



**GARRY OAK MEADOW
PRESERVATION SOCIETY**

To: Ms. Susie Saunders
Director Parks, Culture and Community Services
City of Courtenay
ssaunders@courtenay.ca

Re: Vanier Park Garry Oak Stand Preservation

The Garry Oak Meadow Preservation Society is a 100% volunteer-run advocacy organization that also grows and distributes Garry oak seedlings from locally obtained acorns on South Vancouver Island. Many of the threats facing the sustainability of Garry oak and associated ecosystems further south have similarities to threats of Garry oak patches at the northern reaches of the Garry oak ecosystem (GOE), for example, Vanier Park. This unique local genetic adaptation to the environment and its associated species community would be difficult to re-introduce if lost, and this localized species community could have great importance in a changing climate for biodiversity and human health.

The culminating pressures diminishing natural regeneration of Garry oaks are primarily human associated: the restriction of Indigenous stand management using fire, the encroachment of urban development, increased recreational impacts, the spread of forest pathogen, an array of invasive species inhibiting biodiversity, and increasingly hot and dry summers. Further south on Vancouver Island and on the Southern Gulf Islands we have witnessed stand-level forest conifer decline occurring near built up areas as has been anticipated in climate modeling. The decline of western redcedar, grand fir, western hemlock, western yew, and Douglas fir is occurring at a rate that is challenging from a management perspective and from a loss of benefits to the communities that are adjacent to these forests.

Established stands of Garry oak on the other hand are highly adapted to severe droughts and heat, including on rocky outcrops with shallow soil. Garry oak's role as a long-lived keystone species in a highly biodiverse ecosystem has evolved over the past 8000 years. Protecting existing patches of GOE, providing appropriate management and expanding patches will have great importance for the life cycles of many organisms. Diversity of species observed in GOE include amphibians (7), reptiles (7), birds (104), mammals (33), more than 800 insects and mites, and nearly 700 species of plants.

Through the GOMPS Board of Directors, I would like to express our support for Comox Valley Nature's proposal to the City of Courtenay to conserve the at-risk Garry Oak grove within Vanier Nature Park. We believe the proposal is an opportunity for a stewardship partnership between First Nations knowledge keepers, community volunteers and experts, stewardship organizations, and the City of Courtenay to work together toward enhancing this ecosystem. We believe the strategy prepared is grounded in best management practice and supported by peer-reviewed research. GOMPS would be pleased to support this initiative should it be approved in a technical or advisory capacity, including recommendation of qualified professionals, and assembling relevant research.

Stewardship of Garry oak ecosystems is an act of recognition, appreciation, and support for Indigenous historic and ongoing management. Garry oak ecosystem patches have become increasingly fragmented and continue to degrade with low and no management approaches. Restoring practices of-



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ecosystem stewardship based in First Nations local knowledge and in using alternative practices (e.g., wildlife snag creation) where fire cannot be accommodated is crucial to reconnect community members to each other and to reconnect the community with nature.

Sincerely,

Ryan Senechal
Board President – Garry Oak Meadow Preservation Society
Saanich, BC

References

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