

Summary of “[Green Bylaws for the Sunshine Coast](#)”

Report prepared by the Environmental Law Centre, University of Victoria, July 2024

This report was commissioned to inform Official Community Plan (OCP) updates for the lower Sunshine Coast in 2024-25. It acknowledges that the Sunshine Coast Regional District (SCRD) is a local government partnership between the District of Sechelt, the Town of Gibsons, the Shíshálh Nation Government District and five electoral areas, all of which are currently reviewing their land use policies and practices. It also acknowledges that the lands and waters of the SCRD are located in the shíshálh swiya and in the territory of the Skwxwú7mesh Nation.

The lower Sunshine Coast is at a critical juncture in terms of balancing the need for increased development to accommodate its growing population, with the protection of its sensitive ecosystems and natural assets. Residents and local governments are struggling with ongoing and overlapping crises related to affordability, potable water supply, biodiversity loss and the growing impacts of climate change.

The SCRD has initiated a comprehensive update of its seven Official Community Plans (OCPs)¹. The Town of Gibsons and District of Sechelt are also updating their bylaws. As governments work with communities to update their vision for the future and address critical issues, the need to manage the land base more holistically, and harmonize relevant policies and practices that transcend local government boundaries is increasingly important.

This sets the stage for a once-in-a-generation opportunity to put in place proactive policy that guides development, improves community resilience, prevents irreversible biodiversity loss, and works collaboratively with local First Nations.

Enacting a *green bylaws* approach, rooted in the SCRD’s powers and legislative authority, is an avenue to strengthen its ecosystem protections. Establishing region-wide policies to protect ecosystems and their connectivity within bylaws and OCPs will allow the SCRD to: better plan for community and ecological resilience by guiding development away from the most sensitive ecosystems; account for the cumulative impacts of development; and ultimately ensure that its planning and development decisions are grounded in science. It will also provide more clarity and predictability for developers and property owners on the lower Sunshine Coast.

¹The OCP renewal goals include

- ensuring that OCP policies are consistent with provincial laws and regulations;
- strengthening policy clarity and outcomes while considering factors such as reconciliation, climate change, housing needs, and potential emergencies;
- creating a policy framework that is responsive to the complex development pressures and long-range needs of the region; and
- responding to the needs and values of current and future residents.

The report details the ELC's assessment of the SCRD's use of its regulatory powers. It then recommends concrete ways to strengthen ecosystem protection during land development and OCP amendment decisions by taking a *green bylaws* approach, with consideration of the lower Sunshine Coast's unique geographic context.

The ELC's five recommendations are:

1. Plan for ecosystem connectivity:

- 1.1. Adopt a Regional Conservation Strategy.
- 1.2. Support ecosystem connectivity through zoning, Environmental Development Permit Areas and conservation covenants.

2. Establish long-term, district-wide ecosystem policies:

- 2.1. Update sensitive ecosystem maps.
- 2.2. Align land-use and development policies across the Regional District.
- 2.3. Consider adopting a Regional Growth Strategy.
- 2.4. Align the Regional District's OCPs.
- 2.5. Embed region-wide conservation objectives in policy documents such as OCPs.
- 2.6. Update long-term policies and bylaws to conform with BC's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and work with the shíshálh and Skwxwú7mesh Nations to develop effective environmental management and conservation strategies.

3. Establish binding mechanisms to guide development away from sensitive ecosystems:

- 3.1. Include a Growth Management Section in the OCPs.
- 3.2. Enact zoning bylaws that have environmental protection as a specific purpose.

4. Enhance the power and efficiency of environmental impact assessment procedures:

- 4.1. Enact bylaws with Development Approval Information Area designations.
- 4.2. Consider and communicate how and when impact assessments are required.
- 4.3. Protect sensitive ecosystems from cumulative impacts.
- 4.4. Establish and use ecological indicators to monitor ecosystem health.

5. Ensure that planning and development decisions are based on a comprehensive and scientific base of knowledge:

- 5.1. Develop detailed standards to direct consistent performance by Qualified Environmental Professionals.
- 5.2. Incorporate ecological expertise into project reviews.
- 5.3. Continue supporting public engagement.