

Natural Shoreline Natural Treasures

Sand and Gravel Beaches

Sand and gravel beaches are vital to life in the ocean. When you walk on a sandy beach, many small creatures are beneath your feet. These small animals are food for larger fish, birds, and marine mammals. This marine food web reaches far out to sea. From sand grains to salmon, insects to orcas, it is all connected.

You can help keep the web of life intact by leaving no trace.

- Leave the shoreline as you found it.
- Pack out your trash.
- Don't remove sand, gravel, rocks, driftwood or seaweed.
- Know that all beach fires are prohibited.
- Follow regulations for harvesting fish and shellfish.



Belted Kingfisher

Double-Crested Cormorant

Song Sparrow

Backshore

The area where the land and sea meet is the marine riparian area or backshore. Trees and shrubs in this area are a crucial part of the coastal ecosystem. Debris and insects falling from the trees provide food for tiny organisms called plankton and young fish. Overhanging vegetation creates shade for organisms in the beach zone, especially the incubating eggs of fish such as sand lance and Surf Smelt. Shoreline vegetation also filters water runoff and stabilizes the banks. Once dead, trees provide places for perching, nesting or feeding, for birds such as Bald Eagles or cormorants.

Driftwood and beach grasses growing close to the water knit the beach together and provide moisture and habitat for small animals and rare plants. The logs and grasses protect the beach from large storms and wave erosion.

Subtidal Zone

Subtidal refers to the area below the low tideline, and some of BC's well-known marine life lives here in the waters off Saanich beaches. A secure food supply for them depends on a healthy, productive ecosystem on the shore. Early spring is often a good time to view marine birds and mammals as they are attracted to the area during the herring migration when these fish lay their eggs on eelgrass and algae near shore.



Great Blue Heron

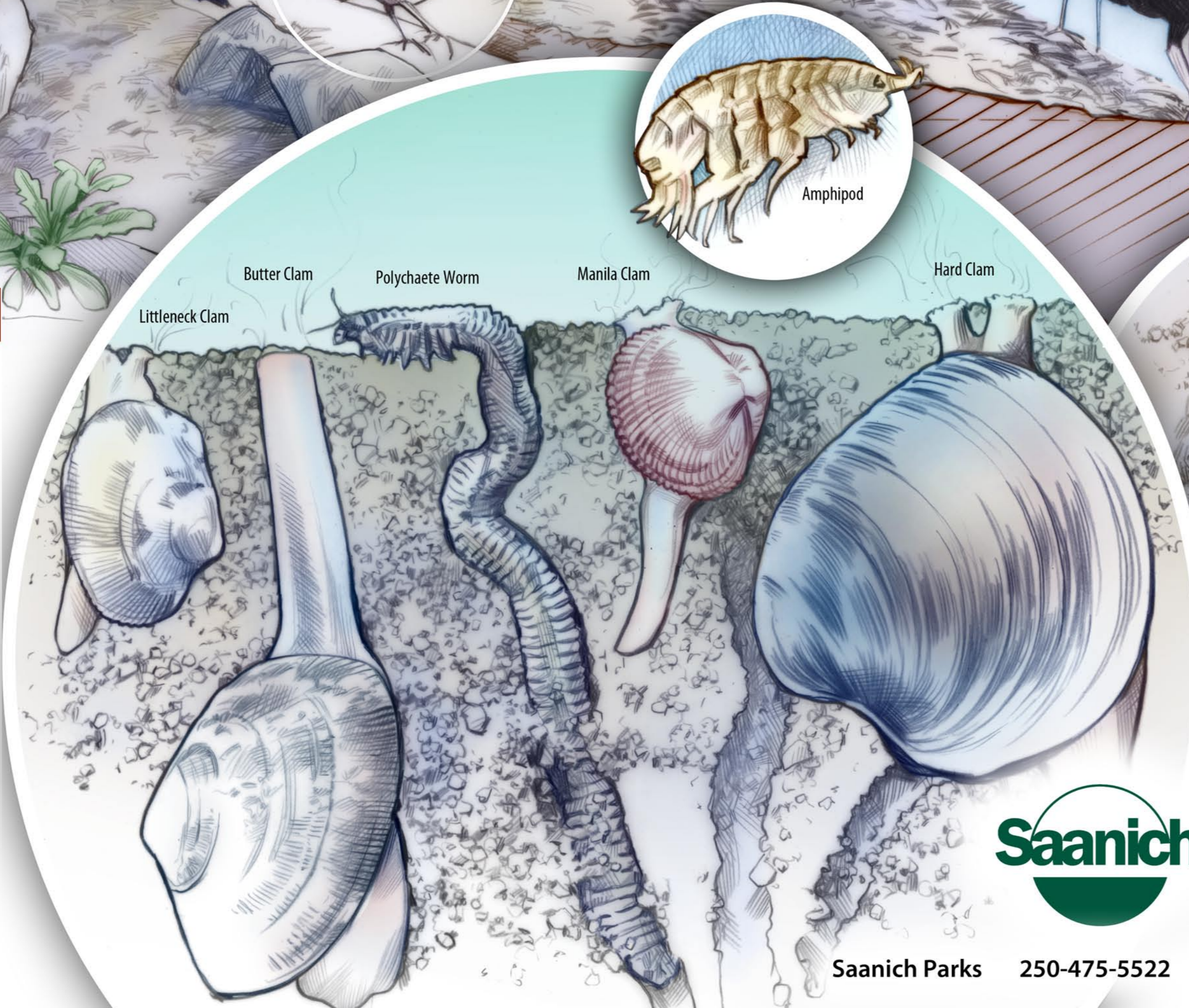
sealions

orcas

Harbour Seal

Buffleheads

Black Oystercatcher



Littleneck Clam

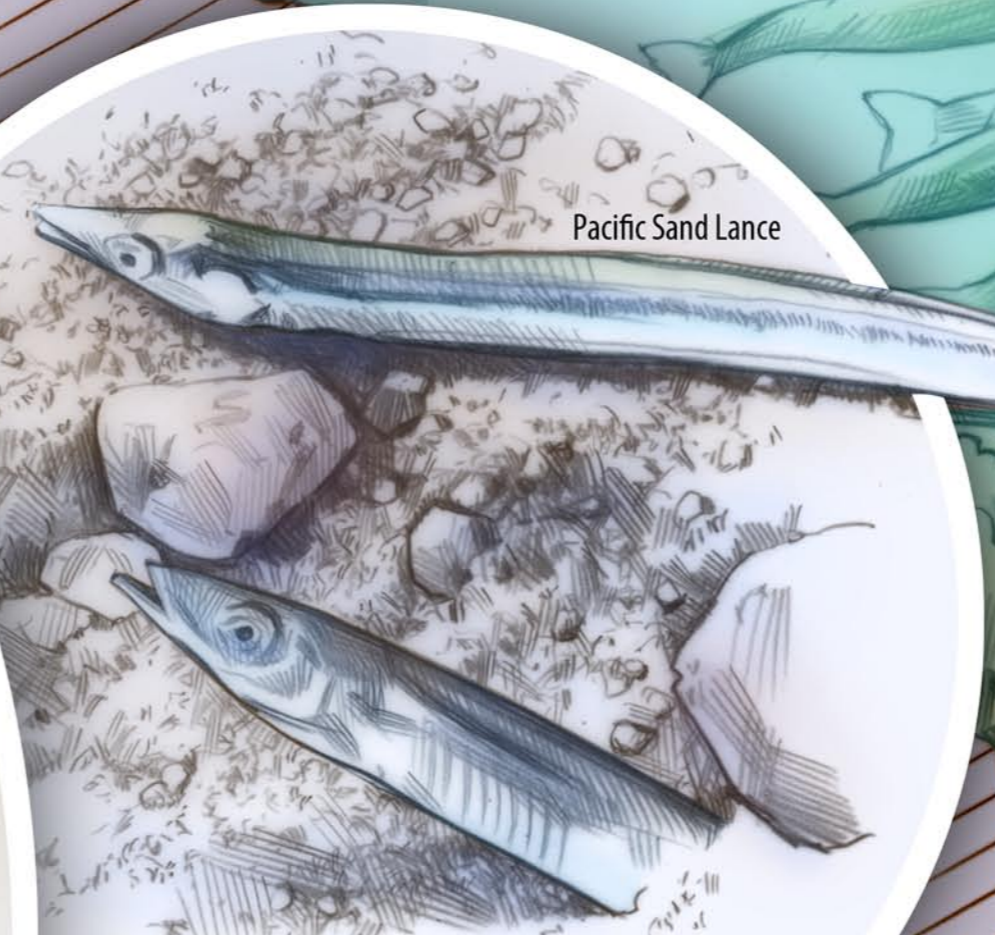
Butter Clam

Polychaete Worm

Manila Clam

Hard Clam

Amphipod



Pacific Sand Lance

Pacific Herring

Intertidal Zone - Foreshore

The intertidal zone on a sandy beach is constantly changing and full of life. Animals such as amphipods, polychaete worms, clams and many other invertebrates are found in this zone, living below the surface. Small fish such as Surf Smelt and Pacific Sand Lance spawn on pebbles and sand high in the intertidal zone, just below the driftwood line.

These fish, along with Pacific Herring, are called forage fish because they form a large portion of the diet of salmon (especially Chinook Salmon), marine mammals, and many birds. Activities such as sand and gravel removal reduce the habitat for these small organisms, which in turn affects animals higher up the food chain.

