

Gulf Islands National Park Reserve of Canada

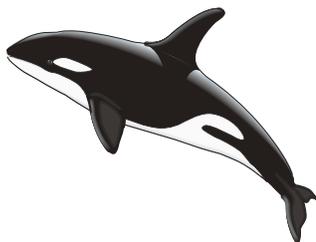
Climate

The Gulf Islands lie in the rain-shadow of the mountains of Vancouver Island and the Olympic Peninsula. The result is a Mediterranean type of climate with dry summers, moderate rainfall in the winter, and more than 2 000 hours of sunshine annually. Summer temperatures are usually in the low 20°C; winter temperatures are cooler at 5-10°C. Freezing temperatures are rare. Autumn is the foggiest season and Spring brings the windiest weather.

Geology

The Gulf Islands are underlain by folded and highly faulted sedimentary rocks. This area of southwestern British Columbia is seismically active, overlying a tectonic subduction zone. On the islands, north-south headlands and high ridges of erosion-resistant sandstone/conglomerate are separated by narrow valleys and bays underlain by more easily eroded shale.

Glacial ice as much as a 1.5 km thick carved the landscape over two glacial periods, with the ice finally receding for good 12 000 years ago. Deposits of glacial sand and gravel form Sidney Island, and striated and fluted bedrock are common throughout the islands. Sea levels have remained the same for the last 5 000 years.



Location

Gulf Islands National Park Reserve was established in 2003 as Canada's 40th national park. Located in the southern Strait of Georgia between Vancouver and Victoria, the park is 33 km² in area, scattered over 16 islands and more than 30 islets and reefs. An additional protected zone extends 200 metres out into the ocean beyond the low tide mark. Gulf Islands national park reserve represents the Strait of Georgia Lowlands natural region, and is located in the Pacific Maritime Ecozone.



A park map is currently
being produced.

Vegetation

Many plant species in the Gulf Islands are at the northern extreme of their range, and are not found elsewhere in Canada. Garry oak and arbutus trees -- with their smooth red bark and evergreen leaves -- are unique to this small area of British Columbia. The Garry oak ecosystem is one of Canada's most endangered ecosystems. The dominant ecosystem of the southern Gulf Islands is Douglas fir-balsam-red cedar. Most of the islands' forests are second growth, with only pockets of old growth forest remaining. There are also areas of open wildflower meadows and grassy hilltops, usually interspersed with a Garry oak-arbutus-Douglas fir woodland. Coastal bluffs represent another sensitive ecosystem, one in which plants face disturbance from wave action, currents, tides, winds, heat, storms and salt spray, and must sustain themselves on very thin soils. Scotch broom, Himalayan blackberry and gorse are displacing native species in many areas of the Gulf Islands and present a significant challenge in the sustainability of the park's ecosystems.



For more information, contact:
Gulf Islands National Park Reserve
2220 Harbour Road
Sidney, British Columbia
V8L 2P6
Telephone: (250) 654-4000
Fax: (250) 654-4014
Web site: www.pc.gc.ca/gulf

Wildlife

The wide variety of terrestrial and marine habitats mean that the wildlife found in the Gulf Islands is very diverse. Orcas, porpoises, sea lions, seals and otters call the surrounding waters home. Eagles, falcons and turkey vultures soar overhead. Hundreds of thousands of seabirds, shorebirds and waterfowl thrive on the bounty of the nutrient-rich ocean waters. On the islands, there are no large predators remaining to maintain ecosystem checks and balances. This is causing significant alterations to the islands' ecosystems - such as occurs when an overabundance of deer eliminates the forest understorey (and the habitat it provides) through over-grazing. Overall, the Gulf Islands have 15 endangered species, 10 threatened species and 13 species of special concern. These species vary from butterflies to snakes, shellfish to ferns, and from bats to killer whales. Sharptailed snakes are just one of the endangered species currently being monitored in the national park reserve.

Activities

Visitors to the Gulf Islands enjoy activities such as: kayaking, boating, hiking, camping and tidepool exploration. Cycling is popular on the larger islands, with the hilly topography giving cyclists a good workout. Many islands are accessible only by vessel, giving kayakers and boaters unique opportunities to explore and hike more remote areas and islands. Panoramic views from the top of Mount Waterburton Pike on Saturna Island or Mount Norman on South Pender Island are spectacular, offering vistas of the other Gulf Islands and the neighbouring San Juan Islands in the United States. On clear days, the snow capped Olympic Mountains, volcanic Mount Baker, and the Coast ranges on both Vancouver Island and the mainland can be seen.