

Section #1: Natural Environment, Parks and Protected Lands

Introduction:

The District of Sechelt is defined by its foreshore areas, shorelines, watercourses, wetlands and forested upland areas, some of which are protected in the form of parks. Others fall within the Agricultural Land Reserve, which is a provincial designation which recognizes agriculture as the priority use, and the Community or Provincial Forests.

Lands not suitable for development include environmentally sensitive and hazardous areas, floodplains, foreshore areas, shorelines and watercourses. In most cases, regulations have been enacted to limit or prohibit development in such areas. For example, development is not permitted within 15 metres of the high water mark and/or ravine crest of major watercourses.

Despite these regulations and others, residents have expressed concern about the pace and design of new development and its impacts on the natural environment. For example, site preparation practices such as clearing and grading prior to development can lead to erosion, excessive siltation of streams and the loss of native vegetation. Conventional residential subdivision, which employs dispersed designs and large amounts of paved areas, can lead to excessive stormwater runoff.

Residents have also expressed concern about the management and stewardship of parks and protected lands, including the Community Forest. For example, poor farming practices can lead to ground and surface water contamination. Logging in watersheds can lead to erosion and excessive siltation of streams, as well as decreased water supply during the dry season.

Given the above concerns and others, there is support for more and stronger measures to protect the natural environment. There is also support for measures that take a more holistic approach to protection and management; taking into consideration larger systems such as watersheds and ecosystems.

There is too much growth occurring. Without knowing it, we are losing the things that make us truly special.

(Student Questionnaire Respondent, June 2006)

Sechelt is defined by its natural environment. From a distance, the most prominent features are our forests and mountains; however, they are under assault. We are clear-cutting our forests and taming our topography. Our inspiration appears to be the mine and not our natural environment. The time for action is now before it is too late.

(Written Submission, October 23, 2006)



We are operating in a virtual vacuum. We need more information about the natural environment if we are to preserve and protect it.

(Directional Document Respondent, February 22, 2007)

Community Feedback:

Based on the community consultation in support of the visioning process, the following challenges were identified:

- concerns about climate change and its local impacts;
- lack of information about how individuals can make a difference in reducing greenhouse gas emissions;
- lack of local leadership on environmental issues;
- inadequate waste management;
- lack of compact building forms and energy efficient design;
- limited public access to information related to watersheds and environmentally sensitive areas;
- limited use of renewable sources of energy—e.g., geothermal, solar, tidal and wind;
- loss of forested lands and fish and wildlife habitat;
- poor development practices—e.g., clear-cutting and grading;
- conversion of productive farmland to hobby-farm use and rural estates;
- pressure to remove lands from the Agricultural Land Reserve.

The divide between developed and undeveloped lands has never been greater. In the past, residential neighbourhoods seamlessly transitioned into rural estates and farms. Today, new residential subdivisions stand in stark contrast to more established neighbourhoods. Lots are small, houses are large and trees are non-existent. We need to rethink our current development practices and preserve and protect our natural environment.

(Directional Document Respondent, February 22, 2007)



If people were exposed to the ideas of conservation design in new developments, it might be used as a starting point for developing models of environmental protection within existing neighbourhoods. For example, community gardens using grey water, edible and native landscaping, and flowers and shrubs that attract birds and insects. Greenways could also become corridors for harvesting fast growing tree species such as alder or floral arrangement material. Alder has become an attractive wood for woodworkers for carving, furniture and kitchens.

(Directional Document Respondent, February 22, 2007)

Vision:

Sechelt is a leader in addressing climate change; in promoting sustainable lifestyles; in protecting environmentally sensitive areas; and in ensuring that its protected lands are managed in an environmentally sensitive and sustainable manner.

It is committed to eliminating air and water pollutants and greenhouse gas emissions by changing behaviours and adopting new technologies; designing neighbourhoods which enable residents to meet many of their daily needs within an easy drive or walk; encouraging the construction of compact building forms and energy efficient design; promoting alternative modes of transport to the automobile; and supporting energy conservation and waste reduction education programs.

It ensures that development, especially in the forested upland areas, respects site conditions and terrain; retains significant areas in their natural state; and minimizes the amount of paved surfaces to reduce stormwater runoff. It also ensures that developments are coordinated with each other and with greenways and parks to achieve contiguous green and open spaces.

It preserves environmentally significant areas such as riparian habitat, watersheds and wetlands and protects forested lands on escarpments, surrounding ravines and along watercourses. These lands, in combination with existing parks, provide essential habitat for fish and wildlife, while serving as wildlife corridors.

It safeguards its protected lands, including those within the Agricultural Land Reserve and the Community and Provincial Forests; ensuring that they are managed in an environmentally sensitive and sustainable manner. It encourages best management practices that support farming, logging and wildlife, while protecting ecosystems and water quality. It also minimizes urban/rural conflicts and uses natural buffers to separate potentially conflicting land uses.

Objectives:

The objectives are:

- To be a leader on environmental issues.
- To reduce greenhouse gas emissions and plan and prepare for climate change.
- To protect, rehabilitate and/or restore environmentally sensitive and significant areas.
- To ensure that new development and redevelopment occurs in an environmentally sensitive and sustainable manner.
- To expand and connect the park and open space system.
- To manage all protected lands in an environmentally sensitive and sustainable manner.
- To acquire and use the best current information in support of decision-making.
- To encourage and practice sustainable lifestyles.

The natural environment sustains all other systems. As such, it should be granted more respect. We see the environment as serving us rather than us serving it. We must change our mindset before it is too late. We need to reduce our footprint by encouraging compact building forms and preserving our natural heritage. This document provides me with hope.

(Directional Document Respondent, February 22, 2007)



Strategies:

The following strategies support the vision and objectives for the Natural Environment, Parks and Protected Lands. In many cases, they require more detailed study of the natural environment as a precursor to planning and protection. They also require further development and changes to both the Official Community Plan and Zoning Bylaw to ensure and enforce protection.

Watershed and Ecosystem Planning and Protection:

Current Situation:

The Geotechnical and Environmental Reconnaissance Study (May 1993) by Golder Associates Ltd. contained an inventory of environmentally sensitive and hazardous areas within the District. It also contained a number of recommendations to protect such areas.

Based on this inventory, environmentally sensitive development permit areas were designated within the District's Official Community Plan. Development within such areas may require the applicant to supply an environmental impact assessment.

Regulations are also in place to protect watercourses and shoreline and foreshore areas within the District. Regarding the former, development is not permitted within 15 metres of the high water mark and/or ravine crest. As for the latter, development is discouraged within 15 metres above the high tide line and 15 metres below the low tide line.

While these regulations provide localized protection, they do not consider the impact on larger systems, including watersheds and ecosystems. As such, the cumulative impact of many individual and localized decisions can have a detrimental effect on these larger systems.

Watershed and Ecosystem Planning and Protection:

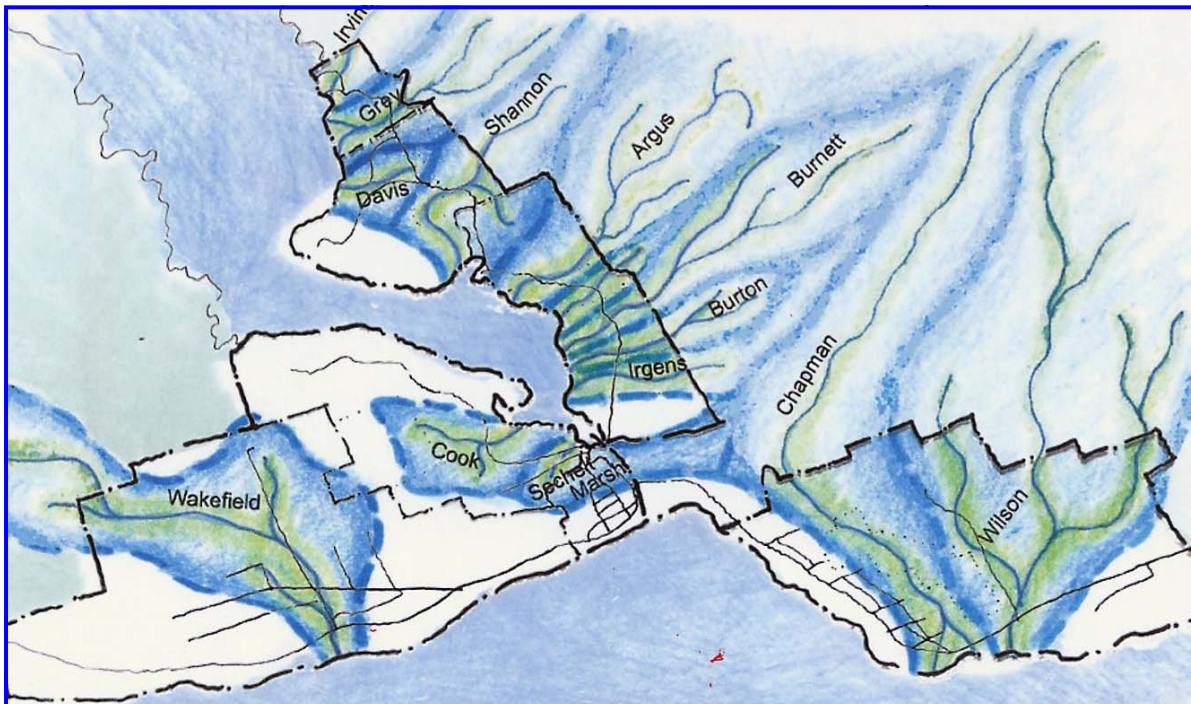
The following policies and programs are designed to protect watersheds and environmentally sensitive areas (including ecosystems) within the District:

- That an updated inventory and map be prepared of watersheds and environmentally sensitive areas within and bordering the District.
- That development be discouraged within watersheds and environmentally sensitive areas.
- That a development permit be required prior to the commencement of development within watersheds and environmentally sensitive areas.
- That an environmental impact assessment be required prior to the issuance of a development permit within watersheds and environmentally sensitive areas.
- That development employ appropriate mitigative measures within watersheds and environmentally sensitive areas. For example, the reduction of impervious surfaces and the retention of native vegetation.

Watershed and Ecosystem Planning and Protection:

- That 'rurban' conservation design regulations be used to guide development within watersheds and environmentally sensitive areas. 'Rurban' conservation design conserves or protects large amounts of contiguous open space by compacting buildings, parking and street circulation (refer to Section #2: Residential Neighbourhoods).
- That leave-strips and setbacks along major watercourses be increased from 15 to 30 metres from the top of the high water mark and/or ravine crest in new development areas.
- That watercourses be protected, rehabilitated and restored and that 'buried' or 'culverted' watercourses in developed areas be 'daylighted,' if feasible.
- That the management of watersheds and environmentally sensitive areas be integrated with the District's Parks and Open Space Master Plan (July 2006), so that environmentally sensitive areas, with the added potential for use as wildlife corridors and linkages to the greenway, pedestrian pathway and trail network, can be acquired and protected.

The City of Port Moody has prepared an inventory and map of environmentally sensitive areas, including ecosystems, within its boundaries; has classified them as high, medium or low; and has developed an Environmentally Sensitive Area Management Plan. The District of West Vancouver is using creek corridors to provide an open space framework for neighbourhood planning and design. To this end, it has enacted regulations prohibiting new development and restricting redevelopment within creek corridors and environmentally significant areas with the exception of public works (e.g., crossings for roads and services) and trails.



Watersheds and Riparian Areas Within and Bordering the District

Environmental Stewardship Program:

- That an Environmental Stewardship Program be developed. This program would protect, restore and manage environmentally sensitive and significant areas. It would also balance public and private sector responsibility in implementing stewardship initiatives, while providing opportunities for residents to make a meaningful contribution.

Possible components could include:

- ◇ stewardship planning—e.g., conduct inventory studies, prepare management plans, etc.;
- ◇ stewardship awareness—e.g., conduct public outreach and education;
- ◇ stewardship volunteers—e.g., support voluntary actions by individuals and community groups;
- ◇ stewardship investment—e.g., facilitate environmental protection;
- ◇ stewardship bylaws—e.g., motivate the private sector and enforce compliance;
- ◇ stewardship finance—e.g., fund mechanisms in support stewardship initiatives.

The City of North Vancouver has recently developed such a program and has prepared an action plan in support of its implementation.

Climate Change Action Plan:

- That a Climate Change Action Plan be developed. This plan would incorporate strategies to reduce local greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change and ensure that the community is prepared to adapt to the potential impacts of climate change. It would define a leadership role for the District and enlist the participation of builders, businesses, institutions and residents. It would also identify reduction targets and incorporate a monitoring and reporting program.

Currently, a number of municipalities are developing such plans. For example, the City of Kamloops is developing an Integrated Greenhouse Gas, Energy and Air Quality Plan and the Regional District of Nanaimo is developing a Community Greenhouse Gas and Air Emissions Management Plan.

- That a Community Education Program be developed in support of the Climate Change Action Plan. This program would raise awareness about climate change and provide information and instruction on calculating and reducing one's carbon footprint, which is a gauge of the impact that one has on the environment in terms of the amount of greenhouse gases produced, measured in units of carbon dioxide.

Currently, there are a number of websites dedicated to calculating one's carbon footprint. For ease of access, one or more of these websites could be featured on the District's website and a booklet or guide could be produced—e.g., "101 Steps to a Sustainable Lifestyle.

We need to do something about climate change before it is too late. We must move from talk to action.

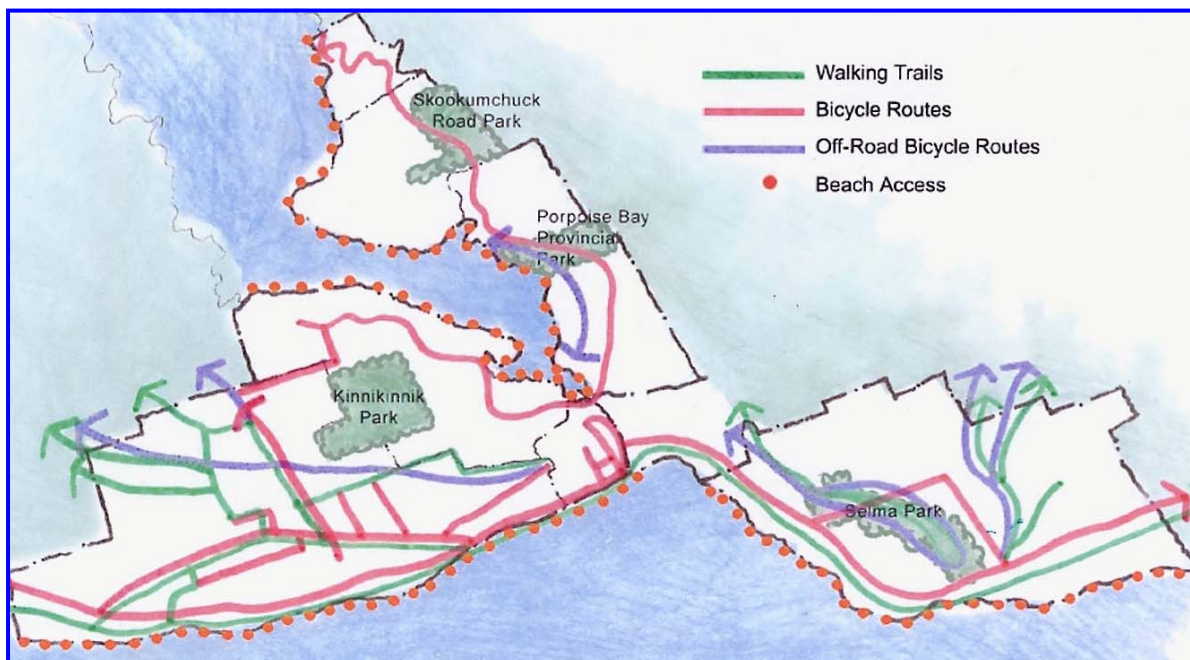
(Youth and Young Adult Focus Group, December 12, 2006)

Park and Open Space:

A [Parks and Open Space Master Plan](#) was completed for the District in July 2006. This plan is supportive of many of the objectives related to the natural environment, as well as other areas of focus, within the Vision Plan, including:

- the creation of a bicycle/pedestrian pathway and open space system that parallels the shorelines of both Sechelt Inlet and the Strait of Georgia;
- the creation of greenways that connect open spaces, parks and protected lands, thus creating contiguous areas or corridors to facilitate wildlife movement;
- the creation of a greenway, pedestrian pathway and trail network linking neighbourhoods with each other and to the Downtown Village;
- the creation of a greenway, pedestrian pathway and trail network that encourages use of alternative modes of transport to the automobile;
- the enhancement of waterfront access and use, including improved accessibility for people with disabilities and mobility limitations;
- the provision of open space and parks in existing and newly developed areas to provide opportunities for nature appreciation and recreation such as cycling, jogging and walking;
- the use of partnerships with community and conservation groups to protect, maintain and/or manage natural areas, open spaces, beach accesses and parks.

Given the above common objectives, plus others, **it is recommended that the [Parks and Open Space Master Plan](#) be supported and implemented.**



Major Parks and Trails in the District

Agricultural Lands:

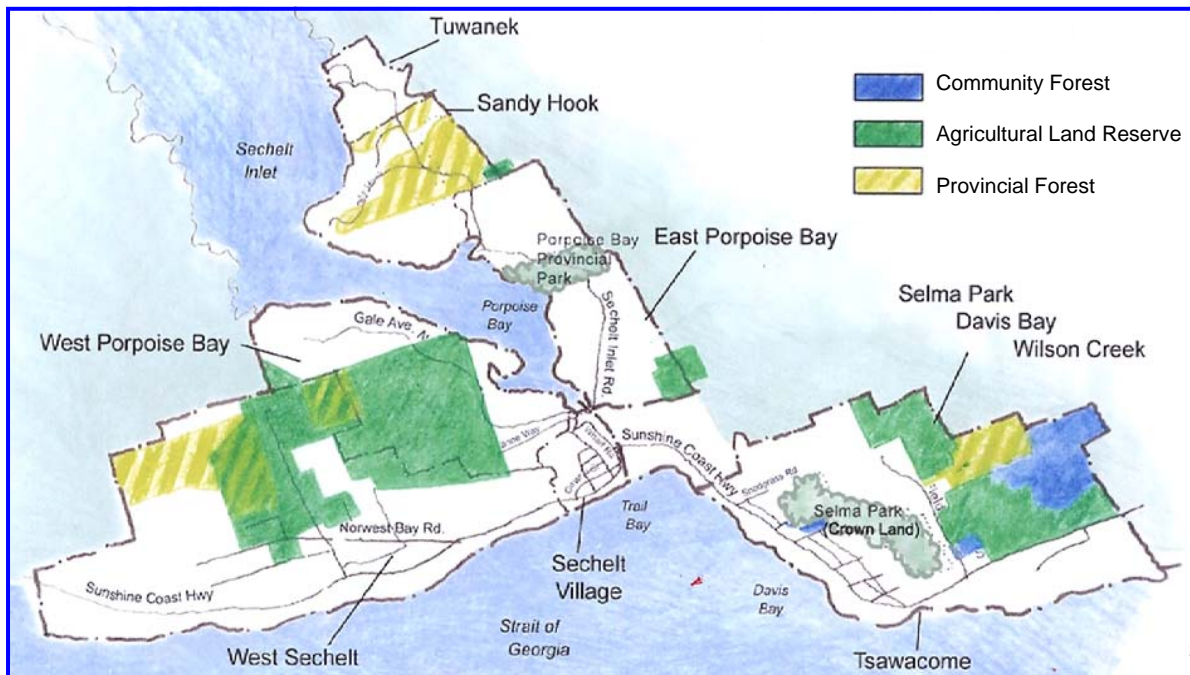
Current Situation:

There are about 660 hectares of land within the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) within the District, which is a provincial designation that recognizes agriculture as the priority use. All land within the ALR is subject to the provisions of the Agricultural Land Commission Act. The Act generally prohibits or restricts non-farm use and subdivision of ALR lands, unless otherwise permitted or exempted.

Issues facing the farm community include but are not limited to: the long-term viability of agriculture; the preservation of farmland for farming; the increasing number of conflicts between urban and rural activities; the rising cost of farmland; the conversion of farmland to hobby-farm use and rural estates; and the interrelationship between farmland and wildlife habitat.

Farmland Protection Strategies:

- That farming be recognized as the primary use of agricultural lands.
- That a regional strategy in support of farming be developed in conjunction with the Sunshine Coast Regional District.
- That parcel sizes be maintained and that consolidation be encouraged (rather than fragmentation of agricultural lands).
- That an Agricultural Impact Assessment be used to quantify the impacts of a proposed development, rezoning, subdivision or other non-farm use on farmlands or areas adjacent to farmlands.



Agricultural Land Reserve and Community/Provincial Forests

Agricultural Lands:

- That 'rurban' conservation design regulations be used to guide development within the urban/rural interface. 'Rurban' conservation design conserves or protects large amounts of contiguous open space by compacting buildings, parking and street circulation.
- That a Community Education Program be undertaken to inform residents in the urban/rural interface about farm practices and 'urban' activities that may result in difficulties to farmers.
- That best management practices be encouraged that support both farming and wildlife and that maintain hydrological functions and water quality on agricultural lands.

The Corporation of Delta has taken a leadership position with regard to protecting its agricultural lands. Its Official Community Plan includes a policy requiring an Agricultural Impact Assessment prior to development on farmlands or areas adjacent to farmlands and new zoning regulations that minimize the negative impacts of dwellings on farmlands. It is also considering urban/rural planning initiatives such as development permit guidelines for the urban side.

Community and Provincial Forest Lands:**Current Situation:**

The Community Forest comprises an area of about 250 hectares within the District. In a Community Forest, the Province transfers decision-making over local forest resources, including non-timber values, to a community. Community Forest license holders can manage their area for a range of community values, including biodiversity, visual qualities and watershed protection. Five year probationary licenses can lead to agreements of up to 99 years, providing communities with the opportunity to manage local forest resources for the long-term benefit of their residents.

The Provincial Forest comprises an area of about 195 hectares of land and includes lands within the neighbourhoods of Selma Park, West Sechelt and Wilson Creek.

Sustainable Management:

Consultation participants and steering committee members emphasized the importance of these lands, given their size and strategic location, and the need for them to be managed in an environmentally sensitive and sustainable manner. They also emphasized the need for these lands to provide community benefits, including biodiversity and ecosystem preservation; community water supply protection; and recreational access and use; as well as consideration as to their visual qualities, since they form the forested backdrop to the community. Given that no detailed study was undertaken with regard to these lands or their current management practices, no strategies are outlined. Given that community concerns have been raised regarding their management, there is a need to communicate how these lands are being managed in an environmentally sensitive and sustainable manner and what benefits the community is deriving from their use.