gibsons may have profound effects on all sites. Their characteristics and habitat value should thus be taken into account when considering future development.

C-2.5 Forests: Corridor Potential and Visual Resource Management

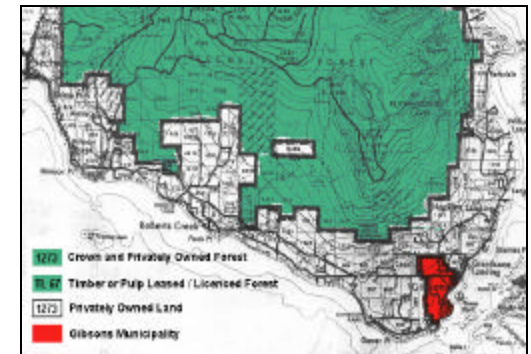
Due to its proximity to Vancouver, logging on the Sunshine Coast began early and was consequently selective in method. The catastrophic forest fires in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries created new stands not ready for intensive logging until fairly recently. Since mid-century, mechanized logging has converted large areas at middle elevations to young silvicultural stands. Today logging continues in middle and high elevations above Gibsons. Canfor and OJI currently operate in the area, carrying out selective logging. The method of logging is important for the visual resource management of the area, especially in the event that Gibsons pursues a more tourism based industry.

Maturing, naturally-regenerated forest now covers a large fraction of the lowlands near where people live. One can see from the 'Proximity' map to the right that there are possibilities for the creation of wildlife corridors between the urban forested land in the municipality and the larger forested lands further upland.

What We See



Environmentally Important Sites

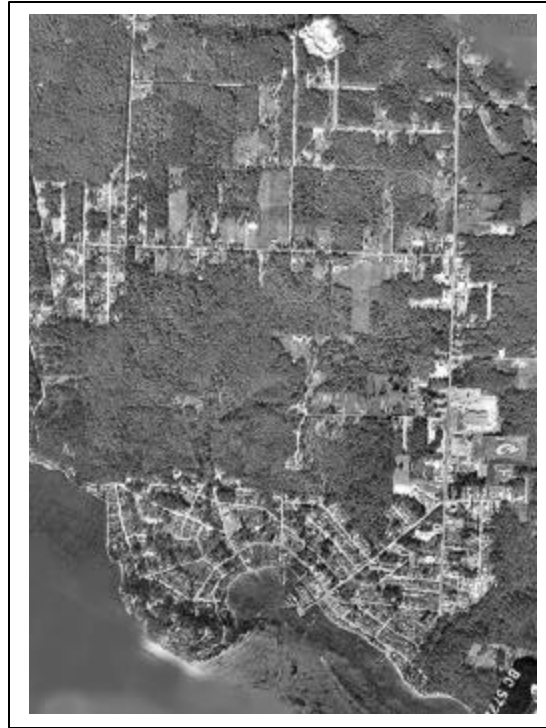


Proximity of Forested Land to Gibsons

What We Found

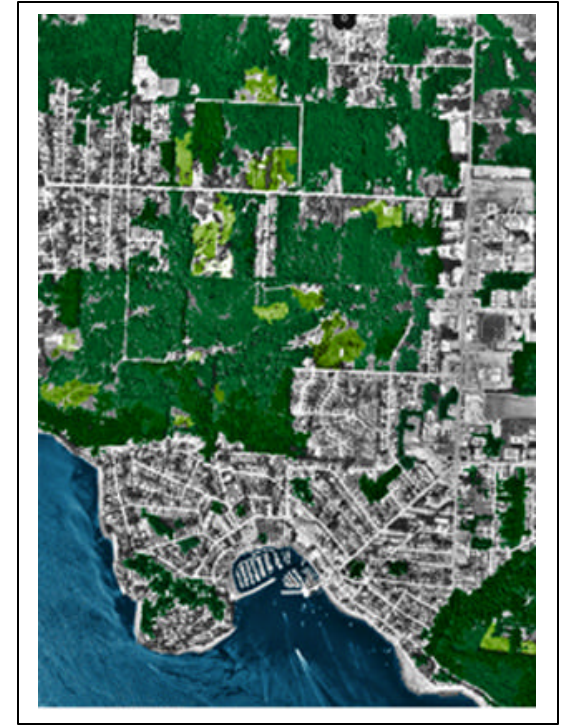


Gibsons 1957



Gibsons 1976

What We See



Gibsons 1998

C-2.6 Historical Patterns of Vegetation Removal

Gibsons was originally inhabited by members of the Coast Salish nation, specifically the Shishalh tribe. Population was concentrated in the Chaser Creek area and along the coast from Williamsons Landing to the Town of Gibsons and sacred sites were discovered at what is now called Gospel Rock, which should be considered in future development.

European settlement patterns seem to have resulted in the removal of vegetation in a radial pattern around the bay and in a linear fashion along highway 101. As shown by the vegetation/slope map on page 1, older coniferous vegetation has been retained as a result of steep slopes of riparian areas impeding development. Some of the older residential areas and agricultural homesteads seem to have retained much of the native vegetation, while the view lots in newer residential areas show little vegetation retention.