



THE PROPOSED SOUTHERN STRAIT OF GEORGIA NATIONAL MARINE CONSERVATION AREA RESERVE

A FEASIBILITY STUDY

NEWSLETTER #1
WINTER, 2005

IN THIS ISSUE:

What is a national marine conservation area?1
 Are there any other NMCAs in Canada?2
 What are the marine values in the study area?3
 What is a feasibility study?4
 Where is the study area?4
 What is the study process?5
 NMCAs connect the water, the land and the people8 – 9
 What could an NMCA mean to the local region?10 – 12
 What do NMCAs mean for Aboriginal people?13
 How do I get involved in the feasibility study?14

Parks Canada is conducting a feasibility study and is looking for public comments.



NATIONAL MARINE CONSERVATION AREA RESERVE FEASIBILITY STUDY

*C*anada is a nation with a rich marine heritage. Here on the Pacific coast, the 27,000 kilometres of shoreline, with its myriad islands, fjords and straits, create a vast diversity of habitats and marine life known to be among the most diverse and abundant in the world's temperate waters. The waters of the southern Strait of Georgia are an integral part of this coastal ecosystem and are known to be among the finest in the world for SCUBA diving, whale watching, sea kayaking and coastal cruising. For untold centuries, these waters have supported vibrant coastal communities and continue to do so today.

A National Marine Conservation Area Reserve (NMCA reserve) is being considered for the southern Strait of Georgia to protect these values for the future and Parks Canada would like to hear your thoughts. This newsletter provides an introduction to national marine conservation areas and describes the planning process that will occur over the next few years. The planning process examines the potential for establishing an NMCA reserve through a feasibility study. Please read on to learn more about the program and how you can contribute to the feasibility study.

Another Parks Canada initiative is occurring in the southern Gulf Islands. Public input is being requested to support the development of Interim Management Guidelines (IMG) for the new Gulf Islands National Park Reserve. For more information, please call the park administration office in Sidney at (250) 654-4000 or email gulf.islands@pc.gc.ca. Public open houses on the draft IMGs will occur in early 2005.

WHAT IS A NATIONAL MARINE CONSERVATION AREA?

In contrast to the preservation orientation of national parks, national marine conservation areas (NMCAs) are a type of marine protected area that is managed to protect and conserve marine ecosystems while providing for human uses to continue in a wise and ecologically sustainable manner.

NMCAs are established under the *Canada National Marine Conservation Areas Act* and are dedicated to the protection and conservation of representative marine areas for the benefit, education and enjoyment of the people of Canada and the world. NMCAs include both the water column and the submerged lands beneath, and can also include adjacent lands such as islands, coastal areas and estuaries.

When areas being considered for new NMCAs are subject to a comprehensive land claim by Aboriginal people, an NMCA *reserve* is established, pending the resolution of the claim. Traditional hunting, fishing and other marine resource based activities by entitled Aboriginal peoples can continue.

The traditional uses of the marine environment such as commercial and recreational fishing, commercial shipping and other forms of marine transportation, utility corridors and a range of recreation and tourism activities can continue in NMCAs, but within a newly defined conservation oriented management regime. In this context, conservation embraces a number of management concepts, including preservation, maintenance, ecologically sustainable use, and restoration of the natural marine environment.

The exploration for and extraction of non-renewable resources, including aggregates, hydrocarbons and minerals are not permitted in NMCAs, and the dumping of wastes and dredging of the seabed are only permissible under permit. In order to manage a variety of continued uses, NMCAs would be managed in collaboration with Parks Canada, its partner agencies, in particular Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Transport Canada and Environment Canada, and the provincial government. Parks Canada would also work in close cooperation with regional and local governments and Aboriginal peoples. In the southern Strait of Georgia, the government of British Columbia will play a significant role in the conduct of the feasibility study.



Photo: Mark White/2004

NMCAs are established under the Canada National Marine Conservation Areas Act. NMCAs include both the water column and the submerged lands beneath, and can also include adjacent lands such as islands, coastal areas and estuaries. Zones are used as a tool to ensure that NMCAs find a balance between resource protection and appropriate levels of sustainable use.





Photo: Mark White/2004

Parks Canada seeks to protect and conserve representative portions of each the 29 marine regions in Canada. Parks Canada is assessing the feasibility of establishing five new NMCAs in Canada, two of which could be in British Columbia.



ARE THERE ANY OTHER NMCAs IN CANADA?

The goal of the NMCA program is to protect and conserve representative portions of the 29 distinct marine regions that Parks Canada has identified in the Pacific, Arctic and Atlantic oceans and the Great Lakes. On Canada's Pacific Coast, there are five such regions: Hecate Strait, Queen Charlotte Islands Shelf, Queen Charlotte Sound, Strait of Georgia and Vancouver Island Shelf.

There are two operating sites within the NMCA program: Fathom Five in Ontario and the confluence of the Saguenay – St. Lawrence rivers in Quebec. As part of Canada's Action Plan, the federal government is committed to establishing five new NMCAs, two of which are in British Columbia. Parks Canada is pursuing the establishment of an NMCA reserve in the waters adjacent to Gwaii Haanas National Park Reserve in cooperation with the Council of the Haida Nation. Through this feasibility study, Parks Canada is also working with the government of British Columbia and other federal departments (Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Transport Canada and Environment Canada) toward the establishment of an NMCA reserve, here in the southern Strait of Georgia.

Two other NMCA feasibility studies are taking place in Lake Superior (Ontario) and the Magdalen Islands (Isles de la Madeleine) in the Gulf of St. Lawrence (Quebec). The fifth proposed NMCA will be identified at a later date.

Pacific Marine Regions



WHAT ARE THE MARINE VALUES IN THE STUDY AREA?

The southern Strait of Georgia is rich in marine biodiversity and, especially when combined with Saanich Inlet, is highly representative of the larger Strait of Georgia marine ecosystem. The richness of this area is due to the mixing of fresh water from the Fraser River with the ocean waters that flood through Juan de Fuca and Haro Straits. The mixing of these different waters creates a nutrient rich, highly productive marine environment.

The marine life along the west coast of British Columbia is among the most diverse in the world's temperate waters. This ecosystem is home to a wide range of marine species, which thrive in the rocky reefs, lush kelp beds, protected bays, estuaries and fast water channels of the Gulf Islands. Sub-tidal communities throughout these waters support thousands of invertebrate species including anemones, sea urchins, a wide variety of shellfish, crabs, sea stars and the largest octopus in the world, the Pacific octopus. Several species of fish occupy these waters, including the Pacific sand lance, herring, salmon, lingcod and rockfish.

Seals, river otters and sea lions are frequently observed. Killer whales, harbour porpoise and Dall's porpoise reside here, and are visited in the summer by gray and minke whales, and more recently, a growing number of humpback whales. Colonies of gulls and cormorants are scattered throughout the area, as are breeding sites for bald eagles, oystercatchers and pigeon guillemots. The marine waters are particularly important to migrating and wintering populations of loons, cormorants, grebes, murrelets, gulls and ducks.



Photo: Quillback Rockfish/Parks Canada/Tomas Tomascik

The Strait of Georgia is among the most productive of all marine ecosystems in the world. The mixing of fresh water with ocean water creates a nutrient rich, highly productive marine environment.





Photo: Parks Canada/Matthew Payne/2004

WHAT IS A FEASIBILITY STUDY?

There are several steps to establishing an NMCA, one of which is examining whether the proposal is feasible. To find this out, Parks Canada conducts a comprehensive study to determine if the NMCA is practical and desirable by asking if established goals can be achieved and if public support is present.

A feasibility study identifies possible boundaries of the NMCA and also seeks to develop a shared vision for the conservation and management of the area. The feasibility process involves broad public consultations to help shape the vision, goals and objectives. During the process, information is gathered concerning water quality, the protection of marine habitats, the restoration and maintenance of marine biodiversity and ecologically sustainable use.

Determining the level of public support is a key goal of the feasibility study. Parks Canada will not proceed with the establishment of an NMCA without adequate support. The feasibility study for the southern Strait of Georgia is a multi-year process, projected for completion in 2007. During this time there will be many opportunities for the public to engage in the feasibility study process.

At the conclusion of the feasibility study, a determination will be made about whether or not an NMCA reserve is feasible and desirable. The governments of Canada and British Columbia will consider the recommendations and determine whether or not to proceed with the negotiation of a federal/provincial agreement for the legal establishment of an NMCA reserve.

WHERE IS THE STUDY AREA?

The study area for the proposed NMCA reserve encompasses an area of approximately 900 square kilometres and extends from Haro Strait in the south to the waters of Active Pass, southern Trincomali Channel and the southern shores of Salt Spring Island, including Saanich Inlet (see map on following page).



Photo: Parks Canada/Matthew Payne/2004

WHAT IS THE STUDY PROCESS?

Pre-Feasibility Study

Canada/BC Memorandum of Understanding – Fall 2003

A Memorandum of Understanding set out the framework for Parks Canada and the Province of British Columbia to work cooperatively to complete the NMCA reserve feasibility study.

Study Process

Phase 1 – Complete Terms of Reference

- Complete the terms of reference for the feasibility study
- Confirm the study area extent
- Create the Project Team

Status: Complete

Phase 2 – Develop Vision, Goals & Objectives

- Gather information and identify challenges and opportunities
- Complete a marine atlas
- Complete socio-economic and environmental studies
- Develop draft vision, goals and objectives

Spring, 2005

Phase 3 – Issues Identification and Analysis

- Identify and analyse issues
- Prepare responses to issues identified
- Consult on proposed responses
- Revise vision, goals and objectives accordingly

Spring, 2006

Phase 4 – Prepare Preliminary NMCA Reserve Concept(s)

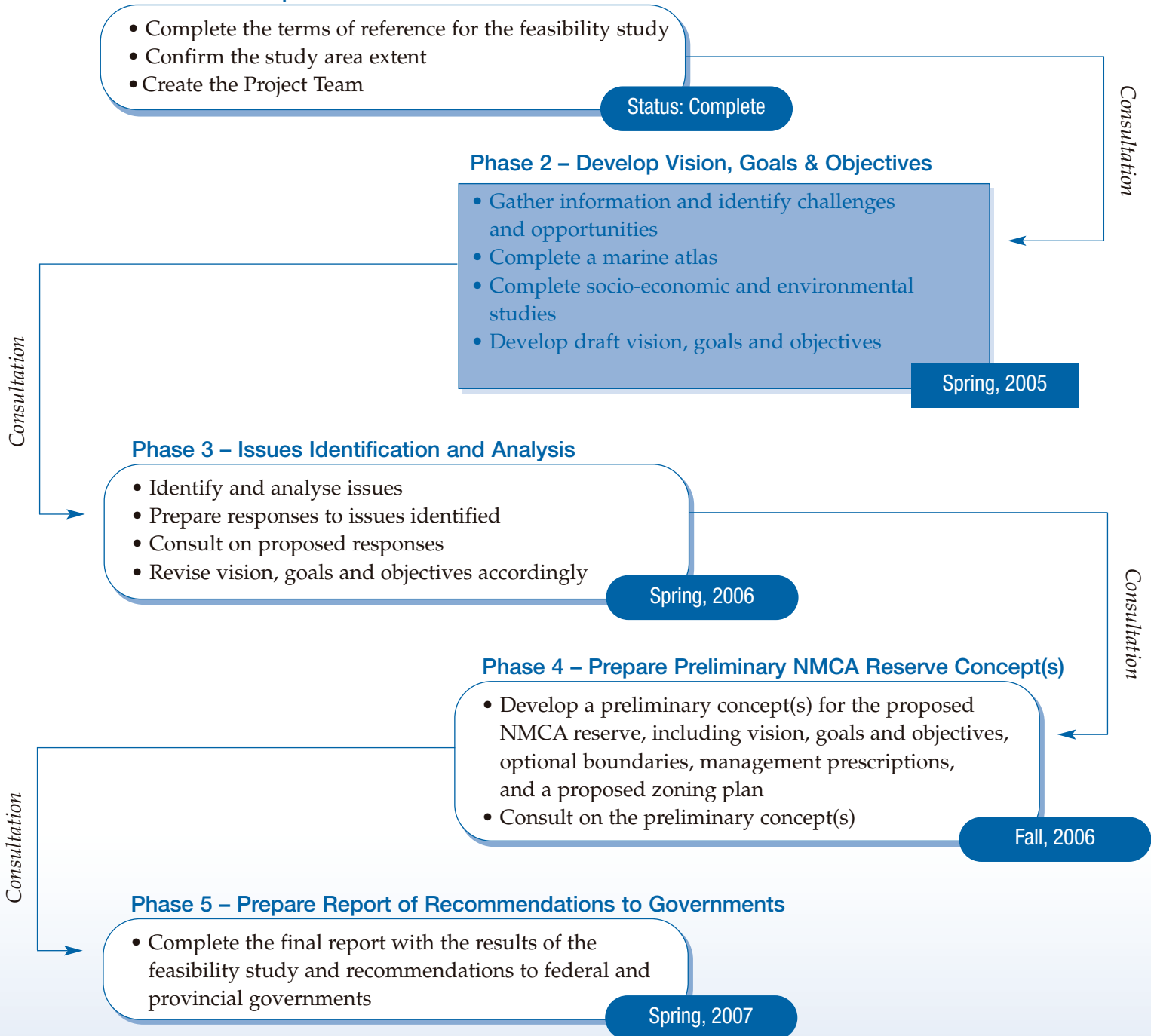
- Develop a preliminary concept(s) for the proposed NMCA reserve, including vision, goals and objectives, optional boundaries, management prescriptions, and a proposed zoning plan
- Consult on the preliminary concept(s)

Fall, 2006

Phase 5 – Prepare Report of Recommendations to Governments

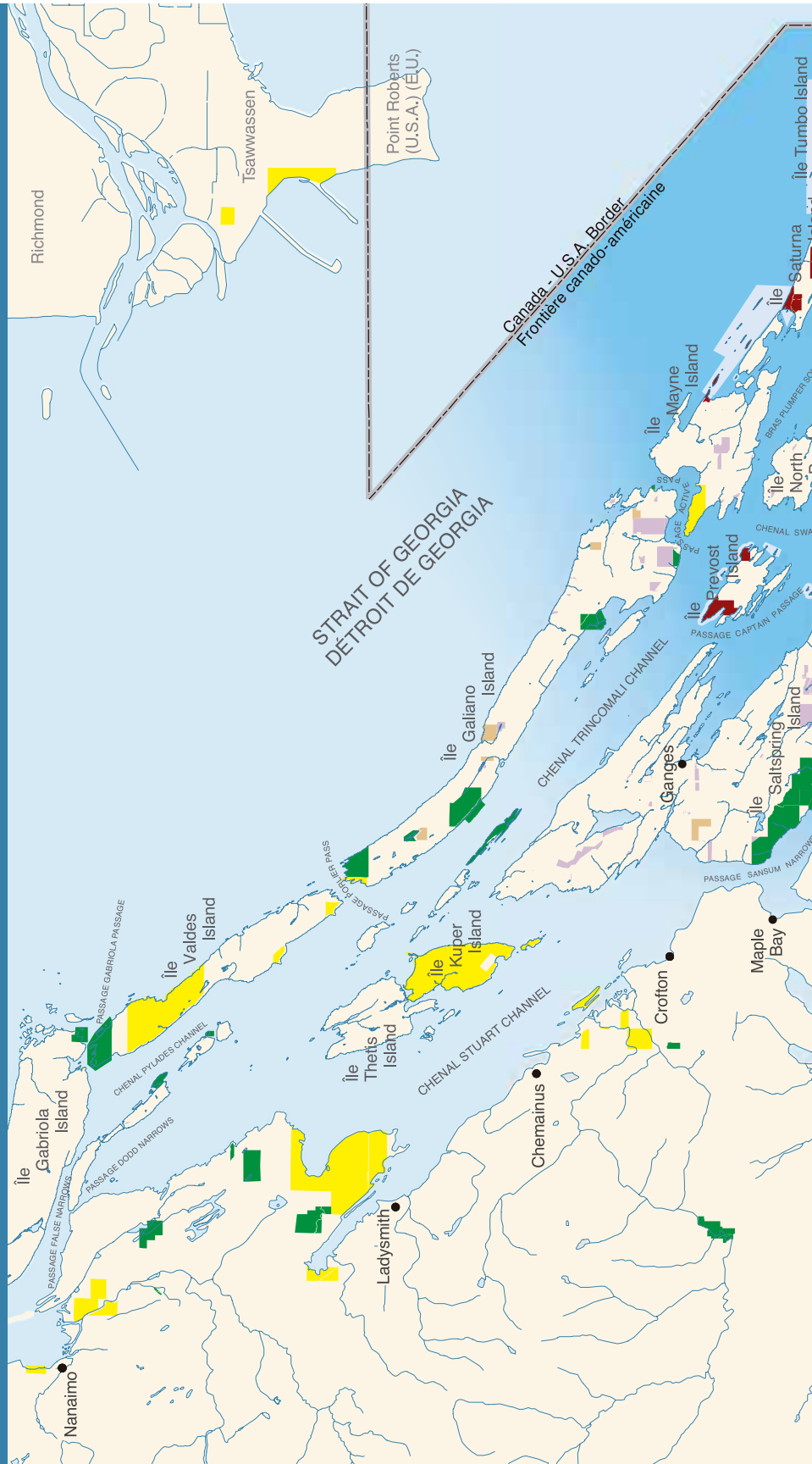
- Complete the final report with the results of the feasibility study and recommendations to federal and provincial governments

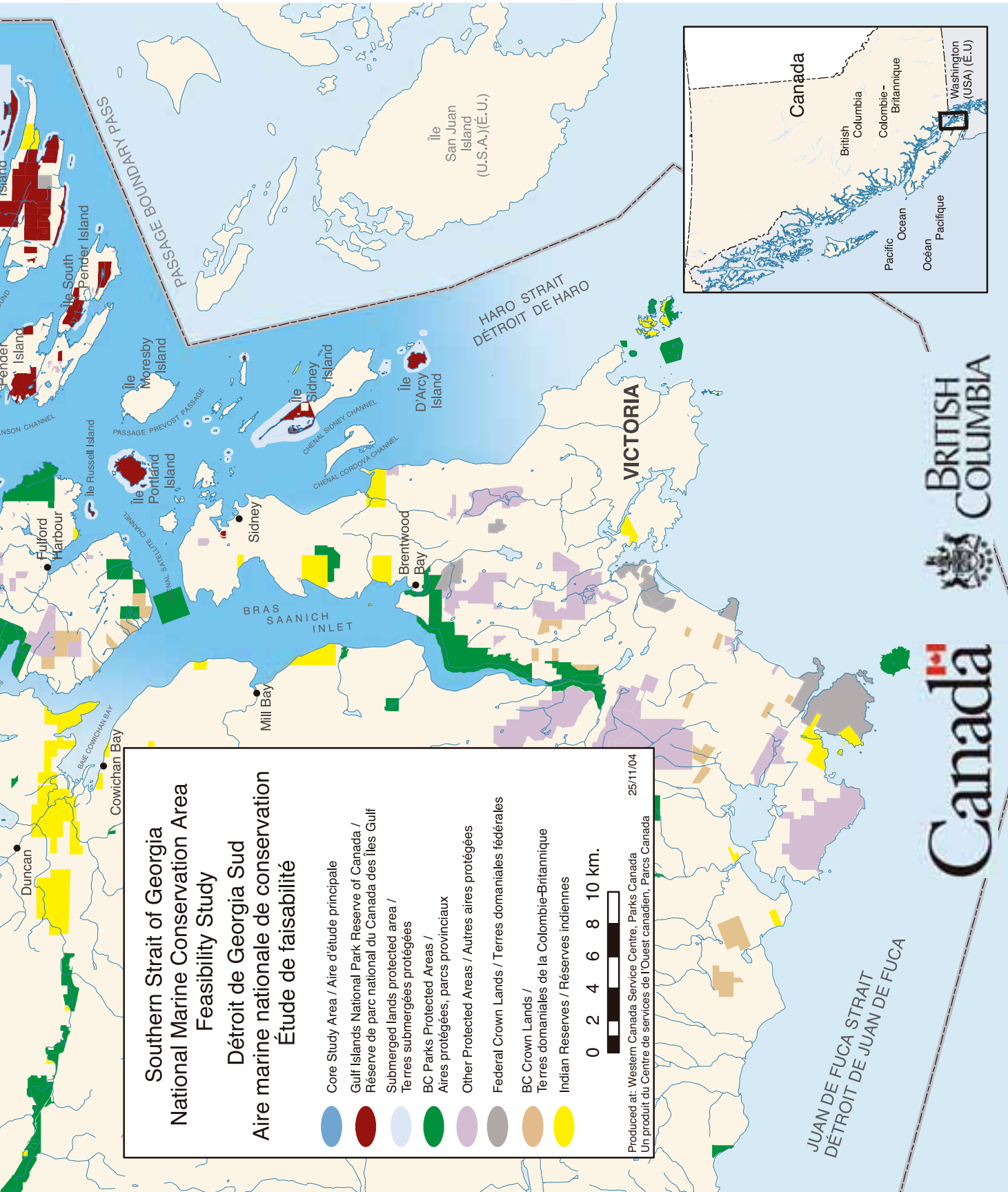
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NMCA Feasibility Study

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NATIONAL MARINE CONSERVATION AREAS CONNECT

The establishment of an NMCA in the southern Strait of Georgia would protect and conserve this vital marine ecosystem while providing for a range of human uses to continue in a wise and ecologically sustainable manner. This raises numerous challenges, but it also presents an exciting opportunity to define and create a legacy for future generations, a legacy founded on a healthy, productive marine ecosystem that can continue to provide many benefits and services to residents and visitors. By ensuring good habitat, high water quality, the conservation of marine biodiversity and increased protection for rare and endangered species, the waters of the southern Strait of Georgia can continue to support viable and ecologically sound commerce and a recreation and tourism destination of international caliber. What are some of these challenges? How could an NMCA connect the water, the land and the people?

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES:

- Communities are experiencing high rates of population growth, placing additional pressures on marine and coastal resources
- Management of this growth may be required to protect and conserve the coastal and marine environments that form the basis for this west coast lifestyle
- There is a well developed network of organizations and potential partners who could become leaders in the local stewardship of their coastal and marine environments

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES:

- An NMCA, combined with adjacent national and provincial parks, could provide enhanced opportunities for outdoor recreation and tourism
- Requirements will grow for services such as boat anchorages and mooring buoys, and for higher environmental standards for pollution control from, for example, sewage disposal from vessels
- Overcrowding may become an issue
- Recreationists have long advocated for and contributed to the protection of safe anchorages, SCUBA dive sites, coastal campsites and kayaking routes
- Sustainable marine recreation and tourism activities are compatible with an NMCA

COASTAL COMMUNITIES

The communities on the shores of the east coast of Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands are known as places of natural beauty and rural character with a relaxed atmosphere. They enjoy a Mediterranean climate found nowhere else in Canada. To many, living in these communities is a matter of lifestyle, to others a place of work. To even more people, they are a place to visit, to escape city life for a while and to recreate on both the land and the sea.



Photo: Parks Canada/Matthew Payne/2004

MARINE-BASED RECREATION AND TOURISM

The southern Strait of Georgia, especially the inside waters surrounding the Gulf Islands, is recognized as one of the most popular outdoor recreation destinations in Canada, and ranks among the world's best for kayaking, coastal cruising, SCUBA diving and whale watching. The inviting combination of relatively calm waters, superb scenery and a rich diversity of marine wildlife, supported by a strong tourism service industry, draws many visitors from the major urban centres of British Columbia and Washington, as well as the rest of Canada and abroad.

THE WATER, THE LAND AND THE PEOPLE

COMMERCIAL AND SPORT FISHERIES

Commercial and sport fishing, as well as local Aboriginal fishing, are an integral part of the history of human settlement in the Gulf Islands and on Vancouver Island. For thousands of years, Aboriginal people relied to a considerable degree on the sea for their sustenance. The commercial and recreational fisheries in the southern Strait of Georgia contribute to the economy of local communities. With a wide variety of fish and shellfish that can be harvested by the commercial sector and for pleasure and personal consumption in the recreational sector, fishing is an activity that occurs year-round by both residents and tourists.



Photo: Parks Canada/2000

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES:

- Commercial and recreational fishing can continue in NMCAs within a new conservation oriented fisheries management regime
- Fishing for food, social and ceremonial purposes by Aboriginal people, subject to conservation requirements, can continue in NMCAs
- The conservation, protection and, where necessary, the restoration of marine habitats and biodiversity is a priority in NMCAs
- Declines in the populations of several species of fish have raised concerns among stakeholders, residents and Aboriginal people

MARINE TRANSPORTATION

The southern Strait of Georgia contains a number of important commercial shipping routes including the major shipping lanes into Vancouver harbour, one of the busiest harbours on the west coast of North America. With the BC Ferries routes between Vancouver and Victoria and among the southern Gulf Islands, as well as other ferry routes and localized industrial boat traffic, these waters experience high levels of commercial marine transportation use. In addition, many recreational power and sailboats cruise the Gulf Islands as a primary destination or as part of an extended west coast journey.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES:

- Concerns about the impacts of increased commercial shipping traffic and the effect on marine resources
- The extended anchoring of commercial ships in the internal waters around the Gulf Islands has raised concerns about potential environmental impacts
- The effective management of ballast water is essential to minimize the introduction of exotic species into our marine ecosystem





Photo: Parks Canada/Bill Henwood/2001



Photo: Parks Canada/Bill Henwood/2001



Photo: Parks Canada/Bill Henwood/2001

WHAT COULD AN NMCA MEAN TO THE LOCAL REGION?

NMCAs aim to balance protection, conservation and ecologically sustainable use. This can result in a range of benefits for coastal communities, Aboriginal peoples, resource users, the general public and the marine ecosystem itself.

PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION:

NMCAs are managed to ensure that marine ecosystems work as they should. This means conserving native species' populations, protecting water quality and safeguarding important habitats. The diversity of life on the land and in the sea depends on a healthy marine ecosystem.

FISHERY RESOURCES:

Conserving fish stocks is essential to a healthy marine environment and is equally important to the well being of many coastal communities. Ecologically sustainable commercial and sport fishing can continue in NMCAs. By adopting appropriate harvest levels, outlining sustainable fishing practices and protecting habitat, NMCAs can play an important role in helping to maintain commercial and sport fisheries for the future. In an NMCA, Fisheries and Oceans Canada would work with Parks Canada and its partner agencies to ensure an ecologically sustainable future for all forms of marine life, and for a sustainable commercial and sport fishery.



Photo: Parks Canada/Graham Osborne/2000



RECREATION AND TOURISM:

The southern Strait of Georgia is a popular tourism destination and an NMCA could help enhance and sustain opportunities for outdoor recreation and tourism. The protection of features such as beaches, boat havens and safe anchorages, boating routes and popular dive sites can ensure that these opportunities are available today and for future visitors.

HERITAGE PRESENTATION AND EDUCATION:

An NMCA can enhance the opportunity for all Canadians and visitors to explore our rich marine heritage through interpretative and educational programs. NMCAs also offer the opportunity to develop a better understanding of marine ecosystems and an increased awareness of marine conservation issues.



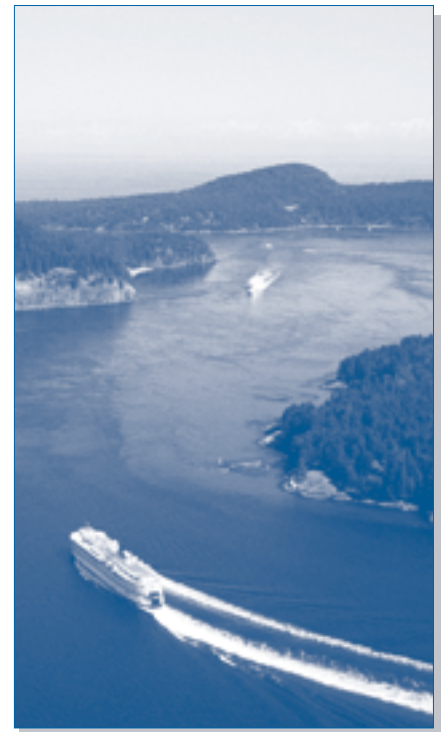
Photo: Parks Canada/Matthew Payne/2004



Photo: Parks Canada/Bill Henwood/2001



Photo: Parks Canada/Bill Henwood/2001



Parks Canada/Nick Irving/2004



An NMCA can result in benefits for coastal communities, Aboriginal peoples, resource users, the general public and the marine ecosystem itself.



Photo: Parks Canada/Matthew Payne/2004

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND THE SHARING OF TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE:

Scientific research in NMCAs can increase our knowledge about marine species and their ecosystems and provide opportunities for sharing traditional knowledge. The academic community, Aboriginal people, and other researchers in the southern Strait of Georgia region can help us learn more about the underwater ecosystem in this marine “laboratory.”

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS:

Healthy coastal communities rely on healthy marine ecosystems. NMCAs can contribute to diverse and stable economic opportunities for coastal communities. NMCAs can enhance the sustainability of commercial and sport fisheries and provide opportunities for recreation and tourism operations, thus providing a legacy for future generations.

IMPROVED OPPORTUNITIES FOR LOCAL INVOLVEMENT:

The conservation of a marine environment can be complicated by many factors. An NMCA can provide a more efficient means of ensuring greater collaboration among all levels of government, Aboriginal people, stakeholders and the public.



Photo: Parks Canada/Bill Henwood/2000



WHAT DO NMCAs MEAN FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLE?

Archaeological records show that the southern Strait of Georgia region, including the proposed NMCA reserve, has supported Aboriginal cultures for thousands of years. Over time, Aboriginal people have developed a close relationship with the land and sea that includes a connectedness between spiritual beliefs and intimate knowledge of the environment.

The study area for the proposed NMCA reserve includes traditional territories of several Aboriginal groups. Through close collaboration with Aboriginal groups both in British Columbia and Canada, it has become evident that Aboriginal people and Parks Canada often share values focusing on conservation and respect for the environment. NMCAs can help protect and conserve the natural and cultural marine heritage of importance to Aboriginal people. At the same time, NMCAs provide for a continuation of traditional activities, including harvesting, by Aboriginal people who have a historical relationship to the region.

Other significant benefits for Aboriginal people could include economic and employment opportunities associated with the management and operation of an NMCA. There would also be opportunities for Aboriginal people to have a significant role in the long term planning, cooperative management and decision-making process for NMCAs.

Consultation with Aboriginal groups of the Strait of Georgia is an important and integral part of the feasibility study. Parks Canada looks forward to working with Aboriginal people to develop an effective and meaningful consultation process. During the feasibility study, a priority of Parks Canada will be consulting early and often, and working with Aboriginal people to learn more about their traditional ecological and cultural knowledge of, and aspirations for, the NMCA reserve study area. This will greatly aid the development of a shared vision for marine conservation in the southern Strait of Georgia.

Parks Canada will work closely with Aboriginal people to listen and share information about the study area.



Photo: Mark White/2004



Photo: Mark White/2004



HOW DO I GET INVOLVED IN THE FEASIBILITY STUDY?

A critical part of the feasibility study is to hear your ideas and concerns about the proposal. The vision of local residents, Aboriginal people and interested stakeholders will play a major role in determining the feasibility of the project.

Parks Canada and its partner agencies are meeting with communities, local citizens, Aboriginal people and representatives from all levels of government to arrive at a proposal that supports local needs, conservation and sustainable use goals. This will be an open process to determine an outcome. A final decision to create a national marine conservation area has not been made, nor will one be made, until the feasibility study is complete. Now is the time to begin expressing your views and ideas.

Information sessions, open houses, public meetings and workshops will be held throughout the study area and at various times throughout the feasibility study process.

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Check the flyer inside this newsletter to find out when open houses will be held in your community!



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849	10.5	8,968	235	5	397	1231	.9	9.5