

SEI Update

A publication of the Sensitive Ecosystems Inventory Project No. 5 February 2000

Inventorizing the Islands

The Islands Trust Fund makes extensive use of two inventories – the Environmental Information Management System (EIMS) and the Sensitive Ecosystems Inventory (SEI).

"EIMS is an inventory of inventories," explains Carolyn Stewart, Co-ordinator for the Islands Trust Fund. "It is based on a summary of information and reports that the Islands Trust has gathered over the past 25 years that indicate areas and features of significance in the Islands Trust Area."

Where these reports have identified natural values on a property, this information is mapped on the Islands Trusts' GIS system. Some of the information is dated, and not all ecologically important areas have been included, but it is still a very useful tool to identify sites that have conservation value.

The Trust Fund uses both EIMS and SEI information as a "first cut" in assessing potential conservation projects. For example, when a landowner approaches the Trust Fund with an offer to covenant land, the first place Carolyn checks is the EIMS and SEI maps. If either inventory identifies areas of potential, she knows it is worth going into a more detailed assessment.

These inventories are also being used in the development of a "Public Land Strategy" for the Islands Trust Area. The Islands Trust Council and Trust Fund Board are working with other provincial agencies and looking at the conservation, resource and community needs values of vacant Crown lands in the Trust area, so that they can provide advice on the best use of these properties. EIMS and SEI are being used along with tourism and other data as part of this assessment.

Carolyn finds that EIMS and the SEI complement one another. Sometimes the SEI will identify sites that are not included in EIMS, and vice versa. Both are a useful starting point in identifying sites with conservation value, but both require field verification to make sure that information is complete and up-to-date.

For further information contact Carolyn Stewart, Trust Fund Co-ordinator, Islands Trust Fund at (250) 405-5151.

Best Management Practices for Land Developments

How can developments be designed to reduce the risk from flooding and erosion? What setbacks are appropriate near raptor nests? In order to answer these and many other questions that would normally be part of the referral process, the Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks is developing a set of best management practices (BMPs) to assist subdivision approving officers in the review and assessment of development proposals.

A first draft of Environmental Requirements and Best Management Practices for the Review of Land Development Proposals (Version 1, December 1999) is now in use by local governments. Version 2 – February 2000 – is being finalized and will be released soon. The latest version incorporates various edits and clarification as suggested by users.

The Best Management Practices lists the SEI as a key tool in identifying areas with documented sensitive ecosystems, and buffer widths are suggested for the different ecosystem types. The new document refers to the SEI Conservation Manual, now in the final stages of development.

For a copy of the "Best Management Practices for Land Developments" or additional information, please contact Marlene Caskey, Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks, Vancouver Island Regional Office, phone (250) 751-3100, e-mail mcaskey@nanaimo.env.gov.bc.ca

Tips and Tricks

- When doing a site evaluation, don't forget to check the Conservation Data Centre(CDC) database for rare element occurrences (known locations of rare plants, animals and plant communities). For information call (250) 356-0928.
- The SEI field checked about one-third of the sensitive ecosystems, and this information is available to everyone. If there is an asterisk beside the polygon number on the map table, call Jan Kirkby at (250) 387-0732 to get the details.

Environmental Mapping Workshop

There's a lot of mapping going on around Vancouver Island! This was one conclusion from a one-day workshop on sensitive habitat mapping, held in Nanaimo in November 1999. About 130 participants from all over Vancouver Island heard about a variety of inventory projects – mapping aquatic areas, inter-tidal foreshores, terrestrial mapping (including SEI), watershed mapping, and assessing imperviousness. The purpose was to review, compare and coordinate efforts – to look at what's worked and what hasn't in mapping and inventory, to examine the quality of the data and the products, and consider the need for training, certification and integration.

Discussion focused on ways to make sure that inventories – and the resulting decisions – are based on the best available science, and that standards are in place to ensure that the results are seen as valuable and credible. The workshop sponsors – the Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks, Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Canadian Wildlife Service – plan to host a follow-up workshop in 2000 to discuss

these issues further, and look at how the federal and provincial government can best support inventory initiatives.

For further information contact Peter Law, Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks, (250-751-3229) or Brad Mason, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, (604-666-7015).

SEI Outreach Program

During the summer of 1999, H.T.Consulting conducted an evaluation of the Sensitive Ecosystems Inventory project. Interviews were conducted with planners from most of the local governments in the study area, as well as representatives from First Nations, consulting groups, non-government organizations, and federal and provincial agencies who have used the maps and data. The intent of this study was to find out how the SEI is being used and received, whether users know about the available support materials and services, and the overall satisfaction levels.

Overall, the majority of respondents (66%) felt that the SEI generally met their needs and expectations, while 19% expressed dissatisfaction. We found that many people were unaware of the original intent of the SEI, and while others were inexperienced in working with GIS information or did not have access to this technology.

One of the biggest concerns was the scale of the mapping (1:20,000). Many people commented that it was useful for general planning purposes, but that a 1:5,000 or better scale was required for site-level plans. Perhaps not surprisingly, regional districts were generally more satisfied with the scale than municipal governments. Unfortunately, the scope and budget of the SEI project did not allow for large-scale mapping, and its intent was only to act as a "flag" for further investigation.

The other major concern was data accuracy, again relating to expectations that exceeded the original purpose of SEI. In some cases, the original airphoto information may now be as much as ten years old, and some the sensitive sites no longer exist or have been extensively modified. We encourage users to let us know of changes so that we can update the database.

We also learned that more than half of the SEI users are not aware of the available support services and materials (such as this Update). Those that did know about and use support services were mostly very satisfied with the help they received. Several respondents said they were looking forward to having the SEI Technical Report and Conservation Manual available. *(Note: The Technical Report has since been distributed widely to local governments, First Nations and consultants. The Conservation Manual will be available shortly.)*

Non-government users and consultants see the SEI as providing easy access to good data in a form that is readily usable. One enthusiast cited the SEI as "coin of the realm."

We are trying to respond to the needs of users, many of whom told us they would like to see "a human face" more often, and would be interested in participating in information or training sessions as long as the cost was reasonable and the content worthwhile. On this note, we are developing a series of one-day workshops on the application of SEI. We will be visiting and talking to potential participants in the coming weeks to get a better sense of the type of information that would be most useful.

For more information on the survey results and the upcoming workshops, please contact Judith Cullington, SEI Project Coordinator, (250) 391-8772 or jcullington@pacificcoast.net.

Our thanks to everyone who participated in the SEI survey.

In Brief...

Sunshine Coast SEI: Air photo interpretation is now underway for the Sunshine Coast study area (Howe Sound to Desolation Sound). Islands in the Howe Sound, including Bowen and Gambier, have already been inventoried as part of the Vancouver Island and Gulf Islands SEI (in order to provide complete coverage of the Islands Trust area). Maps for the Howe Sound islands are available from Clover Point Cartographics (see below).

Georgia Basin Ecosystem Initiative: A Georgia Basin Ecosystem Conservation Partnership (GBECP) has been formed as part of the GBEI. Its members – including several government agencies and non-government organizations – are identifying sites with high conservation value within the Georgia Basin.

Conservation Data Centre staff are cataloguing information on sites proposed by members of the GBECP. All sites will be fully described, digitally mapped, and will include ratings given for biodiversity significance, connectivity, representativeness, protection urgency, management urgency, cultural/heritage and other values (e.g. recreational, aesthetic, etc.). This standardized, comprehensive compilation of site information will assist the GBECP in establishing priority areas for acquisition and/or stewardship. Both SEI and CDC data have been extensively used in the preparation of the Site Catalogue.

Need an Update?

This issue of the SEI Update is #5 in a series. For copies of previous issues, please contact

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For more information, contact:

- ***on the SEI project, change forms and groundtruthing:***

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To order maps, please contact:

Clover Point Cartographics

Ph.: (250) 384-3537

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