



April 24, 2017
Annual General Meeting
Garry Oak Meadow Preservation Society
(GOMPS)

President's Report

One year ago GOMPS was at a crossroad. Faced with a declining membership and an increasing demand on our Directors we turned to like minded organisations for guidance.

We have always considered ourselves to be somewhat of a “working board” but the ability of our volunteer board to completely fulfil all aspects of our mission has been stretched to the limits. The demands of a tree nursery, added to our original mandate of advocacy and education, were too much. After last year’s re-visioning process which involved a facilitator from Volunteer Victoria, we chose to focus on two specific areas – our Garry oak tree nursery and advocacy.

To kick-start the nursery we hired professional help. This spring, a contractor completed the initial stages of setting up the nursery and we are now in the process of preparing a second, separate short-term contract for a temporary Nursery Manager. This Manager will not be a permanent employee but in the beginning he or she will tend to the daily operations. Most importantly, this Manager will provide guidance and direction to our volunteers. While it is not our intention to have employees or staff we felt a short-term contract was needed to get the work done as our original model of a 100% volunteer run nursery was out of reach for many reasons. The most impacting being the retirement and emigration of two key members of our initial nursery working group. Moving forward we met the requirements of the City of Victoria, our sub-liscence issuer, and submitted a detailed report to them outlining our progress, finances and our ambitions for this year. The report is available for public viewing after this meeting.

Our focus on advocacy concentrated on local authorities but, along with others, we seem to be experiencing difficulty advocating for trees – let alone, Garry oaks. We are but a single voice and it is clear our goal must be to bring others together. We have contacted local governments, private landowners, developers and even farmers in our attempt to draw attention to the importance of preserving natural spaces. We explored relationships with other groups that could possibly contribute towards this. Next month we will meet with the Garry Oak Ecosystem Recovery Team (GOERT) to explore common ground.

Recent changes to BC's Societies Act, enacted November 2016, require all societies to transition their Constitution and Bylaws to a new prescribed format and then upload this data to the government's online system. Our Constitution and Bylaws should be easily translated into this new format. We don't foresee any changes will be needed to the actual language in our documents. We will also be using an online payment system to remit our annual fees to the Province. None of this work is onerous and we are on track to transition very soon.

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The public turned to GOMPS for help with a number of issues, mostly involving development relating to land use issues such as tree protection and protecting Garry oak habitat. The challenge to protect Garry oak ecosystems is not limited to any one region but it is clear – some of our elected officials have seriously taken up the issue while others seem to be in need of a little bit of education.

Technology may afford us new tools as social media provides us with a much bigger soapbox. Looking ahead I see a few small challenges but I know that our conservation minded friends are standing with us.

The last matter to announce is a vacancy in our Board of Directors as Dr. Karen Wonders will not be seeking re-election this year. Karen joined our Board at the request of the late Tom Gillespie since then she brought us a unique perspective. I believe her exposure to the European education system, witnessing the affects of centuries of land management and her personal experiences there, enabled her to learn much from another society's history. The worldliness that evolved there, isolated from that which shaped our younger Canadian experience, helped to guide her. Her contributions to our Board will be missed.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of GOMPS I wish to express a sincere "thank you" to Karen.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Croteau".

Michael Croteau
President, Garry Oak Meadow Preservation Society (GOMPS)