

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

From: Margaret Lidkea [REDACTED]
[REDACTED], Victoria BC V8R 5W1

September 4, 2023

Re: The Garry Oak Grove in Vanier Nature Park

Dear Ms. Saunders,

I am writing to you to express my support for Comox Valley Nature's proposal to the City of Courtenay to conserve the at risk Garry Oak grove within Vanier Nature Park. I am familiar with the CVN proposal, and agree with the need to release the oaks by removing the overtopping conifers which are shading and killing the oaks. If a sustainable oak grove is desired, the oaks must be given more access to sunlight, which will increase their vitality, including acorn production and oak seedlings. Planting of native wildflowers and other indigenous plants of the Garry oak Ecosystem is also important.

I have been leading community restoration of the globally endangered ecosystem of Uplands Park in Oak Bay, Victoria, for over 30 years. I grew up a free-range child in the Garry Oak areas of Victoria, have a BSc from UBC, a teaching degree and taught environmental classes at Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary for 21 years. When I retired, I co-founded the volunteer group, Friends of Uplands Park in 2010, which partners with Oak Bay Parks. Our Mission is to provide opportunities for stewardship, education and inspiration.

We became a Society in 2018 with a Board that includes experts like Matt Fairbarns, Rare Plant Specialist, and Wylie Thomas, Ecological Botanist and Invasive Plant Manager of Uplands Park. Our Municipal Council and Oak Bay Parks is very supportive. Wylie, on contract, manages the work paid for by the Habitat Stewardship Program and other federal grants. Friends of Uplands Park also partners with other organizations and experts in their specialties. Because of all the hours volunteers and school students put into restoring the park, and because we have over 24 rare plants, Oak Bay Parks has also received Priority Places federal funding that allows for restoration in most natural areas in Oak Bay.

Uplands Park will soon be recognized nationally as a Key Diversity Area in Canada by the Wildlife Conservation Society of Canada. Last Fall, over 130 Conservation Coaches from around the world came to see Uplands Park. International recognition continued this summer with 3 groups of youth (about 100) from Asia, South America and beyond, learning

about environmental leadership. and spending part of a day removing invasive plants. They were very impressed with Uplands Park.

Please check our website, *friendsofuplandspark.org*, for additional information and photos of our Restoration, Educational Programs and Celebrations. In 2022 we organized 175 events.

Our Garry Oak Ecosystem is one of the top two endangered ecosystems in Canada. The other is the Carolinian Forest of Ontario. It extends down into the United States where it is not considered endangered. Our Garry Oak Ecosystem is limited to the east side of Vancouver Island north to Vanier Nature Park in Courtenay, in the Gulf and San Juan Islands, and in one place in the lower mainland near the Fraser River. It does not extend further because it depends on the Mediterranean climate in our “rain shadow” areas. So, there is a case for thinking that it could be the most endangered ecosystem.

Centuries ago, it extended all along the southern border of now British Columbia because the climate was much warmer. When the climate cooled, the coniferous forests took over. As climate now warms up, the plants of the Garry Oak Ecosystem will probably survive better than some of the current plants. It is a good plan for municipalities to increase the numbers of these plants and to protect and restore the wild Garry Oak areas, to combat climate warming.

Less than 5% of the ecosystem exists today since the arrival of European settlers in the mid-1800's. The ecosystem, managed for thousands of years, by the indigenous people for the plants and animals that it provided, especially the Camas flower bulbs, was largely Garry Oak meadows. These beautiful meadows provided an easy place for settlers to create farms, build homes, towns, cities and industry. With arrival of European settlers, diseases decreased the population of the indigenous people by about 90%. Their traditional areas were then built on by the settlers leaving mere pockets of the ecosystem intact. Many invasive plant species arrived over the years and have taken over much of the remaining ecosystem.

It is imperative that the Garry Oak Ecosystem be protected and restored by communities, including children to create stewards of tomorrow, and including the indigenous people working together. It is a cultural and an ecological necessity.

Thank you for your consideration.

Margaret Lidkea, President, and Board members of Friends of Uplands Park Society
Partnering with Oak Bay Parks

friendsofuplandspark.org and on Instagram and Facebook



From: Jennifer & Robin Harrison [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, September 19, 2023 7:55 PM
To: Saunders, Susie
Cc: Jim Boulter
Subject: Garry Oaks in Vanier Nature Park

From: Robin Harrison, [REDACTED]
September 19, 2023

Re: The Garry Oak Grove in Vanier Park

Dear Ms. Saunders,

I am writing to express my support for Comox Valley Nature's proposal to the City of Courtenay to conserve the at risk Garry Oak grove within Vanier Nature Park. Shading by fast growing evergreen trees is affecting the growth of the oaks, weakening them and causing some to die. Topping the conifer trees would allow more sunlight to reach the oaks thereby increasing their vitality and acorn production.

As a long-time member of CVN, I have been aware of this situation for many years and have walked through the park to see for myself the relationship between the oaks and conifers. It is a rare occurrence to have Garry oaks growing in a wet area. In my opinion, it is well worth saving this unique grove of oaks but action must be taken soon before the health of the oaks deteriorates further.

Thank you for considering this proposal.

Sincerely,

Robin Harrison

cc Garry Oak Team [REDACTED]

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

From: Verna Mumby
Mumby's Arboriculture Consulting
[REDACTED]
Comox, BC

Dear Ms. Saunders,

I assessed the Vanier Nature Park area many years ago for a potential development site. At that time I was impressed with the high number of Garry oak trees. I was also impressed at the public meeting how many people came out and voiced their concern about developing the area and thereby not retaining the oaks. I remember one gentleman who spoke up, stated he was a builder, and this forest had too many good memories for many people of the valley and should not be developed. Jump ahead 20 years and the work and subsequent plan Comox Valley Nature (CVN) has developed for the potential retention of this incredible forest is impressive.

They have asked many professionals for opinions and mitigating measures (yes I have authored a few reports for them) and their plan is concise. The oaks do need to obtain more sunlight by selective tree work on the conifers. They have not overlooked other parts of the ecosystem in their plan and the goal to increase the oak vitality and increased regeneration can be achieved.

In closing, I ask you to make this area a dedicated Garry oak preserve and healthy forest. As a consulting arborist, when I work in the Duncan area where there are so few Garry oak areas left intact; I see this as an opportunity for Courtenay to embrace retaining one of the few(er) intact Garry oak forests and work alongside with a very passionate and dedicated group of people who love the forest.

Sincerely

Verna Mumby

cc. Gary Oak Team [REDACTED]

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

From:

Thomas Munson, Ecologist

[REDACTED]
Victoria, BC V8Z 6S4

Email: [REDACTED]

September 20, 2023

Re: The Garry Oak Grove in Vanier Nature Park

Dear Ms. Saunders,

I am writing to you to express my support for Comox Valley Nature's proposal to the City of Courtenay to conserve the at-risk Garry Oak grove within Vanier Nature Park. I am familiar with the CVN proposal, and have visited the site several times on trips to the Comox Valley. I agree with the need to release the Oaks by removing the overtopping conifers which are shading and killing the Oaks. If a sustainable Oak grove is desired, the Oaks must be given more access to sunlight, which will increase their vitality, including acorn production and oak seedlings.

I am a field ecologist with over 20 years' experience in ecological restoration on southern Vancouver Island in the rare and red-listed Coastal Douglas-fir ecosystems, which include Garry Oak ecosystems. I worked for 10 years in protecting and restoring native plants in the small remnants of Garry Oak ecosystems in the City of Victoria Park system. I am now working as Senior Environmental Planner for the District of Saanich, charged with protecting the small amount of Garry Oak ecosystems here, against the rapid pace of housing development.

With less than 5% of the Island's Coastal Douglas-fir forests and ecosystems still in a natural state on Vancouver Island, it is imperative to protect what we have, especially stands of Garry Oaks that have stood the test of time. The Garry Oak Grove in Vanier Nature Park is the most northerly Garry Oak stand on the Island and in British Columbia, and as such, is a unique remnant of what the trees that once covered the eastern side of the Island. This grove should be preserved for present and future generations, and all restoration practices employed to improve its condition. If Garry Oak ecosystems are to expand with climate change, it is from this location that the groves will expand northward.

I urge you to take all necessary measures to both protect and restore the Vanier Nature Park Garry Oak grove. Never let it be said that you stood by and watched a species disappear into the halls of extinction. Now is the opportunity to save this legacy. Thank you for your consideration.

Thomas Munson, MSc., P.Ag.
Victoria, BC

cc. Garry Oak Team 

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

From: Frank Hovenden
[REDACTED]
Courtenay, BC V9N 3A5

August 31, 2023

Dear Ms. Saunders;

I am writing you to express my support for the proposal from Comox Valley Nature (CVN) to the City of Courtenay to conserve the at-risk Garry Oak grove within the Vanier Nature Park. I am familiar with the proposal and the site itself, which I have visited many times over the years.

I have worked with the City on the Courtenay Airpark Restoration Project for over 25 years. In this project CVN has removed invasive plants and planted native flora including Garry Oaks at the Courtenay River Airpark. I work closely with the City of Courtenay through their Parks Manager Mike Kearns. An annual report is prepared which summarizes the work of our volunteers. Several hard copies are submitted to City of Courtenay Parks. It is also available on line at the CVN's website.

I agree that the Garry Oaks need to be released from the shade of over-topping conifer trees. I would call this a slight ecosystem tweaking to the natural succession process in order to preserve the Garry Oaks. The Garry Oak ecosystem is the most threatened on Vancouver Island, and it is imperative that the City supports this plan to preserve this very small stand of Garry Oak, which is but a remnant of the Oak prairies that covered much of the Comox Valley in pre-settlement days. An added benefit which the City should be acknowledging is the wild fire susceptibility of this area. This area falls within what can be described as the urban / forest interface zone. This summer many BC communities have suffered serious losses in these areas due to wild fire. Deciduous stands are less susceptible to wildfire than conifer stands. This is an added benefit of reducing the conifer content of this grove.

Thank you for your consideration,

Frank Hovenden B.Sc.F.

From: Dr. John D. Neilson <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Monday, September 4, 2023 9:27 AM
To: Saunders, Susie
Cc: JIM BOULTER
Subject: Letter of Support for the Comox Valley Nature proposal for Garry Oaks at Vanier Park

Dear Ms. Saunders,

I am writing to express my support for the proposal of Comox Valley Nature to conserve the Garry Oaks in Vanier Nature Park. As I understand it, the stand of Garry Oaks is a remnant of a much larger population. As a professional biologist and past member of Canada's Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC), I can affirm the importance of maintaining rare habitats such as Vanier Nature Park. Such urban forests with native species often turn out to be biodiversity hotspots. The City of Courtenay has a very important biological asset, and I hope the City supports the sensible recommendations presented by the Comox Valley Nature group to the Recreation, Culture and Community Services Department, August 21, 2023.

Thank you for considering my view on this important matter.

Sincerely,

John D. Neilson, Ph.D

[REDACTED]
Comox, BC V9M 2P6

From: Patrick Maingon <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Thursday, August 31, 2023 9:47 PM
To: Saunders, Susie
Cc: Wells, Bob; Hillian, Doug; CouncilAlias; Boulter, James and Anette
Subject: The Garry Oak Grove in Vanier Nature Park

Re: The Garry Oak Grove in Vanier Nature Park

To: Ms. Susie Saunders
Director Parks, Culture and Community Services
City Of Courtenay, ssaunders@courtenay.ca
From: Dr. L. Maingon (RPBio)
[REDACTED]

31 August 2023

Dear Ms. Saunders,

I am writing to you to express my support for Comox Valley Nature's proposal to the City of Courtenay to conserve the at-risk Garry Oak grove within Vanier Nature Park. I do so both as a Registered Professional Biologist, as well as a City Courtenay taxpayer and voter, since I own property in Courtenay, though I reside in Area C.

My association with the oaks on the Vanier property goes back to October 1970 when I came with a university friend, Neil Frazer, who is now a retired professor of Earth Sciences at the University of Hawaii. His parents, who built and owned Comox Trucking after 1945 and lived on a small farm by St. Andrews Church, were then already concerned about the future of the Vanier Oaks.

Around 2000, as I approached retirement, I wrote a report on Towhee Creek for the Tsolum River Restoration Society, which included concerns for the stunning deterioration of the oaks after four decades of mismanagement and neglect. The ill-advised development of the ice facility had already extirpated a thriving coho population, it had also extirpated 60% of the oaks associated with the coho wetlands of that site.

In 2013 I initiated a Garry oak restoration programme for the Comox Valley, as an extension of my work with the Garry Oak Ecosystem Recovery Team.

At the time I strongly publicized that given that according to the Ministry of Forests' own research the current population amounted to "less than 1%," and, that given mortality rates, the state of the three genetic populations of Garry oaks in the Comox Valley was such that Garry oaks would be extirpated from the Comox Valley between 2030 or 2040. In 2014, at the urging of then Councillor Jim Gillis, I wrote a small letter-report for CVRD Board members, and if my recollection serves me right I did a short presentation for council.

Given that background, it comes to me as no surprise to find out from the Comox Valley Nature report, and from the independent work of arborists, that another decade of neglect has resulted in the loss of 40% of the 40% that remained after the 1998 ice rink disaster. That means that there is less than 24% of "less than 1%" of the original population left, about <0.24%. As a scientist, for reasons I will detail below, I am appalled that given that the data and information have been available for at least 20 years, that under both the School Board's and the City of Courtenay's stewardships, this important part of the Pentlatch heritage has been treated with the same duty of care as was given to residential school children. This is First Nations' heritage and we owe it a better duty of care. As a taxpayer and voter I am outraged that my tax dollars were not used with more foresight and care for the well-being of future generations. And again, as a taxpayer, I am shocked that there is no accountability for this neglect.

If this summer should have taught us anything, it is that we are entering into a new climate frontier. From what climate scientists note, the summer and drought we experienced this year will seem like a very pleasant memory ten years from now, even if we take steps to control climate change. That would return us to a climate at best similar to the extreme heat that was normal in British Columbia before 1750, without the benefit of the off-sets between July and September provided by the abundance of water that previously came from glaciers and old-growth. That is an important consideration because basic plant physiology tells us that photosynthesis is optimal at 21°C. At 46.5°C even the leaves of tropical plants collapse. If you recall, after hovering for several days at 47.5°C Lytton ignited at 49.5°C. That should be our climate planning point of reference for potential conditions in Courtenay.

Tree species are adapted to a range of temperatures. Climate adaptation, which is becoming increasingly important, requires that we plant and conserve city trees with that in mind. Additionally, with water shortages becoming an increasing climate change concern, we should not be planting trees that require watering. As has long been known from the work of Dr. Richard Hebda, trees that require an abundance of water and cool weather, such as red cedar and grand fir are not expected to withstand the new climate frontier on Vancouver Island. Garry oaks exceed Douglas fir in drought tolerance, heat extreme and low flammability. (The 1,500 Garry oaks in my nursery have required no watering over the past three summers - even through the "Heat Dome" of 2021.) Their presence in the Comox Valley bears witness to pre-1750 extreme drought conditions that we should learn from. The conditions in which the Garry oaks are now in the Vanier site, overtopped and crowded-out by grand-firs are anomalous. The grand firs are unlikely to survive climate extremes expected in the next decade and their continued presence endangers the survival of the Garry oaks which have survived droughts on the West Coast for six millennia. If the current regime of neglect

continues it will only take a couple of heat waves for the City of Courtenay to be graced with a hillside of dead and dying trees. As a taxpayer, I would like to know who will be accountable for that?

In my professional opinion, the plan proposed by the Comox Valley Garry Oak Team is an extremely conservative small-scale demonstration exercise. It is neither ground-breaking nor experimental, since it follows standard prescriptions, very successfully tested and implemented in Mt. Tzouhalem and at Somenos Marsh by Dave Polster in collaboration with local First Nations. These prescriptions have been successfully replicated in Saanich and on Saltspring Island and there is no reason why it should not be successful, unless Courtenay is on another planet. This simple project, which the proponents have developed with great diligence, presents very little risk and many benefits. I am surprised that it is not being funded under a climate adaptation grant given the importance of this work for Courtenay's "Climate Emergency," response.

As a Courtenay taxpayer, I would be both delighted and relieved to see my tax dollars put to such good use for the benefit of future generations.

PDF attached.

Yours,
L.Maingon (MA, PhD, MSc, RPBio)

[REDACTED]
CourtenayBC V9J 1N9

[REDACTED]
cc. mayor@courtenay.ca
dhillian@courtenay.ca
council@courtenay.ca
[REDACTED]

--
Loys Maingon MA, PhD, MSc (RPBio)

[REDACTED]
Courtenay,
BC V9J 1N9

Telephone: [REDACTED]

Cell: [REDACTED]

From: Dave [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, October 4, 2023 12:15 PM
To: Saunders, Susie
Cc: JIM BOULTER
Subject: The Gary Oak Grive in Vanier Nature Park

Dear Ms. Saunders,

I am writing to you to express my support for Comox Valley Nature's proposal to the City of Courtenay to conserve the at risk Garry Oak grove within Vanier Nature Park. I am familiar with the CVN proposal, and agree with the need to release the oaks by removing the overtopping conifers which are shading and killing the oaks. If a sustainable oak grove is desired, the oaks must be given more access to sunlight, which will increase their vitality, including acorn production and oak seedlings.

I am very familiar with the Oak Grove, for I have assessed it a few times with CV Nature volunteers, since I have a forestry background. As well, I linked CV Nature with the Coastal Ministry of Forests Pathologist from Nanaimo and we all assessed the disease issues in the grove. These wetland oak groves are extremely rare on the eastside of the island and represent some the last remaining stands of this type.

Both I and the regional pathologist recommend the proposed treatments.

Thank you for your consideration.

Dave Weaver
Retired Professional Forester.

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

From: Veronique McIntyre [REDACTED]

August 28th, 2023

Re: The Garry Oak Grove in Vanier Nature Park

Dear Ms. Saunders,

I am writing to you to express my support for Comox Valley Nature's proposal to the City of Courtenay to conserve the at-risk Garry Oak grove within Vanier Nature Park. I am familiar with the CVN proposal and agree with the need to release the oaks by removing the overtopping conifers which are shading and killing the oaks. If a sustainable oak grove is desired, the oaks must be given more access to sunlight, which will increase their vitality, including acorn production and oak seedlings.

As a regular user of the Comox Sports Centre, I often walk through this grove on my way to and from the arena and the pool. I am therefore quite familiar with it and think it would be a shame to lose it when not much is needed to give it a chance to survive.

Garry oaks are the basis of rich ecosystems, and we all benefit when we protect them. This particular grove is exceptional in that it is located in a wetland area, which for this species is quite rare. The grove is also close to a high school and could be used as an on-going example of conservation practices in environmental studies programs.

Thank you for your consideration.

Veronique McIntyre

cc. Garry Oak Team [REDACTED]



PO Box 488 Merville BC V0R 2M0, tsolumriver@shaw.ca, 250 897-4670

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

September 15, 2023

Re: The Garry Oak Grove in Vanier Nature Park

Dear Ms. Saunders,

I am writing to you to express the support of the Tsolum River Restoration Society (TRRS) for Comox Valley Nature's proposal to the City of Courtenay to conserve the at-risk Garry Oak grove within Vanier Nature Park. We are familiar with the CVN proposal and agree with the need to release the oaks by suppressing the overtopping conifers which are shading and killing the oaks. We understand that, if a sustainable oak grove is desired, the oaks must be given more access to sunlight, which will increase their vitality, including acorn production and oak seedlings.

Vanier nature Park is the headwaters of Towhee Creek and is an important to the health of Tsolum River Coho salmon. It feeds the ponds in the forest below the Comox Valley exhibition grounds which the Coho use as a high-water refuge area during the high flows in the winter. These ponds hold thousands of Coho fry each year and it is important that the water temperature remains as cool as possible in spring. We appreciate that CV Nature recognizes the importance of the Vanier Forest to the Coho downstream in Towhee Creek.

TRRS supports the new plan of invasive species removal first, as well as the longer-term suppression strategy for the over-topping Douglas Firs. This allows for ongoing assessment of the effect of this activity on the water quality, especially water temperature, in Towhee Creek. The monitoring of Towhee Creek as a component of the plan is appreciated by the TRRS.

We think it's important that a group like CV Nature cares about this forest to ensure its long-term protection. The Vanier Forest is an important cultural and recreational resource in the City of Courtenay and the Comox valley.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Wayne White".

Wayne White, President
Tsolum River Restoration Society

cc. Garry Oak Team [REDACTED]



University
of Victoria

School of Environmental Studies

David Turpin Building, B243

Victoria, BC, V8W 3R4, Canada

Tel: 1 (778) 922-1752, Email: nshack@uvic.ca

September 19, 2023

Ms. Susie Saunders
Director Parks, Culture and Community Services
City Of Courtenay

Re: The Garry Oak Grove in Vanier Nature Park

Dear Ms. Saunders,

I am writing to you to express my support for Comox Valley Nature's proposal to the City of Courtenay to conserve the at risk Garry Oak grove within Vanier Nature Park. The Park is an important piece in the Tsolum River Valley, which is one of Canada's Historic Places, and houses rich and rare national biodiversity.

Vanier Nature Park is home to a stunning oak meadow, which is a deeply cultural landscape that was maintained as open canopy cultivation areas for millennia by the Coast Salish peoples, with Vanier specifically managed by the K'ómoks Nation and its families. The dispossession of the traditional management activities, coupled with the introduction of species from around the globe, has led to many of our meadows experiencing encroachment by trees and shrubs, with the eventual shading out of important species like camas and the oaks for which the meadows are named.

I am familiar with the CVN proposal, and agree with the need to reduce canopy cover across the park by removing the overtopping conifers. If a sustainable meadow is desired, the land must be given more access to sunlight, which will maintain and increase the unique diversity in the park.

Understanding, and helping protect, these ecosystems has been an important part of my role since I arrived at the University of Victoria. These spaces are not ours – they are the legacy and lands of the people who shaped them. However, it is our job to help protect them, which includes maintaining their unique open structure and rich community of flowers and grasses.

Thank you for your consideration.

Nancy Shackelford

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nancy Shackelford".

*Assistant Professor, School of Environmental Studies
Academic Director, Restoration of Natural Systems Program
University of Victoria
www.restorationscience.net*

I work on the traditional territories of the ɬəkwəyən peoples and the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day. I, and most of my group, are uninvited settlers here. We are committed to deepening our understanding of how we can assist in the movement of reconciliation, dismantling the systems that continue to cause harm, and honoring the traditional stewards that have shaped this land.



**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-



**GARRY OAK MEADOW
PRESERVATION SOCIETY**

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

Ingrim, Gordon B. 2007. Unresolved Legacies: Aboriginal Food Production Landscapes, Ecosystem Recovery Strategies & Land Use Planning for Conservation of the Garry Oak Ecosystems in South-Western British Columbia.

Barlow et al. 2021. Garry oak ecosystem stand history in Southwest British Columbia, Canada: implications of environmental change and indigenous land use for ecological restoration and population recovery.

Crookston, Nicholas. 2023. USDA Forest Service Plant Species and Climate Profile Predictions.

Griesbauer, Hardy P. et al. 2019. Variation in climate-growth relationships for Douglas-fir growth across spatial and temporal scales on southern Vancouver Island, British Columbia.

Hahm et al. 2018. Controls on the distribution and resilience of *Quercus garryana*: ecophysiological evidence of oak's water-limitation tolerance.

Fuchs, Marilyn. 2001. Towards a Recovery Strategy for Garry Oak and Associated Ecosystems in Canada: Ecological Assessment and Literature Review.

Beckmann et al. 2021. Douglas-fir encroachment reduces drought resistance in Oregon white oak of northern California

Comox Valley Nature
(Comox Valley Naturalists Society)
PO Box 3222, Courtenay BC V9N 5N4

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

September 27, 2023

Dear Ms. Saunders,

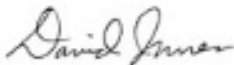
We are writing in support of the Comox Valley Nature's proposal to the City of Courtenay to conserve the at-risk Garry Oak grove within Vanier Nature Park. We are familiar with the CVN proposal, and agree with the need to release the oaks by removing the overtopping conifers which are shading and killing the oaks. If a sustainable oak grove is desired, the oaks must be given more access to sunlight, which will increase their vitality, including acorn production and oak seedlings.

The CVN Board has discussed the proposal with the dedicated volunteers that continue to work hard on this project. The plan proposed by the Comox Valley Garry Oak Team is an extremely conservative small-scale demonstration of the action needed to preserve this important Garry Oak park. The park represents a rare oak grove with cultural significance and educational benefits. In addition, the park includes the Towhee Creek headwaters and wetlands within the Park are integral to sustaining the natural ecology and environment of Vanier Forest and lower watershed of Towhee Creek.

Thank you for considering this important proposal.

Sincerely,

Signed on behalf of the Board of CVN,



David Innes,

Coordinator, Comox Valley Nature

cc. Garry Oak Team: [REDACTED]

CVN Secretary: cvnsecretary@gmail.com