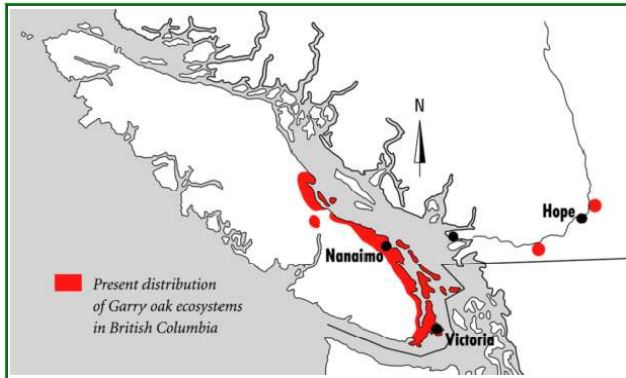


History of Garry Oaks in the Comox Valley

Garry Oak Meadows are an example of a culturally modified ecosystem. For centuries the coast Salish peoples used grass fires in these meadows to burn off unwanted undergrowth and allow the edible Camas bulbs to flourish. Garry Oak meadows were a rich source of food and medicine for the Coast Salish peoples. Indigenous stewardship and agriculture allowed Garry Oaks to thrive.

The Vanier forest Garry Oaks are a unique part of several remaining groves that once covered 160 square kilometres and stretched from the Comox estuary to present day Smith Road.



Present distribution of Garry oak ecosystems (map source: Province of BC)

Today less than 5% of Garry Oak ecosystems in Canada remain in a near natural state. Much of this loss is due to development, farming, road building and the spread of invasive plants.

How Can You Help?

Volunteer to help remove invasives in the Vanier Nature Park

Connect with nature in your neighbourhood by joining Comox Valley Nature
www.comoxvalleynaturalist.bc.ca



Discover more about Garry Oaks through the Garry Oak Ecosystem Recovery Team website.
www.goert.ca

Grow and Nurture native plants and insects in your own backyard.
www.satinflower.ca
www.pollinatorpartnership.ca

Read about the City of Courtenay Urban Tree Management Strategy
www.courtenay.ca/EN/main/community/environment/tree-management/urban-forest-strategy.html



Learn about dealing with invasives like Holly, spurge laurel, ivy, and bitter cherry,
www.bcinvasives.ca

Vanier Nature Park Garry Oak Grove

A rare ecosystem in need of restoration



Garry Oaks in open meadow (*quercus garryana*)

Garry Oak ecosystems are the richest land-based ecosystems in coastal British Columbia. They include open forests dominated by groves of soaring sculptural Garry Oak trees that can reach up to 25 metres. The forest understory is composed of shrubs and grassy meadows of wildflowers that carpet the ground in the spring.

An exceptional list of native plants

Many species are associated with Garry Oaks

- Trees such as Garry Oak, Arbutus and Douglas-fir.
- Shrubs like Snowberry, Oceanspray, Nootka Rose.
- Wildflowers including Camas, Shooting Star, Checker Lily, White Fawn Lily, Nodding Onion, and Sea Blush
- Mammals such as Black-tailed Deer, Black Bear, Moles and Shrews
- Birds, insects and reptiles including the Western Bluebird, Sharp-tailed Snake, the Island Marble Butterfly and the endangered Taylor's Checkerspot Butterfly



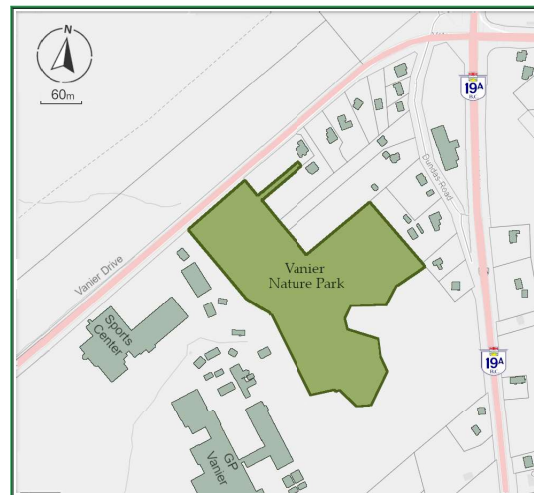
Taylor's Checkerspot Butterfly

Comox Valley nature has been studying this Garry Oak grove since 2009...

In that time they have catalogued and measured the trees in the grove and monitored their health. Together with Tsolem River Restoration they have analyzed ground water and soil quality. In 2013 there were 130 oaks in the grove. By 2023 there were only 70, which represents a 40% loss in 10 years.

Garry Oaks need full sunlight to thrive. Invasive trees like Sweet Cherry and Holly as well as native conifers, that grow taller and faster, block the light and weaken oak trees. In the understory Daphne and Ivy inhibit the growth of younger oak trees. Today the oaks in the grove are all over 70 years of age.

The loss of Garry Oak habitat also endangers the plants and animals that normally thrive there. More than 100 species are at risk in Garry Oak areas. **Unless action is taken these species will disappear.**



Vanier Nature Park NE of GP Vanier High School

Next steps:

Comox Valley Nature and the Vanier Woods Stewardship group will

- work with the city to open the canopy through selective pruning of over-topping of trees to create wildlife trees.
- remove invasives such as Holly, Ivy and Sweet Cherries
- monitor the regeneration of tree species
- reintroduce Garry Oak native plants
- connect with SD71 schools by using Vanier Nature Park as an outdoor educational laboratory supporting curriculum led environmental stewardship programs
- provide stewardship support for the grove in the future

There are habitat restoration groups working in Garry Oak meadows throughout their range. We need to be a part of this vital work.

“What can I do to make a better tomorrow?”

Maiya Modeste, Garry Oak Restoration Project Coordinator Stqeeye' Learning Society, Salt Spring Island.



Camas