



## Another Win for the Whales!

by Christianne Wilhelmson

Endangered killer whales are the big winners in a decision made in February by the Federal Court of Appeal.

The judgment was in response to the federal government's appeal of part of an earlier ruling. If this appeal had succeeded, it could have seriously weakened the effectiveness of Canadian law in protecting killer whales and other species at risk. In making its ruling, the Federal Court of Appeal gave a strong rebuke to the government (which had also received forceful criticism from the judge in the original ruling).

Georgia Strait Alliance and eight other conservation groups, ably represented by our lawyers at Ecojustice, had brought forward—and won—the original case, regarding the government's failure to appropriately implement the federal *Species at Risk Act* and protect killer whale's critical habitat. In his December 2010 ruling on that case, the judge stated that protecting the critical habitat of killer whales cannot be left to the discretion of the Minister of Fisheries & Oceans—it must be enshrined in law.



*Southern Resident Orca L-116, aka "Finn", was first spotted swimming alongside his mother Kasatka in October 2010.*

*Photo: Dave Ellifrit, Center for Whale Research*

That ruling was truly great news and a landmark decision, and as a result, Fisheries & Oceans Canada (DFO) has since updated the recovery strategies for both the northern and southern resident killer whales to reflect the court's decision.

However, the government unfortunately chose to waste time and taxpayers' money in appealing one part of the decision, a section related to Ministerial discretion. In so doing, the government demonstrated that it was not willing to take real responsibility for the protection of species at risk

as directed by law and by the court's ruling.

In its appeal, the government argued that the Minister should have discretion over whether, and how, to implement various sections of the *Species at Risk Act*. By contrast, our contention was that discretion in *how* you protect at-risk species is understandable, but discretion on *whether or not* you protect them—and the habitat that's critical to their survival—is not acceptable.

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## What's New in the Strait?

Twenty-two hectares on Saltspring Island have been added to the **Mount Maxwell Ecological Reserve**, bringing the total to 1168 contiguous hectares (including over 9 km of shoreline) in the Mount Maxwell and Burgoyne Bay protected areas. The addition was made possible by a partnership between the Province and The Nature Trust of BC, along with the desire of the property owners to save the land for conservation. The new parcel contains the largest stand of Garry Oak in Canada, and is one of the

few remaining examples of BC's Coastal Douglas Fir biogeoclimatic zone, made up of ecosystems listed as endangered, threatened or of special concern.

The winter of 2011/2012 has been dubbed "the season of the **snowy owl**" and even an "Owlpalooza" in our region. An unusually high number of the impressive white birds (which have a 5-ft wingspan) were spotted in many locations on both sides of the border. Periodic shortages in Arctic lemmings

bring the owls farther south than normal, looking for alternate food. Boundary Bay Regional Park, with its large population of Townsend's voles, was a great spot for owl sightings over the winter.

A **female orca** from the endangered southern resident "L" pod washed ashore dead in Washington in February. Known as L112 or "Sooke", the whale was born in 2009. Researchers found significant trauma and hemorrhaging, but no external wounds, and said the

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# Strait Thoughts: We Will Not be Silenced

by Christianne Wilhelmson, Executive Director

It's an unfortunate fact that when you are an advocate for improved environmental health and literacy, being in disagreement with government leaders frequently comes with the territory. As challenging as that can feel, the focus of disagreement generally tends to be about the issue at hand—and not about our right to hold certain views, or represent others who do.

So I found it more than a bit shocking when this year began with a visible and intense outpouring, in just about every media outlet in the country, of vitriol, anger and outright lies about environmental groups. Although the context for the attacks was the review process on the proposed Enbridge pipeline in northern BC, the tremors were felt throughout Canada's environmental movement and in much of our broader civil society.

These inflammatory attacks have been disturbing on many levels. Some of them revealed that all you need is a conspiracy theory and a website in order to undermine the civil engagement that is at the root of our democratic process—ironically, at the same time as most of the world, including Canada, has been expressing justifiable outrage about the trampling of democratic rights in Syria. More worrisome attacks, coming from our Prime Minister and some of his Cabinet, took aim at the financial support that makes advocacy work possible and even hinted at possibly stripping environmental groups of their charitable status.

But in all the misguided conspiracy theories and hyperbolic diatribes, what disturbed me the most was this: that we were told that the opinion of you, Mr. or Ms. Average Canadian, does not matter when it comes to what our shared future looks

like—and that the person who said this was one of our federal government's highest officials.

In his Open Letter, the Honorable Joe Oliver, Minister of Natural Resources, clearly discounted the opinions of the approximately 4500 individuals who wished to speak at the Enbridge hearings—while overvaluing the opinions of oil industry representatives.

Regardless of how or why each person signed up to speak, each of them clearly cares enough about the issue to take the time to attend and address the hearings. That many of the speakers may have a similar message is not a reason to discount that message—in fact, it's a reason to pay closer attention. These passionate voices share a common vision for what they want our future to look like: a world free of fossil fuels and the risks that come with them, where renewable energy lights our way.

It's also worth reminding Mr. Oliver and our other leaders that each of these speakers represents thousands more who, for whatever reason, will not be at the hearings, so their message needs to be taken into consideration by the panel and the government that appointed them.

These are frightening times when it comes to the protection of our most important resources: clean air, clean water and healthy ecosystems on land and water. Over the last many decades, big industry has increasingly had the ear of our elected representatives, while ordinary citizens are only valued at election time.

Ironically for the perpetrators of these targeted attacks, the end result has been a renewed commitment among environmental groups, including Georgia Strait Alliance, to work even harder on behalf of the communities we represent.

If we have learned anything so far this year, it is that those citizens who might disagree with our federal leaders' views on the environment need the help of advocates now more than ever. Georgia Strait Alliance will continue to speak out and work on your behalf, advocating for our region's future to be one with healthy communities, rich salmon runs, growing orca populations and sustainable economies. That is our promise to you.

## Another Win for the Whales!

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The Court of Appeal unanimously dismissed nearly all aspects of the appeal and ordered the government to pay the associated costs. This means that essentially all of the original ruling, which found that the federal government had failed to legally protect killer whales' critical habitat, has been upheld.

In an interesting coincidence, the Court of Appeal's decision came on the very day that DFO held its first community consultation on creating a long overdue Action Plan for the recovery of BC's resident killer whales. We can tell you that our first impressions of what DFO considers "action" are worrying, but we will remain an active part of this process to ensure that "delays to learn more" don't become what is confused for action.

It has been nearly eight years since the southern resident killer whales were declared endangered, and until the Action Plan is developed and key actions are taken to address the major threats (pollution, noise and disturbance, and loss of prey), their 'protected status' exists only on paper.

Now we hope the federal government will finally put an end to any further delays and the wasting of taxpayers' money, and turn its attention to the task at hand—protecting endangered killer whales and all other species at risk.



## Nooksack Dace Action

As readers will likely know, Georgia Strait Alliance has been working for many years—both in and out of court—to win protection not only for the orca, but also for another of our region's endangered species: the tiny Nooksack dace, a minnow found in small streams in the Fraser Valley and northwest Washington.

In February we participated in consultative sessions on Fisheries & Ocean Canada's draft "Action Plan for Nooksack Dace and Salish Sucker".

You can find the draft Action Plan at [www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/saraconsultations](http://www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/saraconsultations), or you can obtain it in hard copy by calling 604-658-2757 or emailing [sara@pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca](mailto:sara@pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca).

# Tar Sands & Tankers: Key Issue for the South Coast

by Christianne Wilhelmson

If you monitored the media over the last few months, you could be forgiven for thinking that the threat of increased crude oil tankers plying BC waters is only an issue for the north coast. But sadly, that isn't the case.

As the fight goes on to stop Enbridge's Northern Gateway pipeline, residents here in the Strait of Georgia are facing a plan that's received much less public and media attention: to increase what's already a large amount of crude oil moving through our local waters. The pipeline and tankers are already here, and we're not ready for the risks they bring—let alone the risks that will come with the increase that's planned.

From 2005 to 2009, the volume of crude oil exported by tankers from the Westridge terminal in Burnaby grew by about 350%. Currently, about 75,000 barrels/day are shipped out from the terminal. Kinder Morgan (owner of both the terminal and the TransMountain pipeline which carries the crude oil there from the Alberta tar sands) plans to increase this to at least 450,000 barrels/day by 2016—and perhaps as much as 600,000 barrels/day (see sidebar).

This would make the volume of crude oil being shipped out through the narrow and busy waters of Burrard Inlet and the Strait of Georgia approximately equal to, or possibly even greater, than what Enbridge plans to ship from Kitimat in its Northern Gateway project.

GSA has received many calls and emails about this issue. People in our region are hungry for information and want to understand the history of oil tankers in Georgia Strait and why the Kinder Morgan plan is not subject to a public consultation process like the one underway for the Enbridge proposal. They're asking about the risk of a spill, whether authorities are adequately prepared for accidents, and what the pipeline doubling will mean for the number of tankers in our local waters.

Over the past few months, GSA Director of Special Projects Mike Richards has been researching these questions, and has produced an 11-page "Questions and Answers" document which provides valuable information and a list of useful action steps for anyone wanting to get involved in this important issue. You can download this document in PDF at: [www.GeorgiaStrait.org/tankersFAQ](http://www.GeorgiaStrait.org/tankersFAQ). Please take a look and if you have any comments or questions, contact [gsa@GeorgiaStrait.org](mailto:gsa@GeorgiaStrait.org).

Kinder Morgan, the owner of the TransMountain pipeline and Westridge terminal where the tankers are loaded with crude oil, recently applied to the National Energy Board (NEB) to have firm service agreements with their shipping clients, and to increase the marine component of their pipeline capacity by over 50% (meaning a major increase of tankers through our waters).

Georgia Strait Alliance and Ecojustice did a joint submission to the NEB last summer in response to this application, which you can find at: [www.GeorgiaStrait.org/NEBsubmission](http://www.GeorgiaStrait.org/NEBsubmission).

Regrettably, in the fall of 2011, the NEB approved Kinder Morgan's application.

Going from bad to worse, we learned in February 2012 that Kinder Morgan is seeking commitments from oil drillers that would enable it to increase the capacity of its TransMountain pipeline to 600,000 barrels per day of tar sands crude oil—almost 15% more than Enbridge plans to export via its proposed Northern Gateway pipeline.

Unfortunately, our federal government and Kinder Morgan are quietly moving this plan forward, with complete disregard for the concerns of the communities that live alongside the waters through which the tankers will move.

Georgia Strait Alliance is strongly opposed to the doubling of the TransMountain pipeline, and to the dredging that would be needed under the Second Narrows bridges to allow access by the larger Suezmax class tankers that the doubling would bring (vessels up to 275 metres long).

We will also continue to urge a moratorium on any further increases in tanker traffic in our region, comprehensive public consultation, in-depth risk analyses that consider the full costs (ecological, social and financial) of a large spill, and more extensive tug escorts for oil tankers.

Beyond this, GSA will take a lead role in our region's growing conversation about how we can help wean our global society from dependence on fossil fuels—because the very best way to reduce the risk of oil pollution on our coast, from spills large and small, is to reduce the need to transport that oil in the first place.

For updates on the pipeline and tankers issue in Georgia Strait and ideas on how you can help, please follow: [www.GeorgiaStrait.org/tankers](http://www.GeorgiaStrait.org/tankers).

Our work on tankers is partially funded by **patagonia**

Although GSA is working to prevent oil spills in our region, it's always wise to be prepared for a worst-case scenario. Over the winter we took part in a workshop hosted by the BC Incident Management Team on the use of in-situ burning and dispersants for oil spill cleanups. From L to R: Dr. Ken Trudell (S.L. Ross Environmental Research in Ottawa), Mike Richards (GSA), Graham Knox (Manager, Environmental Emergency Program BC Ministry of Environment) and Clare Frater (Islands Trust). Photo: D'Arcy Sego



# Clean Marine BC Logbook

by Lisa Winbourne

**H**earty congratulations to BC's latest Clean Marinas: the **Greater Victoria Harbour Authority (GVHA)**, which operates four downtown marinas, has just been awarded its Clean Marine BC (CMBC) eco-certification.

Al Charania and the rest of the GVHA's staff have worked very hard for the past six months getting ready for their independent environmental audit, to ensure that their policies, practices and facilities would meet the comprehensive CMBC requirements. As we went to press, plans were afoot for CHEK TV to feature the green initiative in an episode of their weekly **People and Places** series—perfect timing, as the GVHA was being put through its paces preparing for the audit.

Clean Marine BC is just one small piece of the admirable green work being done by the GVHA. You can learn more about all their environmental initiative at: [http://gvha.v3.ca/a\\_environmentalinitiatives.php](http://gvha.v3.ca/a_environmentalinitiatives.php).

We're grateful that over the past fall and winter, generous support for the CMBC program came from the **Victoria Foundation** and **Mountain Equipment Co-op**. With the reductions in charitable gaming funds from the Province of BC, private and corporate donations are, more than ever, vital to the survival of Georgia Strait Alliance and the success of our programs, including CMBC. We thank all our donors and supporters, and recognize that we couldn't do it without you.

The annual **Vancouver International Boat Show** was back this year, at its newly-renovated home at BC Place. GSA staff and volunteers were pleased to be on hand to welcome visitors over the five days of the Show and to provide information on green boating and a wide range of other issues. Fish farms were, as always, a key concern among boaters and other Show visitors, but this year that issue was overtaken by queries about tankers and pipelines. We were encouraged by the level of public knowledge and keen interest in these and other challenging environmental issues.



Greater Victoria Harbour Authority was recently awarded its Clean Marine BC eco-certification.

Photo: Laurie MacBride



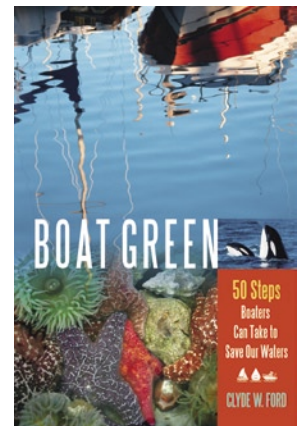
Volunteers Emma Piercey and Brendan Agnew explain our award-winning green boating work to visitors at the Vancouver International Boat Show. Thanks to all who helped out during the five day event. Photo: Lisa Winbourne

It was clear from the Boat Show that there have been considerable improvements over the past decade, but overall, it seems the boating industry still has a long way to go in providing the necessary products, services and information for boaters who are trying to green up their act.

For those of you who missed us in Vancouver, you can find us at the **Nanaimo Boat Show** this spring, June 1–3 at the downtown Boat Basin.

**B**oating season approaches, so it's time to think about getting ready for another season on the water. Grime and mildew may have taken hold over the winter, engines and other systems will need attention, and for most boaters, spring is also the time for annual haulout and bottom painting. Fortunately a great resource is available for tackling these—and many more boating-related issues—in a green way.

Clyde Ford's book, *Boat Green—50 Steps Boaters Can Take to Save Our Waters* is an inspiring and practical resource for all boaters who want to leave a "green wake". Best of all, if you order the book through GSA's website, 15% of the proceeds go to GSA's marine conservation work! You can order it at: [www.GeorgiaStrait.org/boatgreen](http://www.GeorgiaStrait.org/boatgreen).



Clean Marine BC is now on twitter! Though still neophyte tweeters, we're spreading the good word about green boating and clean marinas, 140 characters at a time! Follow us @CleanMarineBC and feel free to pass on your green boating suggestions and news items.

# Protection Principles: We Want to Hear from You!

by GSA's Communities Atlas Project Team

Exciting times for Georgia Strait Alliance—after a year in the making, we have developed a draft set of **Georgia Strait Protection Principles**, to help communities in the Georgia Basin make the link between marine protection and local planning and ensure that marine conservation is treated as a priority.

To get the project off the ground, **Sarah Schmidt** and **Kathleen Fenner** came on board last fall with funding from the Canada/British Columbia Labour Market Development Agreement. Their first step was to carry out an informal survey to gather information on what people saw as priorities to include in the Principles. The results were extremely interesting, with some common themes: a need for more education, concern over increased oil tanker traffic in our region, and the need for more meaningful public consultation.

Their next step was to research existing sets of environmental principles, from the international Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, to those developed at a local level (by organizations such as the Qualicum Institute, for example). They combined what they learned from these documents with the results of their informal survey to create the draft set of Georgia Strait Protection Principles.

Our draft Principles are based on the assumptions that the economy, physical health and social well-being of people in the Georgia Basin all rely on the health of Georgia Strait's ecosystem; that recognizing this interconnectedness is paramount; and that marine ecosystem health should always be a priority, at all levels of government, when planning, designing and implementing policy.

The draft Principles address marine ecosystem health through four main areas: *protection and restoration of habitat; prevention and mitigation of the impacts of climate change; pollution prevention; and active public involvement*. Also entrenched is the concept that all species shall be valued and efforts taken to protect any species that is threatened, endangered or of unknown status.

As well, the draft Principles stipulate that regulations and best practices should be reviewed and updated regularly to monitor their effectiveness, and amended as needed to reflect up-to-date technology and science as well as traditional ecological knowledge.

**Now we want to know what you think.** We have developed a new survey aimed at assessing how strongly you and others in your community agree or disagree with each element of the draft Georgia Strait Protection Principles, and how this might differ from one community to another—information we can use to let local governments know what level of support has been expressed by their own constituencies. The second part of the survey is designed to gauge support for the best practices included in the draft Principles, and to solicit additional ideas we may have missed.

Once we have received your feedback and finalized the Georgia Strait Protection Principles, our goal is to have them adopted and championed by local people, and together, win their incorporation into Official Community Plans or other local planning documents around the Georgia Basin wherever



We're delighted to report that GSA's Communities Atlas Project recently won support from credit unions on both sides of Georgia Strait! \$30,000 was provided by Vancity's enviroFund™, presented by Vancity Director Anita Braha (L), to GSA's Christianne Wilhelmson and Rebecca Adams.

Photo: Moira Teevan

possible. Towards that end, we're working to create an information package that includes the rationale for the Principles and best practices for all phases of their implementation—information that will be very helpful for everyone presenting the Principles to their local governments.

In the meantime, *please add your voice* by filling out the survey enclosed with this newsletter, or by doing the survey online at: [www.GeorgiaStrait.org/GSPPSurvey](http://www.GeorgiaStrait.org/GSPPSurvey).



The Coastal Community Credit Union's Coastal Spirit Fund awarded a total of \$48,000 to GSA and nine other non-profit organizations in the Nanaimo/Gabriola area. Above, L to R: Ian MacCaskell, Assistant Mgr. Lending (Southgate Community Branch); Cathy Booter and Rebecca Adams, GSA; Terry Law, Coastal Community Director; Susan Yates, Community Connection Council Member.

Photo: Donna Berthiaume

# ACID ATTACK: Why We Must Act Now

by Donna Berthiaume

Photos: Bruce Obee, Keith Waterfall, Barbara Watson, Alan Wilson

As the impacts of climate change become better understood, a new term has crept into our vocabulary: **ocean acidification**. What causes it? Why should we be concerned? What can we do to stop it? These are some of the questions that prompted me to investigate this haunting subject, and here is some of what I found.



Ocean acidification describes the process of decreasing pH levels and increasing carbonic acid in our marine waters. Its chief cause is the level of carbon dioxide that our oceans are absorbing.

Before the Industrial Age, the ocean was able to keep its pH levels balanced, so that it was not overly acidic or alkaline; however, since the industrial era the carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has been increasing exponentially, putting more and more pressure on the marine environment. As the carbon in the atmosphere increases, so does the amount in our oceans: **500 billion tons of carbon dioxide** have been absorbed into the world's oceans since the start of the industrial era.

Currently, 70 million tons of carbon dioxide are spewed out every day. Thirty percent of that is absorbed into the ocean, where it turns into carbonic acid. The result is the dilution of carbonate, the basic ingredient used by marine animals to form shells and exoskeletons.

The levels of acidity in the ocean



are rising at an alarming rate. If we use the beginning of the Industrial Age as a benchmark of 0% measurable acidity, there has been an increase of almost 29% to date. The increase is projected to reach almost 70% by 2050, which would have dramatic effects on the growth, reproduction and survival of a great many marine animals.

One of the most important repercussions of acidification is sea life's inability to form shells and exoskeletons. There have already been instances along Washington's coast where the water has become so corrosive that the shells of oyster larvae have dissolved faster than they could form, and where shells have already formed, the increased acidity has made them vulnerable to dissolution. Pacific oysters have not been able to reproduce in the wild in Washington waters since 2004, and shellfish growers in the State are worried that their industry may not survive much longer.



Coral reefs are dying and are in grave danger of extinction, in part because of acidification. These reefs are home to 25% of the world's marine species, so their disappearance will gravely impact our marine ecosystems.

Aside from the hardy jellyfish, which flourishes in acidic conditions, the negative impacts of acidification will be felt all the way up the marine food chain. Some of the animals at risk of extinction include squid, starfish, shrimp, oysters, sea urchins, mussels and abalone. A recent study suggests that even fish, which don't have a shell or exoskeleton, may be impacted at their larval stage.

As the smaller creatures disappear the larger creatures will follow. For instance, if krill die off because they can no longer form their protective exoskeleton, salmon will lack this major food source



and their numbers will decline, and eventually the whales that depend on salmon will feel the impact as well—as will all of us who rely on marine life.

Sadly, we cannot reverse the ocean acidification that is already underway. However, we *can* stop this tragedy from getting worse, by taking steps right now to lessen our impact and give nature a chance to heal herself. There are many things that each of us can do to help make a difference. For example we can:

- *reduce our carbon footprint by using fewer fossil fuels*
- *use green transportation*
- *travel less often, especially by air, and take vacations closer to home*
- *practice the 6 R's of recycling: RETHINK, REUSE, RECYCLE, REPAIR, REDUCE, REFUSE!*
- *support Georgia Strait Alliance and other groups committed to a healthy marine environment*
- *learn more and share the information with friends and family (you can find more information about ocean acidification at: [www.GeorgiaStrait.org/oceanacidification](http://www.GeorgiaStrait.org/oceanacidification))*

If we don't do anything, we will almost certainly be giving up our shrimp or calamari dinner for jellyfish soup—not what I would wish for my grandchildren or yours!



## Canada Failing on Climate Change

The highly-respected scientific body, the Royal Society of Canada, has said that the best strategy to address the significant challenges of climate change is to “protect existing diversity and to rebuild depleted populations and species to restore natural diversity”—and that Canada is failing badly in this.

A recent expert-panel report from the Society states that Canada has:

- *made little substantive progress on its commitments to sustain marine biodiversity*
- *not filled a promised national marine protected areas network*
- *failed to use a precautionary management approach in most of our fisheries*

To date, more than 16,000 marine species have been recorded in Canadian waters—with perhaps two to three times as many still to be found. Our Pacific coast is especially rich in seaweed species, and Canada’s waters are home to 40% of the world’s marine mammal species.

You can find the report at [http://www.rsc-src.ca/documents/RSCMarineBiodiversity2012\\_ENFINAL.pdf](http://www.rsc-src.ca/documents/RSCMarineBiodiversity2012_ENFINAL.pdf).

## Saying Goodbye to a Friend

As 2011 ended, we were deeply saddened by the passing of Milton Wong, a longtime GSA supporter, member of our Advisory Council and, most importantly, friend. He died at home in Vancouver, at 72, after a courageous battle with pancreatic cancer.

Milton, an investment banker with HSBC, was a highly respected community leader and generous philanthropist who, over the course of his life, won many well-deserved awards and honours including the Order of Canada and the Order of BC. He believed strongly in “social investment”, and GSA is just one of a great number of worthy causes he supported.

GSA’s relationship with Milton and his wife Fei, dates back to 1998, when they first opened their hearts, and the doors of their beloved Taku Resort on Quadra Island, to our board and staff for our annual fall planning retreat. At our first evening session together, Milton listened to what we were trying to achieve and then challenged us to aim much, much higher—both in our environmental goals and our finances. “Your budget is far too small,” he said—a challenging concept to a young environmental group used to doing everything on a shoestring.

Milton’s advice was important, but it wasn’t all he offered: over the years he also repeatedly dug deep into his own pocket



*Milton Wong was a generous donor to GSA.*

## What’s New in the Strait?

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injuries did not look like a typical ship strike, but more like the effects of percussion wounds (e.g. from an underwater explosion). The Canadian Navy admits it was carrying out sonar exercises in the San Juan Islands at roughly the same time as L-pod whales were sited nearby, but so far has not responded to reports that whale researchers detected sounds consistent with an underwater blast during the Naval exercises.

Researchers have trained four captive female **Steller sea lions** to follow commands and gestures, and are strapping cameras and tracking equipment onto them and taking them out to deep fjords on the BC coast. They’re hoping to learn how the 500-lb animals dive for food and why the species, once plentiful in the north Pacific, is now endangered. Early results suggest the sea lions may be filling up on “junk food”—eating pollock for calories instead of the oily fish they need in order to thrive.

The US agency, NOAA has begun to attach **satellite tags** to Southern Resident killer whales to track where the animals go in winter. NOAA hopes to dart tag up to six orcas from J pod, and says it needs the info partly to delineate the critical habitat required for orca recovery. The tags are held onto the whale by two retention darts and transmit GPS data to a receiver on a weather satellite. The project was approved without consulting Canada, and has been controversial; whale watch operators and environmental organizations are concerned it could cause infection among the vulnerable population of whales.

In February the Squamish Nation and BC Parks completed management plans for four **protected areas** that will create a “continuous freeway for wildlife” on almost 13,000 hectares of land around Squamish, stretching from the Squamish River Valley to the Tantalus Range. The mountainous area provides important habitat for bald eagles, grizzly bears and other wildlife.

A **potential oil spill** was averted in the Salish Sea in February thanks to the quick response of the emergency response tug stationed at Neah Bay, Washington. A 685-foot cargo vessel contracted by the US military lost propulsion as it was heading into the Strait of Juan de Fuca. The US Coast Guard dispatched the tug, which reached the drifting vessel in less than 20 minutes and assisted in getting it back safely to Port Angeles. Since 1999, the emergency response tug at Neah Bay has been deployed to stand by or assist close to 50 vessels; according to a 2011 report by the Pacific States/BC Oil Spill Task Force, in 11 of these cases where the tug had to take the disabled vessels in tow, its actions helped prevent a combined spill of nearly 5,000,000 gallons of oil.

to help GSA (including providing critical funding to develop our Clean Marine BC program in 2007), and he tapped his own circle of contacts to win new supporters for our goals and programs. And he walked the talk: to give just one example, by making sure that Taku Resort was as green as it could be and won its Clean Marine BC eco-rating.

Milton will be greatly missed, and our hearts go out to Fei, their three daughters and extended family.

# Hearings Reveal Shocking Cover-up

by Ruby Berry

Although the Cohen Inquiry had officially wrapped up its hearings in order to begin its deliberations, it reconvened for three additional days in December to hear new evidence regarding Infectious Salmon Anemia (ISA) virus.

Amid loud protestations from the salmon farming industry, the three days of hearings revealed some shocking information.

Testimony from federal scientists showed that **Fisheries & Oceans Canada** (DFO) has been aware of the deadly ISA virus in BC waters for decades (the same pathogen that all but wiped out the Chilean salmon farming industry in 2007) but has kept that news quiet through withholding the information and muzzling its scientists.

After independent researchers detected the ISA virus in BC salmon in the fall of 2011, DFO publicly announced that its own tests for the virus gave negative results. It suggested the earlier positive results from other (independent) labs were not credible because the tests could not be duplicated, and stated that, since the fish tissue had degraded, the results may have been showing a “false positive”.

The Inquiry also heard that **Fisheries Minister Keith Ashfield's staff** dictated the content of a letter they wanted DFO officials to write, in order to convince the US Congress and Senate that the ISA virus doesn't exist in Canadian fish.

DFO's behavior on this issue was outrageous but not that surprising to GSA, as we have for years denounced the agency's conflicting mandate: to simultaneously support the growth of the aquaculture industry while protecting the health of wild salmon and wild fisheries. But it was disheartening to hear that another

federal government agency, the **Canadian Food Inspection Agency** (CFIA)—responsible for assuring our food exports are safe—considers the issue to be more of a public relations and trade concern than one of health and safety.

Testimony at the hearings revealed that in a November 2011 email exchange with a DFO counterpart, CFIA executive, Joseph Beres, said:

***“It is clear that we are turning the PR tide to our favour—and this is because of the very successful performance of our spokesmen at the Tech Briefing yesterday... Congratulations! One battle is won, now we have to nail the surveillance piece, and we will win the war also.”***

Like DFO, the CFIA used the claims of “bad science” and “degraded samples” as its defence against publicly acknowledging the reality of the ISA virus findings last fall.

The Cohen Commission of Inquiry into the Decline of Sockeye Salmon in the Fraser River began its work in 2010, and its final report is expected to be released this June.

For more information about Infectious Salmon Anemia see [www.GeorgiaStrait.org/ISA](http://www.GeorgiaStrait.org/ISA).

Ever wonder what it's like to oversee GSA's salmon farm campaign, or what a typical work day looks like? Ruby was recently profiled by Charity Village® in its “Day in the Life” series, resulting in a fascinating peek into her datebook and her insights on the challenges and rewards of her job. You can find the story at: <http://www.charityvillage.com/cv/research/rcar79.html>.



Photo: Alexandra Morton

## Ending the Debate on Sea Lice

A team of prominent Canadian fisheries scientists, led by Dr. David Welch, is proposing a comprehensive new study aimed at ending the decade-long debate over whether sea lice from fish farms are killing wild salmon.

Their plan is to tag thousands of wild salmon smolts with acoustic transmitters, and track their survival as they migrate past the dense concentration of fish farms in Wild Salmon Narrows (see *next page*) and out towards the sea. They will also use control groups—keeping some fish in pens near the farms and releasing others in areas where they could not possibly come into contact with fish farms—so that survival rates can be compared.

Last year Dr. Welch presented his earlier acoustical tracking work to the Cohen Commission, showing that salmon smolts were disappearing off northern Vancouver Island in their first year at sea. In December, he told the Commission that a new analysis of that work shows that because so many fish died north of the farms, infection from the farms could explain the Fraser River's catastrophic sockeye collapse in 2009.

However, he cautioned that the earlier study provided correlation, but not proof—which is why he's now proposing the new study, called “Testing the Effect of Fish Farms on Salmon Survival” (TEFFS). The project is designed to deliver definitive results, but to carry it out, the team will need to find \$3 million/year for up to five years.

You can learn more about the project at: <http://kintama.com/applications/testing-the-effect-of-fish-farms-on-salmon-survival/>.

*For up-to-date news and information:*  
**[www.GeorgiaStrait.org](http://www.GeorgiaStrait.org)**

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Also available online at [www.GeorgiaStrait.org](http://www.GeorgiaStrait.org) as a PDF with live links.

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# Time to Clear Wild Salmon Narrows

by Ruby Berry

This is an inspiring and promising time of the year, when we anticipate the spring migration of juvenile wild salmon from rivers all along the coast, heading out to sea to begin the next stage of their lives. We hope that these tiny fish will make it through their thousand-mile journey and return in sufficient numbers to support vibrant ecosystems and continuing wild salmon runs.

Along with salmon from other rivers and streams, many Fraser River juveniles must reach the sea by swimming through the area we call Wild Salmon Narrows (Okisollo and Hoskyn Channels, along the east and north of Quadra Island at the northern end of Georgia Strait).

To get through this narrow corridor, they must pass nine huge salmon farms, with each active one holding from half a million to over 900,000 farmed fish in its open net cages—a perfect breeding ground for sea lice and other pathogens.

Along with other groups and a great many individuals, Georgia Strait Alliance has been calling for the removal of these farms from Wild Salmon Narrows, so that the wild juveniles passing through this constricted area are not at risk of infection.



Conville Bay salmon farm in Hoskyn Channel.

Unfortunately, at this time all nine farms remain in place, and it appears that six of them will be stocked with farmed salmon at the time of the spring migration.

There is a glimmer of hope—perhaps an indication that the industry is listening. As a result of pressure we’ve brought to bear, the BC Salmon Farmers Association is now posting information about stocking and sea lice levels on the farms in Okisollo and Hoskyn Channels. However, this information unfortunately doesn’t actually make the wild salmon passing by any safer than before.

The industry assures us they are operating within regulations for sea lice levels. Current regulations allow salmon farms to have up to three sea lice per fish before they must apply chemicals to kill the lice. But even at just one louse per fish, in a 750,000-fish farm this adds up to a huge number of lice—far too many for the tiny young wild salmon that must swim through this narrow corridor. Added to that is the risk of disease transfer and the accumulated impact of passing a multitude of farms.

In this narrow passageway, six stocked, open net cage fish farms are six too many. If we want to ensure the survival of the Fraser and other wild salmon runs, we must remove all of these net cage farms from the path of these intrepid, vulnerable young salmon.

Photos: Michelle Young



Cyrus Rocks salmon farm and harvest vessel in Okisollo Channel near Octopus Islands Marine Park.

Greig Seafood BC, which operates 21 salmon farms in BC, has been **charged under the federal Fisheries Act** with unlawfully destroying marine animals at three of its farms in 2010—the first time such charges have been laid in BC.

The nine charges pertain to the drowning deaths of an unspecified number of sea lions and harbour seals that became entangled in the company’s nets.

The company says it reported the drowning deaths of 52 sea lions and one harbour seal at its farms over a six-month period in early 2010, but according to its Managing Director, the deaths were caused by “a change in sea lion behaviour [that year]”—that the animals attacked the nets and became

entangled, requiring the company to “get a shooter in to euthanize these animals”.

Marine mammal deaths at salmon farms have long been a concern of GSA. In our 1994 Report Card on regulation of the industry in BC, we noted that although fish farms were required to report all predator kills, there was no auditing system to verify the reports and no method to ensure that the only predators killed were those found inside net cages. These concerns still stand today. We hope that the charges laid against Greig are the start of long-overdue government action to prevent further deaths of marine mammals at fish farms.

Infectious salmon anemia (ISA) virus has been making the news lately on **Canada’s east coast** as well as in BC (see “Hearings”, page 8). In February, federal officials quarantined a salmon farm in Nova Scotia when a suspected case of ISA virus was detected; the company destroyed two net cages of farmed

salmon as a precaution while federal authorities undertook an investigation to confirm the initial test results that identified the ISA. The company has plans for a massive expansion of its operations in the area, which are opposed by a coalition of residents and fishermen.



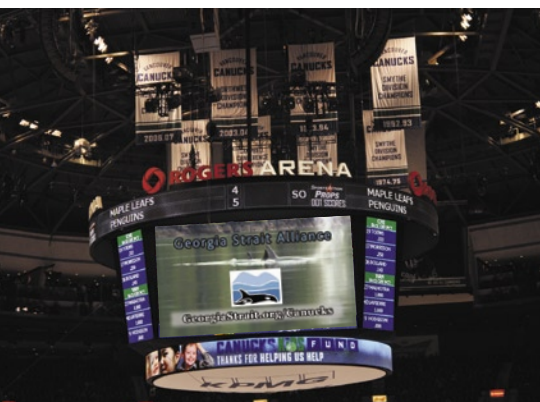
Selene Buendia, a fan of the Canucks—and GSA.

## We All Win!

On January 31, GSA staff and volunteers were guests at the Vancouver Canucks' Community Corner at Rogers Arena. The evening gave us a fun chance to meet Canucks fans and sign up some new GSA members, while the Canucks were busy beating the Chicago Blackhawks 3 to 2 in overtime.

A new 30-second video PSA, produced by Paul Manly and Manly Media, was shown on the jumbotron during the first period. You can catch it at: [www.GeorgiaStrait.org/PSA](http://www.GeorgiaStrait.org/PSA).

Thank you to the Canucks organization for the great show of support! Be sure to watch Canucks Community Corner during the 2012/2013 hockey season, when we hope to do it again!



Our 30-second video played on the jumbotron. Photos: Cheryl Onciul



Please join us in cleaning up a beach near you. Photo: Laurie MacBride

# Keeping Our Beaches Clean

Georgia Strait Alliance is partnering with Coastal Community Credit Union employees to organize a series of beach clean-ups this spring along the east coast of Vancouver Island. Please check your local Coastal Community branch for the times and locations so that you can join in and spread the word.

The clean-ups will be held on the following dates:

**APRIL 21** Nanaimo

**APRIL 22** Chemainus/Duncan, Quadra Island, Campbell River, Parksville/Nanosee, Gabriola Island and Qualicum Beach.

**MAY 6** Victoria, Courtenay/Comox, Nanaimo.

For more information, check out our website:  
[www.GeorgiaStrait.org/beachesclean](http://www.GeorgiaStrait.org/beachesclean)



## Annual Report Upcoming

In GSA's ongoing efforts to streamline our procedures and make every dollar you donate stretch further, we have decided to reduce the length of our Annual Report this year and make it available online instead of printing and mailing it. In late March or April, we will send a notification and link via email to GSA members and supporters. As in the past, the Annual Report will give you a good overview of the past year in terms of both GSA's programs and financials.

If you're a GSA member, **please ensure we have your up-to-date email address** on file so that we can be certain you'll receive the email notification and link. To do this, please send your full name and email address to [gsa@georgiastrait.org](mailto:gsa@georgiastrait.org).



Photo: Laurie MacBride

## To Ban or Not to Ban?

As we went to press, British Columbia's Legislative Committee on Cosmetic Pesticide Use had begun to develop its report and recommendations to the Province from its public consultation process last fall. Chair Bill Bennett said he was hopeful that the report could be finalized within a couple of weeks, but was not expecting the group to come to agreement on the recommendations.

The Committee, made up of MLAs from both the Liberals and NDP, has been studying the issue of whether BC should (as six other provinces have already done) bring forward legislation to ban the use of pesticides used for cosmetic purposes for appearance rather than for a health or economic reason.

A great many individuals and organizations made presentations and submissions, including Georgia Strait Alliance. We were one of 20 leading environmental and health organizations that issued a joint statement calling for new legislation that prohibits the use, sale, and retail display of chemical pesticides for lawns, gardens, and non-agricultural landscaping. As well, GSA made a submission to the Legislative Committee in December.

You can find the joint statement and our submission on our website (along with the Committee's report once it's available), at: [www.GeorgiaStrait.org/cosmeticpesticides](http://www.GeorgiaStrait.org/cosmeticpesticides).



*Everything has beauty, but not everyone sees it.*

Confucius

*In all things of nature there is something of the marvelous.*

Aristotle



## An Ocean of Love!

Show off your love for our coast this year with GSA's beautiful new greeting cards!

There are two separate sets of four cards each. The "wildlife" set features photos of marine mammals, birds and salmon, by photographers Isabelle Groc, Laurie MacBride and Ernest Keeley. These cards are blank inside, with information about the animal on the back of the card.

The "inspirational" set features photos by Michelle Young and Laurie MacBride, each with an inspirational quote from a famous poet or philosopher on the inside, and info about the location or subject of the photo on the back.

The cards are for just \$8/set (includes envelopes), or 4 sets for \$25, plus shipping/handling. You can order them from our website at: [www.GeorgiaStrait.org/cards](http://www.GeorgiaStrait.org/cards).

## Sewage Funding Clock Ticking

In the summer of 2006, the Province ordered the Capital Regional District (CRD) to plan for treating its untreated sewage. Nearly six years later, despite having approved the CRD's finalized plan for sewage treatment in 2010, the Province is failing to put its promised share of funding on the table—which is in turn putting at risk the offer of federal funding, which is due to expire at the end of March.

In December 2011, Georgia Strait Alliance and T. Buck Suzuki Environmental Foundation wrote to every MLA in the province, urging them to push for accountability from the Province. If action is not taken to begin the construction of the CRD's wastewater treatment system, there's a serious risk that the sewage plan will become outdated, and we will have to start the lengthy planning process over again—a significant waste of time and taxpayers money, not to mention the ongoing pollution of our local waters.

You can find our letter at: [www.GeorgiaStrait.org/lettertoMLAs](http://www.GeorgiaStrait.org/lettertoMLAs).

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