

Environmentally Significant Area (ESA) Mapping Initiative Summary



Thank you for your interest in the ESA mapping project! ESA's (Environmentally Significant Areas) are natural areas that have been captured in specific inventories due to their ecological values and special features. These include Bald Eagle nesting sites, wetlands, Garry Oak ecosystems, and many others. Currently, Saanich recognizes the following inventories in our ESA atlas, which is used to inform users of the location of important natural features:

- Sensitive Ecosystems Inventory (SEI)
- At-risk plants, animals, and ecosystems, Conservation Data Centre (CDC)
- Wildlife Tree Stewardship Areas (WiTS)
- Migratory Bird Sanctuaries
- Ecological Reserves
- Aquifers
- Saanich Marine Inventory
- Natural State Covenants (see our brochure or website for more information)
- Saanich Significant Trees
- Saanich wetlands, watercourses, waterbodies and watersheds

The objective of the ESA Mapping Initiative was to improve our existing inventories by looking for areas that may have been missed during past mapping initiatives.



A technical advisory group was created to set the priorities for site selection and criteria to evaluate the ecological integrity of the sites. A biological consultant (Moraia Grau and Associates) was hired to apply the priorities and criteria to the sites.

The project ran from 2011 to 2015 and was divided into three phases which are described on the following pages.

The technical advisory group had representatives from:

- Saanich Planning, Engineering, Environmental Services, GIS & Parks
- Canadian Wildlife Service
- Conservation Data Centre
- Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations
- Garry Oak Ecosystem Recovery Team

Examples of site priorities:

High: A Garry Oak meadow adjacent to a park.

Medium: A group of wildlife trees in the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR).

Low: A significant tree or an area already identified and mapped.

Criteria to assess ecological integrity:

Landscape context such as fragmentation

Condition such as impact of invasive species

Restoration Potential such as the level of effort required to restore the site to its natural state

Summary of Phase 1:

In Phase 1, the consultant considered publicly identified sites using established priorities and criteria. Phase one was completed and the following results were presented in an open house in July 2012.

We received a total of 56 responses identifying 46 sites from the public. The sites were evaluated by the consultant who applied the project priorities to determine which sites should be visited, reducing the sites to 31 sites. In the field, the consultant filled out data forms about each site, inventoried 20m diameter plots, and assessed ecological integrity based on landscape context, site condition, and restoration potential. This information allowed the consultant to evaluate and recommend 29 of the sites as potential new ESA's for consideration by the District of Saanich.

These results have changed slightly since first reported. The consultant reviewed Phase 1 in light of improvements to the evaluation methodology during Phase 2.

Process to Determine ESAs

46 sites

Priorities

31 sites

Criteria

29 new ESAs recommended:

- 23 Sensitive Ecosystems
- 1 isolated watercourse
- 1 Bald Eagle nest
- 4 undeveloped Right-of-ways

Plus

- 2 wildlife tree areas
- 5 veteran tree areas
- 4 older second growth forests

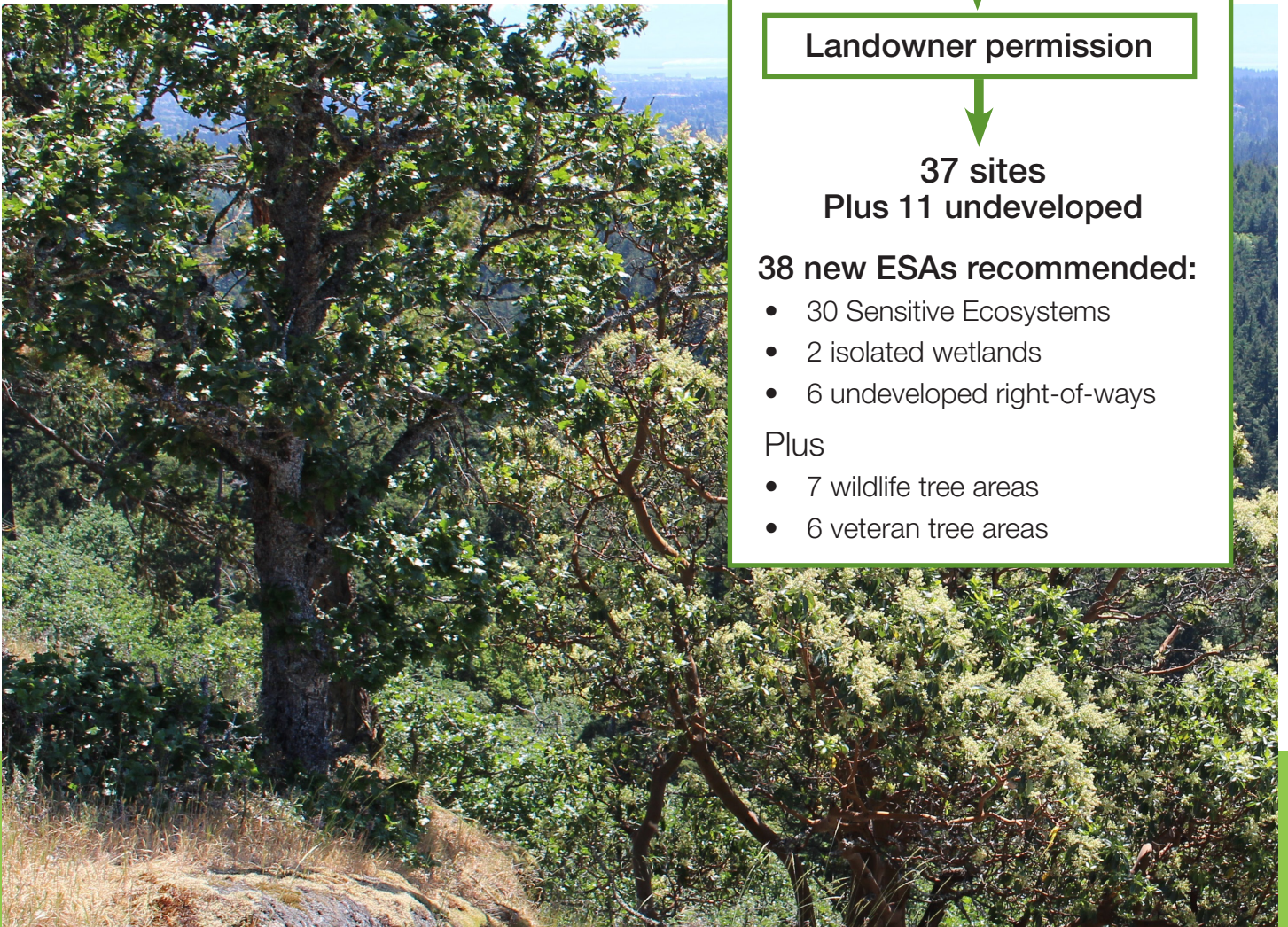


Summary of Phase 2:

In Phase 2, the consultant considered sites identified through existing inventories, data, and aerial photo analysis. These included the 2008 Coastal Douglas-fir Terrestrial Ecosystem Mapping, Historical Garry Oak mapping, and the Victoria Natural History Society Greenspaces Project. Phase 2 was completed in July 2013 and the following results will be presented in November 2013.

180 potential sites were identified, plus another 79 undeveloped right-of-ways. The sites were then run through the priorities and criteria of the Technical Advisory Group. To bring the number of sites down to a manageable number, a second tier of priorities was used. Landowner contact was made to gain permission to access 52 sites. Permission was received for 37 sites.

After collecting data in the field, the consultant evaluated and recommended 51 of the sites as potential new ESA's for consideration by the District of Saanich.



Summary of Phase 3:

Phase 3 was initiated as a result of public engagement at the end of Phase 2. There was concern that only properties where landowner permission was given had been included thus far. Phase 3 gave the consultant an opportunity to evaluate identified sites without field work. The goal was to identify 100 sites that had not been previously mapped and to include smaller sites.

The site evaluation criteria were adapted to account for the lack of site access and included:

- SEI Class (second growth and seasonally flooded areas scored lower)
- Degree of disturbance (location, landscaping, adjacent uses)
- Function (link, buffer, rare species, wildlife trees, etc.)
- Size (larger sites scored higher)
- Ownership (the more owners, the bigger the challenge for conservation)

The results of Phase 3 were presented to the Environment and Natural Areas Committee in 2015.

What's Next:

The data gathered during the ESA Mapping Initiative will be added to Saanich's ESA Atlas and Saanich's public GIS (SaanichMap) as information.

For more information:

Please see our project website at:
<http://www.saanich.ca/living/natural/esamapping.html>

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