Celebration and Persistence

If we had to choose a theme for 2010, it would be that of celebration. We’re celebrating not only the 20th anniversary of Georgia Strait Alliance, but also some very fundamental wins in our sewage campaigns—wins that are great for the entire Strait and have been a long time coming. The Capital Regional District and the Province are ironing out the details of a plan for (finally!) treating Victoria’s sewage and recovering useful resources from the “waste”. On the mainland, Metro Vancouver is incorporating innovative resource recovery into its sewage plan (though as we write, we still don’t know if they’ll make the big commitment of upgrading their two primary plants by 2020).

GSA members should feel incredibly proud of these accomplishments. They were won because of our sustained effort—which was made possible by your sustained support. Our success has required some key ingredients which clearly show how GSA works, not just on sewage, but on a whole range of issues affecting the Strait. These not-so-magic ingredients include education, advocacy, a strong basis in science, collaboration, a focus on solutions that can provide direct benefits to local communities, creative problem-solving and—most important of all—long-term persistence.
Sewage pollution has been a focus for GSA ever since our founding in 1990. As we watched Victoria dump its raw waste into our waters, we learned that Vancouver’s primary treatment was also inadequate, as scientists discovered over 200 chemicals in the “treated” effluent. It was clear that no one in the region was doing enough to protect the Strait, and the impacts were starting to be seen all the way up the food chain.

GSA swung into action with an educational campaign based on science and solutions.

We gathered the available information, taking it to communities around the Strait and government officials at all levels. We hosted conferences bringing together scientists, agency staff, shellfish growers, fishermen and the public to share information and explore strategies for change. Beginning in the early 90s (and to this very day), we served on advisory committees at the regional and senior government levels, providing up-to-date information to policy-makers on the need for sensible sewage solutions and the options available.

Sensible Solutions

GSA’s approach to protecting the Strait is not just about stopping pollution: it’s also about finding solutions that bring added benefits for people and communities. As early as 1993, we were speaking out on the need to start seeing sewage as a resource rather than a problem—shifting the focus of the conversation from why treat, to how it can be done and what opportunities treatment can offer to communities. Through presentations, publications, a video production and face-to-face meetings, we introduced many local and regional officials to technologies they had never heard of, such as constructed wetlands and Solar Aquatics. We urged them to think beyond the big concrete approach to smaller, innovative systems that could fit easily into existing neighbourhoods, provide local employment, and enhance, rather than violate, nature.

By 2005, our discussion of sewage as a resource took on new urgency as calls for Victoria to treat its sewage became more intense. The potential benefits really came to life after a GSA volunteer traveled to Sweden in 2006
Management Plan allowing Victoria to keep dumping its raw sewage for at least the next 25 years. It looked like the end of the line: there was no appeal process, so what could we do?

Thinking there had to be some way to finally stop this growing source of pollution, we met with local environmentalists, labour unions and other concerned people, and from our discussions, two pivotal strategies emerged. First was the (in)famous Mr. Floatie, who brought much-needed humour to the public debate. GSA saw that the seven-foot mascot could make a huge impact by using humour to highlight the shame of a modern city dumping raw sewage. We worked to find ways to support and sustain this grassroots initiative, and as a result, Mr. Floatie started turning up at all kinds of events, keeping people laughing and becoming a media darling locally, nationally and even internationally.

Meanwhile, we met with CRD and provincial officials, who were now much more ready to hear what we had to say about solutions.

The second pivotal strategy was on the legal and scientific front. Working again with our partners, T. Buck Suzuki and Ecojustice, we uncovered documents revealing that in approving Victoria’s sewage plan, the Minister had ignored federal laws, a ten year-old agreement with Washington, past directives to the CRD and overwhelming evidence on the harmful effects of dumping raw sewage into the ocean.

While GSA worked to get this information out to the public, Mr. Floatie attended provincial all-candidates meetings, asking each candidate how they would take action to bring sewage treatment to Victoria. When the election dust settled, five of the seven CRD ridings had been lost by the government, captured by opposition members who had publicly supported treatment.

Despite these significant developments, we still needed something to tip the balance. The answer came after we analyzed the CRD’s data from several years of monitoring around its outfalls and compared this to BC’s Contaminated Sites Regulations. We’d always had evidence that sewage discharges were harmful to the marine environment in general, but now we finally had the proof—ironically, from the CRD itself—that Victoria’s sewage discharges were harming the area around the outfalls. The data showed higher levels of toxic chemicals than allowed under the provincial regulations, so we made a formal request to the new Minister of Environment to declare the outfalls “contaminated sites”.

The CRD’s independent scientific and technical review committee reinforced our findings several months later, stating that relying on dilution was not a long-term answer to sewage disposal. The Province was forced to act: the Minister directed the CRD to provide a detailed plan for sewage treatment and to consider innovative technologies in developing the plan. That process is well underway now.

and brought back a detailed report of how the Swedes were using sewage treatment to produce energy for heating and transportation. Over the next two years we took the concept of resource recovery to government officials at the local, regional and provincial levels, illustrating it with working examples from around the world.

Today—17 years after GSA first started talking about sewage as a resource—the City of Vancouver is using wastewater to produce energy for a False Creek neighbourhood, and our region’s two largest regional districts are planning to make resource recovery part of their sewage management. Proof that persistence and commitment to an idea do indeed pay off!

**CREATIVE WAYS FORWARD**

During this long campaign, there were times when we wondered if we could succeed. In 2003, BC’s Environment Minister approved a Liquid Waste Management Plan allowing Victoria to keep dumping its raw sewage for at least the next 25 years. It looked like the end of the line: there was no appeal process, so what could we do?

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![Protecting the Strait of Georgia, where 70% of British Columbians live, work and play.](image-url)
PERSISTING FOR SUCCESS

Our Capital region will finally have sewage treatment, and resource recovery will be part of the system—this is worth celebrating. But in telling this story, you can see the challenge of writing an “annual report”: a one-year slice of time doesn’t give a realistic sense of the complex issues GSA tackles. Environmental problems persist over many years and it requires a long-term effort to address them.

To complicate matters further, environmental degradation in the marine world is mostly “out of sight”, and many people don’t fully understand how their own daily lives affect marine life or how deeply dependent human beings are on the health of our oceans, rivers, streams and estuaries. Even when the public is calling for change on an issue, it takes a long time for governments to make a 180-degree shift in their policies.

Adding to the challenge, GSA fills a unique niche within BC conservation groups: our work is focused on a highly populated region. The Strait of Georgia supports one of the richest, most abundant and diverse ecosystems anywhere on earth—but this complex web of plant and animal life is at risk because millions of humans share this home with them. That’s why GSA has always promoted practical solutions such as resource recovery from sewage, closed containment for salmon farms, and ToxicSmart household alternatives—ways to support healthy human communities as well as a healthy natural environment.

But above all, it’s the willingness to hang in for the long-term that has made the critical difference for GSA. Throughout our first 20 years, GSA’s members and supporters have shown, time and again, that they care deeply about this region and want to be part of a sustained effort to solve the environmental problems facing our communities. As GSA enters its third decade, in a time of immense global economic and environmental challenges, the need to sustain our collective effort has never been greater—because solutions require a long-term commitment. We thank and congratulate you on our successes so far, and look forward to our continued journey together.

GSA AT WORK—Some of Our Achievements in 2009

• PARTNERED with BC Marine Trades Association to launch the Clean Marine BC Eco-Rating Program and signed up five of BC’s largest marinas.

• FORCED Fisheries & Oceans Canada to order legal protection for the endangered orca’s habitat (the first such order under the Species at Risk Act).

• WON RULING that Fisheries & Oceans Canada had acted unlawfully in failing to identify critical habitat in the recovery strategy of the Nooksack Dace, resulting in the review of recovery strategies for other species at risk.

• WON APPROVAL by the Capital Regional District board of a long-awaited plan for sewage treatment, including the recovery of resources for energy.

• WON SUPPORT from Metro Vancouver’s Waste Management Committee for an updated sewage plan with resource recovery and an expedited schedule for upgrading primary treatment plants.

• HELPPED local residents defeat rezoning bylaw that would have allowed for two massive net cage salmon farms in Sunderland Channel.

• CAMPAIGNED to close five net cage salmon farms in Wild Salmon Narrows (Okisollo Channel), to protect migrating Fraser River salmon from sea lice.

• TOOK the “Save Our Kids Salmon” to communities along the Fraser River, all the way to Quesnel, to publicize the need for closed containment for salmon farms.

• HELPED win a delay and review of Coast Guard’s plan to de-staff BC lighthouses.

• PARTNERED with Fraser Basin Council to train Punjabi and Mandarin-speaking volunteers to carry out a new program to engage immigrant communities in marine and watershed conservation efforts.

• COMPLETED nine intertidal quadrat studies on beaches in Victoria, Sooke, Sidney and Pender Island.

• WORKED with local residents trying to stop the dumping of an old navy ship to create an artificial reef off Gambier Island.

• WELCOMED two respected scientists as newest members of GSA’s Advisory Council.

Space limitations prevent us from listing the details for all our activities around the region in 2009. If you’d like more information, check out our website: www.GeorgiaStrait.org

GSA STAFF

Christianne Wilhelmson—Managing Director
Ruby Berry—Program Coordinator
Cathy Booher—Administrative Director
Lisa Herman—Administrative Coordinator
Mike Richards—Operations Director / Program Coordinator
Michelle Young—Financial Coordinator / Salmon Aquaculture Campaigner

GSA PROGRAMS ARE COORDINATED BY:
Ruby Berry—Salmon Aquaculture
Cathy Booher—Intertidal / Community Mapping
Mike Richards—Green Boating / Clean Marine BC
Christianne Wilhelmson—Clean Air & Water / Species at Risk

CONTRACTORS
Ted Leather—Webmaster, Technical Support
Laurie MacBride & Alan Wilson—Publications
Tracey Jastinder Mann—ToxicSmart Program Coordinator

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Sustaining Success

"Sustainability" has become quite the buzz word of late. Most often, it's used to mean that our economic success must not come at the cost of our social welfare or of nature. Simply put, it's about all of us being here for the long term, in good health.

Sustainability is also a key goal for Georgia Strait Alliance: making sure we are stable and durable enough to be able to protect our part of the Salish Sea—the Strait of Georgia. GSA's sustainability is based on two important measures of health: organizational and financial.

Organizational health is all about ensuring that the people who do the work get the support they need. That includes everything from the tools they require to do the job—from an office to work in, to a computer to work on—to making sure they take care of themselves. Passionate people have always been at the heart of GSA, but passionate people can too often find that their lives are all about work. At GSA, we urge staff to take their full vacation time and to enjoy their weekends with friends and family, because we support Edward Abbey's approach: "It is not enough to fight for the land; it is even more important to enjoy it." A healthy organization is all about healthy and happy people, whether they are staff, board members or other volunteers.

Financial sustainability is also critical to GSA's ability to protect the Strait. Each year, a part of our work plan must include finding the money we need to fund our programs for the next 12 months. Relying on this model of charitable fundraising—which means essentially starting over again every year—can leave us very vulnerable to economic ups-and-downs and changes in charitable giving trends. The latest example of such a threat is the provincial government's sudden decision to change how it dispenses money to charities from gaming funds, resulting in some groups losing this vital funding while others find their funding for this year delayed by months. This sort of vulnerability is why we are so committed to building two very important pillars of our financial sustainability plan: monthly donors and our Endowment Fund.

Monthly donations provide GSA with a consistent source of funding year-round. When we know these funds will be available each month, we can plan more effectively; the more monthly donors we have, the better job we can do in carrying out GSA's programs and campaigns. Monthly donations prove particularly important during those times of year when other donations slow to a trickle (such as after Christmas and during the summer holidays). They also carry added benefits for both the donor and GSA. Most people find that having a small amount deducted automatically each month from their credit card or chequing account is easier than remembering to make a lump sum donation each year. Monthly donations also save time and costs for GSA; we mail you one tax receipt at the end of each year, and instead of having to solicit annual renewals, we can focus on the work we want to be doing—protecting the Strait.

The other key pillar to building GSA's strong financial health is our Endowment Fund, which we established late in 2009 thanks to the generous donation of Joan Milne Stewart (see more info at: www.georgiastrait.org/endowment). In the months and years to come, we will be working with our donors, supporters and advisors to build this Fund, because as it grows, it will provide a consistent source of funding to GSA—allowing us to focus much more of our attention on the work of protecting the Strait.

Sustainability requires creativity and determination. The Strait of Georgia needs GSA as its advocate, and we are committed to doing all we can to ensure our organization is here for the long term. We hope you'll join in helping to meet our goal of sustainability by becoming a monthly donor if you are not already one, by encouraging your friends and colleagues to become financial supporters of GSA, or making a donation to our Endowment Fund. The challenges in protecting the Strait are many, but with the growing support of our donors and supporters, GSA can meet these challenges head on—strong, enduring and successful.
As an independent, charitable society, Georgia Strait Alliance depends on your support to continue working to protect and restore our coastal waters. Each year, funding for our programs comes from a variety of sources including grants and donations. We are honoured to have your support. Thank you! The list below includes grants, partnership contributions, donations and gifts in-kind of $100 or more in 2009. Our sincere apologies if there are any errors or omissions (please let us know).

**SUSTAINERS ($10,000 or more)**

**GUARDIANS ($5,000 – $9,999)**
BC Marine Trades Association, Fraser Basin Council, SunCruiser, Vancouver Foundation

**PROTECTORS ($2,500 – $4,999)**
Greater Vancouver Regional District (Metro Vancouver), Human Resources & Skills Development Canada, Mayfair Experience Centre, Aveda Institute Victoria

**NAVIGATORS ($1,000 – $2,499)**
Anonymous (2), Ray & Joyce Berry, Breze Salon & Day Spa, Don Bulmer, Alexander A. Campbell, Krista DeGroot & Peter Jacobs, Eco-Chic, Grow Creative, Salon Felice, Don & Fay Johnson, Dr. Walton Langford, Marlene & Alexander Mackenzie, Mel McDonald, Suzanne Siemens, Patricia & Steve Strand, Studio One Hair Design, Victoria Foundation

**MARINERS ($500 – $999)**

Mark & Cathy deBruijn, Deep Cove Canoe & Kayak Center Ltd., Thomas Degling, Anne-Marie Dekker-Duke, Alisa Denduyf, Deman Conservancy Association, Jeff DeVries & Marcy Prior, William & Gudrun Doherty, Charles & Gloria Dorworth, Trallee Dun, Jane Dyson, Michael Dyson, Lorne Ebell, Perry Edwards, Frank & Mary Elkins, Dr. Peter Elliott, Dr. Robert Elner, EM Salon & Spa, Kathleen Emerson, Brent England, Jake Etzkorn, Janet Fairbanks & Wayne Bradley, Pam Fairchild, Tracy Ferreira, Fisk Construction, Thora Fleming, Susan & Harold Fletcher, Joan Fowler, Helen Fraser, Louise Fraser, Dr. L. Neil Frazer, Rachael Freer, Brenda Gaertner, Carolyn & Charles Gahr, Gerry Gailey, Capt. Doug P. Gayton, Penny Gibbs & John Willett, Amanda & Barry Glickman, Dr. Elaine Golds & Bruce Brandhorst, Susan Gossman, Harvey Graham, Alison Graves, Great Pacific Mortgage and Investments Ltd., Greater Saint Louis Community Foundation, Gulf Islands Cruising School Ltd., Sharon Haave, Mary Haig-Brown, Terence Hale, Mary Hampson, Matthew & Victoria Hanson, Rick & Heather Harbo, Harbour Authority Association of BC, Judith Harper, Eric

Members are GSA’s lifeblood. Above, Lifetime Member Pat Nordin is thanked by Cathy Booker for her longtime service. Right, Christianne Wilhelmson signs up new members at a public event.

Photos by Jennifer Sweeney and Alan Wilson.

Annual Report © Georgia Strait Alliance 2010
Also available online at www.GeorgiaStrait.org

EDITORIAL & LAYOUT: Laurie MacBride and Alan Wilson

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VOLUNTEERS FOR THE CAUSE

BOARD OF DIRECTORS
May 2009 through April 2010

Brent England, Victoria—President
Matthew Kirchner, Vancouver—Vice-President
Margaret Ransford, Victoria—Secretary
Stan Boychuk, Victoria—Treasurer

Darren Blaney, Campbell River*
Courtney Campbell, Gabriola Island (to June 2009)
Shaena Lambert, Vancouver *
Melinda Skeels, Vancouver (as of December 2009)
Suzanne Siemens, Vancouver *
Frank Tester, Vancouver *
* entering 2nd year of term in May (in office until spring 2011)

ADVISORY COUNCIL

John Cashore, Coquitlam
Dr. Larry Dill, Burnaby
Dr. Robert Elner, Delta
Chief Robert Joseph, North Vancouver/Hopetown
Dr. Donald McQueen, Nanaimo
Dr. Milton Wong, Vancouver

GIFTS IN MEMORY OF J. Alex Edwards, Yamina Holmberg, Joe Lee, Joan Frohne-Nielsen, Lisa van Reeuwyk, Elmo Richards, Edna Routledge, Marian Rowat


FRIENDS (up to $99)
Space limitations prevent us from publishing the names of hundreds of additional caring individuals, organizations and businesses that contributed in 2009. Thank you for your commitment to protecting the Strait.

VOLUNTEERS Our success also depends on volunteers, who provide invaluable help in the office, staffing displays at events, technical assistance, beach clean-ups, biological monitoring and many other important tasks throughout the year. Our volunteers are too numerous to list here, but we extend a hearty round of thanks and appreciation to all.

IT IS WITH GREAT SADNESS we also note the passing of several other long-time GSA members and friends, including one of GSA's most steadfast volunteers. Our deepest condolences to the families and friends of Marvin Brown, Luther Chew, Jeff Hughes, Freya Milne and Joan van der Goes.
2009 Financial Highlights

Financial Position as of December 31, 2009

Current Assets: $194,347 (includes $53,071 in Working Capital Reserve/Sustainability Fund)
Long-term Investments (Endowment Fund): $25,586
Capital Assets (Equipment): $5,673
Accounts Payable & Accrued Liabilities: ($18,373)
Deferred Contributions: ($94,766) (received in FY09 but committed to programs and operations in FY10)
Net Assets: $112,467

In-Kind Contributions: In addition to the revenue above, GSA received an estimated value of $31,707 in donated goods, services and volunteer time in FY 2009.

The above report is a preliminary summary only and not intended to reflect the complete financial status of the Georgia Strait Alliance. The full financial statements will be presented at our annual general meeting on May 7, 2010. Members unable to attend who wish to receive the statements should contact our Nanaimo office at 250-753-3459.

Revenues FY09: $388,161
Expenses FY09: $378,314

OUR BUSINESS PARTNERS
Aveda Institute Victoria
BC Coast Pilots Ltd.
Blush Salon & Spa
Breze Salon & Day Spa
Capers Whole Foods Market
Daniel F. Huber Corporation
Deep Cove Canoe & Kayak Center Ltd.
Eco-Chic
EM Salon & Spa
Feathercraft Products Ltd.
Fisk Construction
Great Pacific Mortgage and Investments Ltd.
Grow Creative
Gulf Islands Cruising School Ltd.
Hornby Island Outdoor Sports
Husky Group Of Companies
Juliette’s Hair Studio
LDE Telecommunications
Luna Aveda Concept Salon
Mayfair Experience Centre
Misty Isles Adventures
Mothership Adventures
Natracare
New Society Publishers
Pacific Edge Publishing Ltd.
Pacific Yachting/OP Publishing
Pacifica Paddle Sports
Salon Felice
Salon J Hair Studios
Silva Bay Resort & Marina
Studio One
Studio One Hair Design
SunCruiser
Supersweep Chimney Services
Tammy Hudgeon Glassworks
Vanities Centre
West Marine - Nanaimo
Wiink 2 For Hair & Body

OUR ORGANIZATIONAL MEMBERS
20/20 Vision British Columbia
Association Of Marina Industries
Campbell River Fishing Guides Association
Campbell River, Courtenay & District Labour Council
Canadian Power & Sail Squadron, Vancouver Island
Conservancy Hornby Island
Denman Conservancy Association
Harbour Authority Association of BC
Hornby Island Residents & Ratepayers’ Association
Nanaimo & Area Land Trust Society
Shaw Ocean Discovery Centre
Silva Bay Yacht Club

Great Blue Heron © Isabelle Groc, www.tidelife.com