

## Web-based Resource

# The Natural Areas Atlas

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If you are involved in land use planning or aquatic stewardship, or if you simply want to learn more about some of Victoria's natural areas, then you will want to log on to <http://www.naturalareasatlas.ca>, a new Web site that features the online Natural Areas Atlas.



The Natural Areas Atlas is a comprehensive, Web-based mapping tool for the Victoria Capital Regional District (CRD) that was created to help those who live and work in the region make well-informed and responsible land-use decisions. The Atlas not only describes and locates important watercourses in relation to property boundaries and road networks, it also acts as a flagging device, keeping municipal engineers, planners, developers, and environmental groups informed and alerted as to when a proposed development or activity needs further study. Free to anyone with an internet

connection, the Atlas also provides essential background information for a wide range of tasks. For example, should you need to describe the ecological characteristics of a property, develop land-use bylaws, or modify official community plans, the Atlas has much of the information you need.

The Natural Areas Atlas has many advantages over conventional book atlases. As an Atlas user, you can add or remove layers of information at the click of a button (see below). You can find local information on such topics as salmon-bearing streams, spawning zones, old-growth forests, endangered plant communities, or shoreline



habitats—all in one place. Over time, the Atlas will become even more useful and informative as additional map layers become available.

In 2002, the Habitat Conservation and Stewardship Program provided the Natural Areas Atlas project with funds to enhance stream mapping within the Capital Regional District. The Atlas project has now corrected 345 errors in existing water feature maps and has completed 38 km of detailed stream

surveys in Goldstream River, and Sandhill and Reay Creeks. This information will provide planners, fisheries workers, and conservationists with accurate and timely data. The Atlas supplies, for instance, the precise location in relation to property boundaries of the creeks and associated spawning habitats, riparian zones, barriers to fish, and restoration sites. The Natural Areas Atlas is also set to initiate a detailed stream-mapping project of the Colquitz River and other smaller streams in Saanich this spring.

A number of agencies partnered with the CRD Environmental Services to help fund the Atlas project. These include the Georgia Basin Ecosystem Initiative, Fisheries Renewal BC, the Real Estate Foundation of British Columbia, Fisheries and Oceans Canada's Habitat Conservation & Stewardship Program, and the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection's Urban Salmon Habitat Program.

In the coming year we will see updates to the Atlas Web site including 2003 air photos, new detailed stream mapping, municipal storm drains, and additional marine habitat information. Technical support for using the Atlas is readily available through the Atlas Project Coordinator (see contact information below). In addition, an Atlas workshop series will take place this fall. Attendees will receive instruction on using the Atlas as a resource to create professional-quality site maps for inclusion in reports and presentations.

Anyone interested in using the Atlas can visit the Web site at <http://www.naturalareasatlas.ca>

For further information contact:

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