

Gorge protection group at risk

By [Roszan Holmen - Victoria News](#)

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The Gorge Waterway Initiative held what may be its last meeting Wednesday.

The Capital Regional District has decided to end its co-ordinating role for the initiative, and the decision has left members of the umbrella organization searching for a way to fill the gap.

"I'd be very skeptical if it's going to continue," said George Blogg, who belongs to the Portage Inlet Sanctuary Colquitz Estuary Society. "It's really going to be a loss to the general public." The estuary society is one of eight environmental community groups belonging to the GWI.

GWI meets monthly, bringing these volunteer groups together with representatives from the four municipalities and three community associations that border the Gorge. They share concerns and ideas, lobby for better policy, and collaborate on projects to improve the health of the waterway.

Until recently, CRD employee Jody Watson chaired GWI meetings. She also presented annual reports to municipal councils, and helped out with GWI initiatives. These include the Point Ellice House shoreline restoration project, where she helped coordinate volunteer excursions to pull ivy and plant native species. She's also played a role in the new signage along the walkway.

The CRD, however, will no longer provide this role. That's because it has been funded under the CRD's liquid waste management plan, explained Dale Green, of environmental services. A 2010 review of the plan concluded that some projects of the GWI don't fit within its mandate.

"The funding for the program isn't changing. What we do with the funding will be changing," Green said. That means allocating more money to monitoring storm water quality entering the marine environmental.

"When we find problem areas, we work our way upstream investigating and trying to find the sources of the contamination," said Green. Then it's up to the municipality to fix failed pipes or to order a business owner to stop discharging contaminants.

The CRD will still participate in GWI initiatives, but only those that relate to contaminants from storm drains or run off from other sources.

The change, Green said, "doesn't preclude one of these community groups from stepping up and chairing Gorge Waterway Initiative."

But Blogg and his wife Vicki worry that won't happen.

"Because we are all volunteer groups, it's hard to find a group to take on that role," said Vicki, adding it involves a lot of hours.

Added Blogg: Why change something so successful?

"It brings a certain amount of my personal skepticism ... because it seemed to be functioning very well."

