



ISLANDS TRUST FUND

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Maps of Eelgrass Beds in the Gulf and Howe Sound Islands Now Online

Underwater camera survey results identify important marine habitat

Victoria, British Columbia, February 17, 2015 — Complete mapping of eelgrass beds in the waters surrounding Canada's islands in the Salish Sea is now available online. The [Islands Trust Fund](#), [SeaChange Marine Conservation Society](#) and the [Seagrass Conservation Working Group](#) partnered on the three-year survey to increase local knowledge of the location and condition of the valuable eelgrass meadow ecosystem. The new maps are intended to support governments in preventing habitat loss as they make science-based decisions about land use and conservation in shoreline areas.

Eelgrass beds are a nursery habitat for fish, shellfish, birds and mammals. This important habitat provides food and protection for over 80% of the region's commercially important fish and shellfish species during some part of their life cycle. The marine plant is also an important carbon sink since it sequesters carbon at a much faster rate than the equivalent area of forest. Eelgrass is sensitive to docks, shading, mooring buoys and anchor chains, hardened shorelines and contaminated or silt-laden runoff from land.

A boat towing an underwater camera surveyed the marine environment to locate eelgrass beds. This technique results in a high level of mapping accuracy, greatly improving upon existing data and filling in gaps where inventories didn't exist. The Mayne Island Conservation Society provided existing data for Mayne Island while Parks Canada provided data for shorelines surrounding Gulf Islands National Park, resulting in a complete data set for all of Canada's islands in the Salish Sea.

Local governments and island communities can use the new maps when considering community education programs, land use bylaws and development applications along the shoreline. Conservation groups can also use this knowledge to focus their efforts where most needed.

"The eelgrass mapping project has been a great example of how a local government can work with a non-profit agency to compile and share information," said Jennifer Eliason, Manager of the Islands Trust Fund. "We have had many requests for information about eelgrass beds and we are pleased that results of this survey are being used by our organization and others."

"Beyond the value of establishing an inventory of current eelgrass beds, this project allowed us to investigate potential restoration sites," said Nikki Wright, Executive Director of SeaChange Marine Conservation Society. "This information will now be used by our organization as we work in partnership with coastal communities to conserve and restore eelgrass habitats in British Columbia. This has been a highly successful working partnership for SeaChange."

The project was funded through the generous support of the Islands Trust, the Pacific Salmon Foundation, the Victoria Foundation, Vancity, the Comox Valley Regional District, the Capital Regional District and Metro Vancouver, the Public Conservation Assistance Fund and Moonstone Enterprises. Read the report and see the maps at www.IslandsTrustFund.bc.ca/Eelgrass

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A CONSERVANCY FOR CANADA'S ISLANDS IN THE SALISH SEA

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Eelgrass mapping is now complete for the nearshore areas of all of Canada's islands in the Salish Sea, highlighted in dark blue in the map above.



Salmon use eelgrass beds for shelter and food. Photo by Tavish Campbell.