

Parks Canada Photo Essay:

**A look at Sidney Island's Potential
Ecosystem Recovery**

This past May, Parks Canada hosted field trips in the Gulf Islands during the Garry oak meadow bloom. These recent photos are intended to provide an example of what nearby islands with healthy plant communities look like, for landowners that were unable to join us.



Pictured: A colourful Garry Oak meadow on deer-free Brackman Island (May 2018)

Sidney Island is a relatively undeveloped and expansive island with outstanding potential to support vibrant Coastal Douglas fir ecosystems – one of the rarest types in Canada.

However, the understory of Sidney Island forests have been over-browsed by deer and do not represent a healthy forest ecosystem.



Pictured: A heavily browsed understory on Sidney Island (May 2018)

Areas of Sidney Island are showing preliminary signs of ecosystem recovery, due to extensive efforts by landowners to reduce fallow deer numbers. However, deer numbers on Sidney Island are still considered high, relative to other regions.

This initial recovery - together with recent research from UBC's Dr. Peter Arcese - suggests that Sidney Island has significant potential for further recovery in the absence of over-browsing by deer.



Pictured: Camas Lillys on Wymond Point, Sidney Island (May 2018). Prior to 2014, blooms of Camas were not seen on the Island.

In fact, Sidney Island could play a critical role as a natural refuge for numerous rare songbird, butterfly and plant species that depend on at-risk Coastal Douglas fir ecosystems to survive.

Parks Canada has used deer exclosures on Sidney Island as part of its research to better understand the impacts of deer browsing on the forest understory.

This deer exclosure demonstrates what the forest understory could look like on Sidney Island, compared to the heavily browsed area around it.



Pictured: A deer exclosure on Sidney Spit demonstrates what a healthy understory can look like (May 2018)

Parks Canada's long-term proposal to restore forest health on Sidney Island would involve the removal of invasive fallow deer, which are largely responsible for the island's barren understorey.

Next, Parks Canada would work towards island-wide ecosystem recovery, supporting the removal of invasive plants, re-introduction of rare plants, and management of black-tailed deer.

If the island's only browsers were a healthy population of native black-tailed deer, the island would regenerate a rich and diverse understory, supporting Garry Oak meadows with colourful wildflowers.



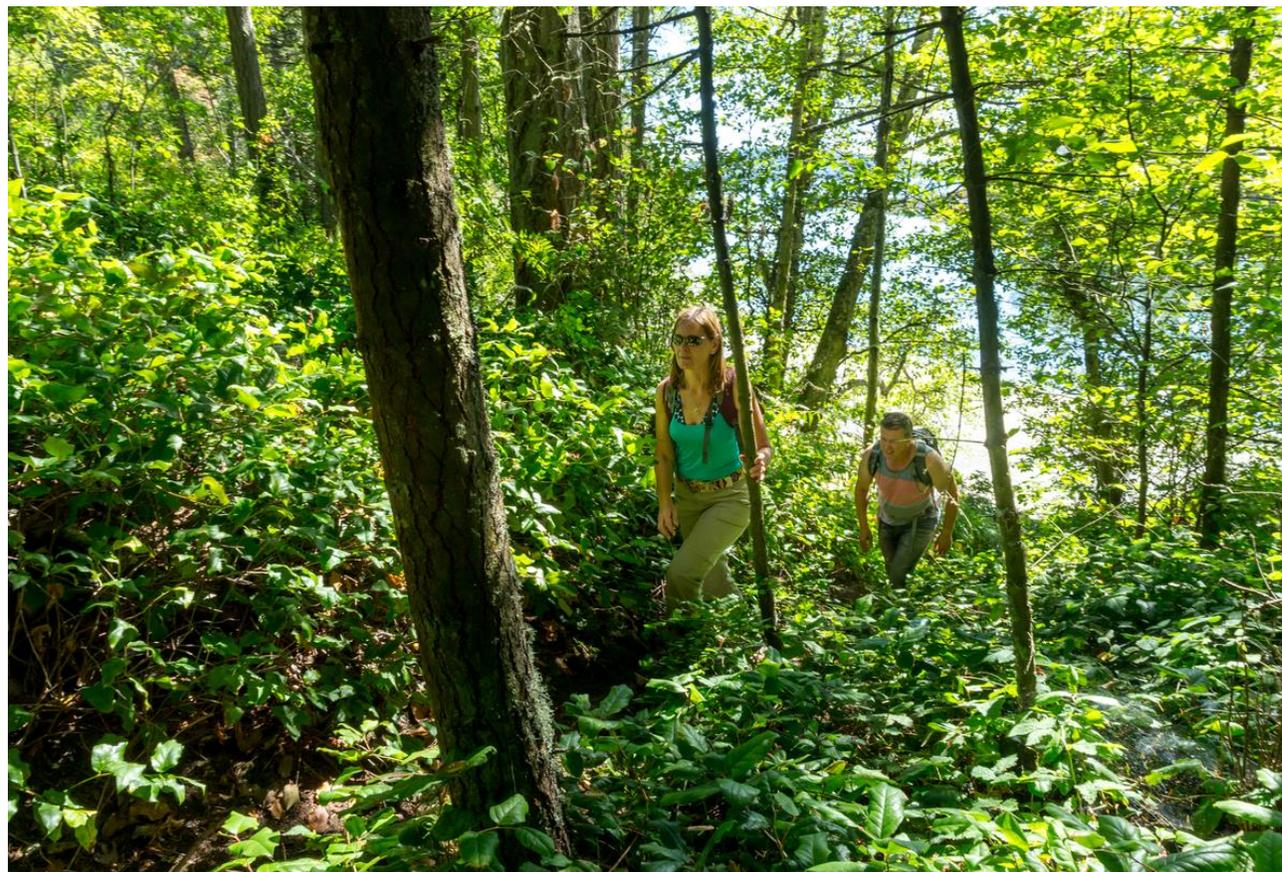
Pippi Lawn, a Parks Canada botanist, studies a Garry Oak meadow on deer-free Brackman Island (May 2018)

The flowers associated with Garry Oak meadow are not only beautiful, they are intimately connected to the history of the area. For millennia, Coast Salish communities actively tended Camas as an important food source. The restoration of Sidney Island's forest would have both ecological and cultural significance.



Pictured: Purple camas (*Camassia quamash*) on Brackman Island (May 2018)

For more information on Parks Canada's proposal to collaboratively restore Sidney Island's forest health please contact Project Manager Michael Janssen at 250-654-4015 or Michael.janssen@pc.gc.ca



Pictured: Hikers walk through a rich healthy understory on deer-free Portland Island – a stark contrast to Sidney Island's forest understorey pictured on page 2. Photo: 2016.