



# Garry oak researchers meet to review and discuss papers

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by Michael Meagher and Shyanne Smith, Garry Oak Ecosystems Recovery Team

Fifty-four researchers, ecosystem restorers, and members of the public met in February 2007 to review and discuss papers presented at the fourth Garry Oak Research Colloquium. This event was held at Victoria's Pacific Forestry Centre.

Garry oak (*Quercus garryana*) occurs in British Columbia in the dry Coastal Douglas-fir zone, but only in the extreme southwest corner—mainly along the east coast of Vancouver Island, neighbouring Gulf Islands, and also in two isolated sites in the lower Fraser valley. The limited area belies the importance of the oak associations; they contain nearly 120 species rated "at risk" by international standards. Indeed, Garry oak ecosystems are one of the most endangered terrestrial complexes in Canada. Species at risk include: 73 plants, some with as few as three known sites in the world; 13 butterflies, some

not seen in the province for decades; 2 reptiles; 14 birds; and 3 mammals.

Many naturalists and professional biologists in the Victoria area began advocating for protection of the oak habitat and its many species, leading to the formation of the Garry Oak Meadow Preservation Society in 1992. The Society organized the first Garry Oak Meadow Colloquium in 1993. Volunteers began removing invasive plants, such as Scotch broom, and collecting oak nuts and planting them at restoration sites.

The development of Canada's Species at Risk legislation prompted attendees of the second Garry Oak Colloquium (1999) to create the Garry Oak Ecosystems Recovery Team (see <http://www.goert.ca>) and to draft a *Recovery Strategy for Garry Oak and Associated Ecosystems and their Associated Species at Risk in Canada*. The Team developed a number of Recovery Implementation Groups (RIGs) to fulfill the goals and objectives laid out in the strategy. One of these groups, the Research RIG, works to determine priorities for, and co-ordinate collaboration in, research leading to effective restoration of these ecosystems. Research topics range from oak ecosystem classification and basic biology (habitat needs, reproduction, responses to fire, and invasive species) to restoration techniques. Other groups, such as the Species at Risk RIGs (Plants, Vertebrates, and Invertebrates), provide more specific direction in the research needs for recovery of species at risk.

Attendees at this year's Research Colloquium represented agencies from Canadian federal, provincial, and local governments, including a First Nation; Washington State; five universities from British Columbia to Ontario; professional consultants; two conservation agencies; a private nursery specializing in native plants; and three volunteer groups. They listened to 13 papers on a variety of topics, including:

- possible effects of climate change on the future range of Garry oak in BC,
- analyses of tree ring-width patterns to indicate historical patterns in oak stands,
- factors to consider in determining how these ecosystems function,
- active restoration programs in oak ecosystems,

## A "perfect Eden"



Chris Junck photo

*Camas in flower under a majestic oak in Uplands Park, Victoria, BC.*

**Sir James Douglas**, first Factor of the Hudson's Bay Company, arrived in Victoria at the height of the spring flower season. Under large Garry oaks, he saw broad areas of meadow dominated by beautiful blue camas, which were visited by several species of butterfly. He described it as "... a perfect Eden." Although urban and agricultural pressures have reduced the area available for restoration, this image continues to appear each spring in Victoria at the few undisturbed oak areas, inspiring us to contribute to the protection and restoration of this amazing local "Eden."

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# Papers to go out to 180 researchers

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- effects of removal of invasive plants on the ecosystems,
- successful removal techniques of a toxic plant, and
- effect of deer as transport mechanisms for native and introduced grasses.

Discussion generated by the papers indicated the interest in, and wealth of, research expertise available to the Recovery Team, both in Canada as well as Washington and Oregon. The papers, plus several

volunteered by researchers unable to attend, will be collated and distributed to researchers (now over 180 people from BC to India registered on the research distribution list) and others interested in ongoing Garry oak ecosystem research.

Any readers interested in receiving the *Proceedings of Colloquia of 2003 and 2005–2007* may contact **Shyanne Smith** at **[Shyanne.Smith@goert.ca](mailto:Shyanne.Smith@goert.ca)**. Likewise, those interested in learning more about Garry oak ecosystems, and local laws and programs for their recovery can consult **<http://www.goert.ca>** for more information on the work of the Team. 