

F-2 EXISTING MUNICIPAL ECOLOGICAL PROTECTION OBJECTIVES

At the municipal level, ecological protection is achieved through policies outlined in the Official Community Plan (OCP). Normally, the OCP begins by making some general statement(s) about local goals for environmental quality and follows with more specific policies designed to achieve the broader objectives. Both the original and most recent OCPs developed by the Town of Gibsons highlight local priorities given to ecological protection.

The 1985 OCP contained the broad environmental objective of "protecting and enhancing the natural environment including vegetation, wildlife and marine life, streams and natural resources on public and private property, and to protect the scenic views of the community". More specifically, the municipality identified Charman and Gibson Creeks, Gospel Rock, and the harbour area as important candidates for ecological protection and enhancement. Planning tools to accomplish these goals included the acquisition of additional parklands in sensitive areas, strict control of subdivision and other development, and upgrading of inadequate storm water drainage infrastructure.

Examples of policies that were adopted to promote ecological protection include:

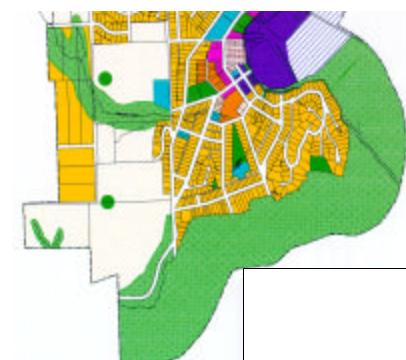
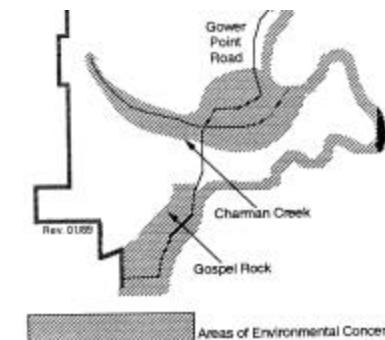
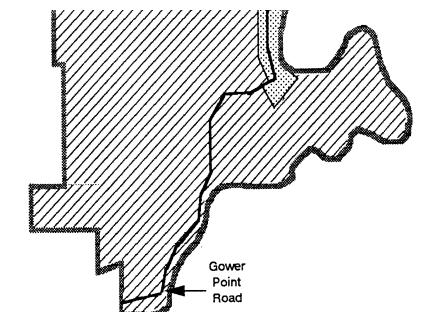
- Retention of existing vegetation cover in sensitive areas;
- Restrictions on building heights and tree cover removal;
- Zoning for parkland and low density buffers on lands adjacent to local greenbelts;
- Prohibition of sewage disposal in the municipal marina; and
- Zoning to regulate the development of land adjacent to water bodies and fish-bearing streams.

The 1993 OCP restates many of the objectives and policies of its predecessor, and is strengthened by more detailed maps and an added focus on habitat preservation. Again, steeply sloped areas (Gospel Rock) and watercourses (Gibson and Charman Creeks) are cited as local greenbelts and zoned accordingly. The newer plan includes "increased emphasis on pedestrian and bicycle transportation" in its background environmental information. It also makes an important distinction between lands designated for ecological protection and those developed as active neighbourhood and community parks.

In the 1993 OCP, *Natural Environment Policies* are revised and updated to reflect the new priorities of Council. General policy directions are consistent with previous guidelines, with the following noteworthy additions:

- Preservation and protection of habitat areas identified by relevant federal and provincial agencies;
- Designation of the buffer area around known Eagle's Nests as a Development Permit Area;
- Participation in regional "round-table" initiatives involving industry, government and user groups in the area.

Overall, the ecological protection objective and policies of the newer OCP convey a slightly more holistic approach to environmental sustainability. This shift is evident in proposals for increased communication and co-operation with government agencies at the regional, provincial and federal levels. The extent to which such proposals have been achieved, or even attempted, remains unclear.



Municipal planning policies have evolved in response to local environmental concerns

WHAT WE FOUND

In addition to explicit goals of ecological protection, municipal recreation objectives have environmental implications. Ongoing efforts to develop a waterfront park in Lower Gibsons promise to provide local residents with an accessible and enjoyable green space in the heart of their town. Development and maintenance of hiking trails and linear parks is intended to link various local parks, greenbelts and wildlife habitat areas. In these examples, public recreation should be compatible with ecological protection.

In important ways, municipal policies reflect environmental priorities articulated by the Sunshine Coast Regional District (SCRD). Public concern regarding environmental issues was highlighted in the SCRD report *Sunshine Coast 2020: Planning for Our Future*¹, but the adoption and implementation of regulatory measures that respond to these concerns is left up to local governments.

WHAT WE SEE

On the ground, the effects of recent ecological protection initiatives can be seen as sensitive habitat areas are being recognised. Beyond the creation and enforcement of land use regulation, however, municipal policies have a very limited role.

¹ Sunshine Coast Regional District, *Sunshine Coast 2020: Planning for Our Future*, 1990.