

## **A Longterm Vision for the Buttertubs Wetlands**

by the Friends of Buttertubs-2018

### **Introduction:**

Within the City of Nanaimo, B.C., Buttertubs Marsh is a natural floodplain of the Millstone River, about 2.5 km upstream from its estuary. It lies within the traditional territory of the Snuneymuxw First Nation.

This floodplain came into prominence in the 1850's when the first European settlers (coal miners) required a place that could be farmed for produce and provide fodder for their livestock. The name "Buttertubs" was given to this area by the Morrell family after a location in the Yorkshire Dales, U.K., known as "the Buttertubs". Here, farmers used limestone caverns to store their butter and cheese. To extend the growing season on this flood plain the bed of the Millstone River was deepened considerably to lower the water table and permit earlier working of the land.

In 1974, what is today known as the Buttertubs Marsh Conservation Area (BMCA - aka the "East Marsh") (see attached map) became one of the earliest purchases by The National Second Century Fund, now known as The Nature Trust of British Columbia, (TNTBC). This original 22 hectare parcel of protected land has since been expanded through the acquisition of seven additional parcels including the "West Marsh" (recently acquired by the City of Nanaimo and Ducks Unlimited Canada). The total protected area now includes about 90% of the original floodplain. Four neighbouring properties, (10 hectares approx.) are identified as possible future acquisitions (see attached map).

Public works within the BMCA include dykes, City of Nanaimo underground water and sanitary sewer lines, a 1.2 mile perimeter walking trail, benches, three wildlife viewing platforms, Information/Interpretation shelters and signage.

Previous to 1955, coal mining took place beneath Buttertubs. The extent of these operations and their possible influence on marsh hydrology are unknown. No designated archaeological sites, nor evidence of First Nation's traditional use, are known for this wetland.

### **Community Use:**

Buttertubs is widely recognized as an exceptional wildlife viewing/nature photography destination and by many citizens of Nanaimo as a place for passive recreation and the quiet appreciation of nature. In a survey conducted during 2016/2017, (Friends of Buttertubs, unpublished report) the annual number of visitors was estimated to be > 75,000, the majority

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being seniors. It was also noted that women with young (pre-school) children and care-givers escorting those with various challenges, were well represented. Conclusion: Butterubs is a favoured destination - a destination that contributes to community wellness.

A trail guide to Buttertubs' human and natural history is available for visitors.

Governance:

The original BMCA was managed through a partnership consisting of TNTBC, the Province of BC, the City of Nanaimo and the Nanaimo Field Naturalists Club. Currently, the newly expanded BMCA is managed and maintained by the West Coast Land Management Program (WCLMP), the City of Nanaimo and the Friend's of Buttertubs (FoB). A management committee consisting of the latter three organisations meets biennially to consider issues and work plans. The inclusion on the committee of Vancouver Island University (VIU), which operates the West Marsh Bird Banding field station, is under consideration.

Management:

An updated strategic management plan came into effect in 2017. This plan addresses the year to year operation and management of the Buttertubs properties.

Long Term Vision (as envisioned by FoB):

1. To ensure that the BMCA is maintained first and foremost as a conservation area by:
  - a) concentrating **appropriate** public use on the BMCA - East Marsh;
  - b) limiting access in the West Marsh to legitimate research and management activities. (i.e. public access only to lands north of the Millstone River);
  - c) discouraging use of the BMCA for "disruptive" community recreation activities (team sports, jogging etc.) by actively promoting the use and development of the Jinglepot/Catstream sports fields area, adjacent to the BMCA.
2. To expand, on a when and if available basis, the protected area of the Buttertubs Wetlands to its former natural boundary by.
  - a) acquiring the riparian area of Judson Brook and property north to the BMCA West Marsh boundary (3 parcels);

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b) acquiring the designated riparian area along the north side of the Millstone River (presently the Pride Vista Golf Course) for public trail use.

3. To manage these protected lands based on knowledge gathered on-site: i.e. paleaohistory, topography, hydrology, bio-ecology (wetland succession and maintenance/enhancement of native flora and fauna).

**Consider:** In partnership with natural science departments at VIU, establishing the West Marsh as a field research area to enable students and staff with gathering site specific information to assist management goals.

Palaeohistory :

Core the floodplain sediments to document past ecological conditions such as plant communities present and fire history etc. (Grad student project?)

Topography:

Map the flood plain to establish its former extent and the impact of past drainage activities (@ ½ metre contours).

Hydrology:

a) Document the annual water cycle and flood events, to establish historic flood plain extent, water flow patterns etc. to determine the water level for optimal vegetation/wildlife management practices.

b) Determine the feasibility of a direct water connection between the East and West marshes.

Bio-ecology:

a) Wetland Succession:

Document changes in open water/aquatic vegetation composition and extent.

b) Flora:

Inventory the plant community; evaluate the 'values' of the species present;

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and from this prepare a management plan that trends towards the retention of native and non-native species with wildlife values and the reduction of invasive and exotic species.

c) Fauna:

Inventory the fauna (all phyla) to identify the species present, those at risk and/or of 'special' interest.

Further considerations:

- a) Restore the nesting of American Bitterns to Buttertubs. (only known nesting site on Vancouver Island);
- b) Ensure a viable population of Western Painted Turtles;
- c) Enhance Wood Duck, Hooded Merganser and swallow populations etc.;
- d) Ensure beaver, river otter and mink continue in residence;
- e) Assess the viability of Buttertubs as off-stream (Millstone River) salmonid habitat;
- f) Ensure viable salamander populations;
- g) Ensure the protection of insect species of interest – i.e digger wasps, thatching ants etc.

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**Overall Goal:** To have Buttertubs recognized as one of the best managed Conservation properties in B.C. and a model for others to emulate

Friends of Buttertubs, 2018



