



Friends of Cortes Island (FOCI) Annual Review 2020

Introduction

2020 was a productive and successful year for FOCI, despite the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Here we outline the different projects and activities undertaken during the year.

We would like to thank all those who took part in delivering the programs and especially all of the wonderful volunteers who contributed their time and energy to making them happen – your help is very much appreciated.

We would also like to acknowledge *the toq qaymix^w* (Klahoose), *ᕿᕿᕿᕿᕿ qaymix^w* (Tla'amin), *ᕿᕿᕿᕿᕿ qaymix^w* (Homalco) Nations upon whose territories the programs and activities of Friends of Cortes Island take place.

Programs and Activities

PARKS AND TRAILS

We carried out ongoing maintenance of Kw'as, Carrington, Whale's Rest Park, Siskin Forest Park and Trails, and the Hayes, Moon, Gnat and Seascape Beach Accesses through our contract with the Strathcona Regional District (SRD). Our contract was renewed in 2020 and runs for another 4 years until 2024. We also took on the maintenance contract for Whaletown Commons Regional Park. Our parks and trails work is undertaken by our parks coordinators Ryan Harvey and Alex Bernier, with support from Tosh Harvey.

We worked in partnership with BC Parks to undertake ongoing restoration work at Mansons Landing Provincial Park Spit. We relocated rock barrier on the Spit to provide better protection for natural ecosystems and the beach, undertook a broom bash, and carried out trail improvements to reduce erosion. We also held a public meeting in partnership with BC Parks about coastal erosion on the Spit and discussed different options for how it could be addressed.

MARINE STEWARDSHIP

We established a new forage fish monitoring project in partnership with Project Watershed to monitor for Pacific sand lance and surf smelt. Forage fish surveys were undertaken by community volunteers and focused on Mansons Spit and Smelt Bay; revealing Pacific sand lance spawning at both locations.

In addition Sabina Leader Mense and Dennis Mense continued our Subtidal Biodiversity Program; undertaking a series of dives to assess marine diversity at different study sites around Cortes, and prepare a Subtidal Biodiversity Program 2020 Report.

Community volunteers continued our annual foreshore monitoring program. This year all 12 permanent monitoring stations were surveyed, contributing to our long-term data collection at these locations. The 25 years of foreshore monitoring data that we hold was delivered to the Strait of Georgia Data Centre, making it available to scientists, researchers and others studying the local marine environment.

We installed BC Whale Trail sign at the Gorge Marina – a partnership project with Ocean Wise and the Gorge Harbour Marina to raise awareness about local cetaceans and their conservation.

We were pleased to receive a donation of \$1,000 from the 10,000 Whales Project for beach cleanups on Cortes, and plan to run our first beach clean up in spring 2021.

Our Marine Stewardship Program is coordinated by marine biologist Sabina Leader- Mense, who is actively involved in developing and delivering many of the survey programs highlighted above.

FOCI STREAMKEEPERS

FOCI Streamkeeper volunteers, led by Christine and Cec Robinson, undertook the following activities:

- Fall monitoring of salmon returns at James, Basil, Hansen, Whaletown, Frabjes Day and Mansons Lagoon Creeks and Chris's Lagoon
- Habitat restoration in James Creek - involved 21 volunteers moving 9,000 lbs of gravel into the creek to enhance spawning habitat for Chum salmon
- Development of new signage for salmon bearing creeks, which incorporate the ayajuthem language of the Klahoose, Tla'Amin and Homalco Nations, and honour the importance relationship between salmon, water and the Klahoose people
- Salmonids in the classroom – Cortes Island School participated in this program which involved raising of salmon fry in the classroom and releasing them into Hansen Creek
- Youth engagement – several youth salmon watch activities were organized with both Cortes Islands School and home schoolers

LOVE THE LAKES PROJECT

Community volunteers carried out monthly water quality sampling of Hague and Gunflint lakes throughout 2020. Volunteers measure different parameters such as Nitrogen and Phosphorus levels to help determine the health of the lakes. This year they also undertook samples of lake inflows. We are particularly grateful to Max, Heidi, Carrie, Autumn and Gina for undertaking our monitoring work in 2020. We are also grateful to Gina for coordinating our sampling work and looking after and calibrating our monitoring equipment.

In 2020 we continued to develop plans, and applied for funding, for a wetland restoration project at Dillon Creek to help reduce nutrient input into the lakes and create habitat for wetland wildlife.

SPECIES AND WILDLIFE AT RISK

This program aims to raise awareness about species and wildlife at risk, and encourage people to take steps to protect them and report their sightings. In 2020 we ran Great Blue Heron Watch Day involving community members monitoring of beaches around the island to help determine heron numbers. We also: undertook a Northern Goshawk survey in Von Donop Provincial Park in partnership with BC Parks; developed a Bear Primer on how to coexist with bears; and promoted our newt-crossing project.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION PROGRAM

We provided ongoing support for the development and maintenance of the Cortes Island School Garden. Every student at the school takes part in activities in the garden during the school year. Students are involved in planting, harvesting and preparing food from the produce.

We ran eight community activities during 2020 including our innovative 'Nature is Good for You' radio series with Folk U. Due to Covid-19 impacts we ran a reduced summer activities program involving 2 Gumbooting the Lagoon events, run in partnership with the Cortes Island Museum

We started the process of updating our website including introducing new sections on Wildlife Coexistence and Sensitive Ecosystems. In 2020 our website had over 3,700 users and 4,922 sessions.

We produced two newsletters and three e-newsletters during the year. We also regularly posted news and activities to our Facebook page and have 775 Facebook followers.

We undertook a community survey to provide feedback on our work and help inform our strategic plan - a total of 40 people took part.

FOCI Staff 2020

Executive Director: Helen Hall

Conservation and Community Engagement Assistant (Canada Summer Jobs Program): Autumn Barrett-Morgan

FOCI Board

Board members included: Max Thaysen (President), Miranda Cross, Elizabeth Anderson (Treasurer), Kate Maddigan (Vice President), Gerri Davis (Secretary), Morgan Tams and Greg Osoba.

Partnerships

In 2020 we worked in partnership with the following organizations: Cortes Island Museum and Archives Society, Linnaea Farm Society, Folk U, The Children's Forest, Project Watershed, Strathcona Regional District, BC Provincial Parks, Cortes Streamkeepers, Ocean Wise, Strait of Georgia Data Centre, Cortes Island School, BC Forests Lands and Natural Resource Operations, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Discovery Island Ecosystem Mapping and the Gorge Harbour Marina.

Funding

Our generous funders include: Strathcona Regional District, BC Parks, Employment and Social Development Canada, Province of British Columbia, Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation and Pacific Salmon Foundation.

We would also like to acknowledge the many generous donors who donated to FOCI in 2020; your donations are very much appreciated.

FOCI Memberships

FOCI has 131 members.