

A Time for Recollection: Exploring the Temporality of Victoria's Sea-to-Sea Green Blue Belt Campaign

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Introduction

From 1988 to the early 2000s, the Sea-to-Sea Green Blue Belt campaign successfully protected the lands connecting Tod Inlet, Sooke Basin and Sooke River as a way to promote urban containment and wildlife protection.

- Until now, the work, missions and values, strategies, and wins and failures of those involved in the Sea to Sea Green Blue Belt land acquisitions have not been recorded academically.
- There is a lack of anthropological research specifically looking at greenbelt activists and their relationship with community, land, and time.

The research's purpose will be to understand **1)** The timeline of the Sea-to-Sea Green Blue Belt campaign, and **2)** the temporal experiences of participants.

The research followed an inductive-deductive analysis and was guided by the following frameworks:

- **Future Orientations** (Bryant & Knight, 2019) = Individual and collective experiences of thinking about the future regarding hope, anticipation, expectation, and potentiality.
- **Social Ecology** (Scoones, 1999) = Human agency in transforming the spatial and temporal dynamics of environments

Nine individuals were interviewed from the Sea-to-Sea Greenbelt Society (Sea-to-Sea), the Sierra Club, the Western Canada Wilderness Committee (WCWC), The Land Conservancy (TLC), the Capital Regional District (CRD), as well as a former MLA of the Province of British Columbia.

- Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, a modified photo-voice, and secondary data.
- The researcher had previous relationships with 5 participants and used snowball sampling for the rest of the recruitment. Written and verbal consent was obtained, and interview transcriptions were sent to corresponding participants for review.

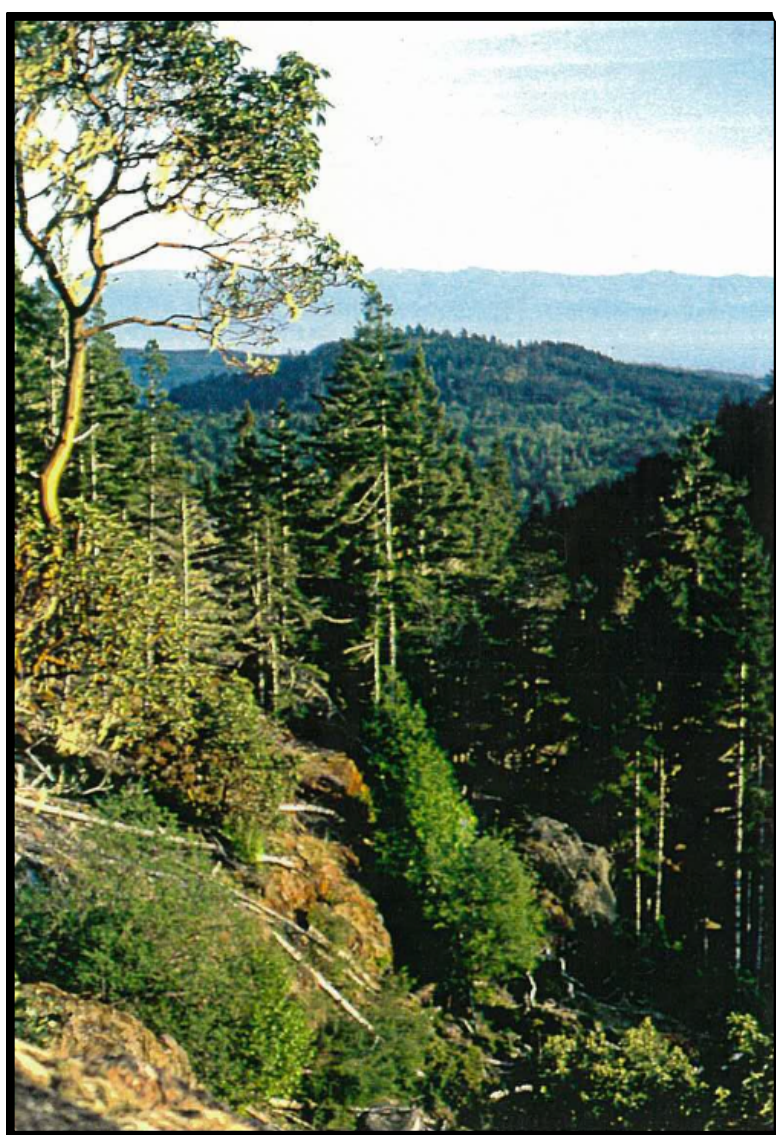


Figure 1: Sooke Hills Wilderness Park of the Sea-to-Sea Green Blue Belt in Victoria, BC (WCWC, 1996). The use and physical appearance of Greenbelts are influenced by the geographical, political, economical, and social contexts of regions.

"It Tasted Like a Meal of Lousy Spaghetti."

In the summer of 1988, the Greater Victoria drinking water ran oily, fishy, and turbid. With his background in soil science, Mehdi knew that this algae bloom was caused by soil erosion, a direct result of logging in the watershed.

- Despite rising cases of stomach aches and diarrhea, the Greater Victoria Water District (GVWD) denied all accusations of partaking in private logging. They responded to any questions concerning their disregard for their mandate of protecting water quality and quantity from human activity with dismissal and harassment.
- As a Sierra Club volunteer, Mehdi and WCWC representatives wrote reports, attended Water Board meetings, and sought legal advice on the GVWD Act. After being challenged by a Water Board member, the team sued the GVWD and won in 1994, with the B.C. Supreme Court declaring logging in the watershed land illegal.



Figure 2: Logging at Goldstream Lake, June 1992 (MacDuffee & Najari, 1994)



Figure 3: Algae in the Sooke Lake Reservoir, September 1992 (MacDuffee & Najari, 1994)

"They Want You to Think of [The Natural World] as Resources Because You Won't Go in and Clear Cut a Forest if You See Them as Your Kin."

Once defeated, the GVWD announced that the watershed's catchment lands would become surplus. Envisioning a greenbelt with the creation of Sooke Hills Wilderness Regional Park, the WCWC and the Sea-to-Sea built public support by writing letters and educational publications, conducting research, speaking at public meetings, working with the media, and producing a Sooke Hills musical.

- In opposition, the Association of B.C. Professional Forester's South Vancouver Island Chapter began its push for a Community Demonstration Forest, where old-growth logging would continue under the guise of public education.
- In 1996, Special Commissioner David Perry was appointed by the Minister of the Environment to consult the public on the GVWD's management. Upon reviewing the Commission's report, the government supported the recommended disbandment of the GVWD, the transfer of water supply responsibility to the CRD, and the full protection of the 4, 100 hectares of the Sooke Hills lands in 1997.



Figure 4: The Sea-to-Sea Green Blue Belt campaign aimed to protect a 20,000 hectare corridor (WCWC, 1999)

"I Would Never Go to a Politician Asking For Money Before It Would Be Political Suicide for Them to Say No."

Pressed for time in terms of price, population growth and corresponding development, TLC joined the campaign to raise over 30 million dollars to acquire private property to complete the Sea-to-Sea Green Blue Belt. They received overwhelming support from the public for their Regional Park Acquisition Fund, a property tax levy of 10\$ per household reserved for buying parkland. Unable to deny the strong public pressure after surveys and a municipal election poll, the CRD established the tax in 2000. A CRD Master Plan followed in 2001 to outline key park areas, including within the Sea-to-Sea Green Blue Belt, and to suggest acquiring strategies depending on the required funding.

- In 2001, a \$5.3 million Sooke Hills property of 1,380 hectares was purchased within 8 months by TLC with a contribution of \$3 million from the CRD and \$2 million from the federal government. This completed a critical link between Sooke Hills Wilderness Regional Park and Sooke Mountain Provincial Park.
- In 2004, TLC was able to raise \$11 thousand in public donations within just 72 hours to secure the purchase of the \$3 million Sooke Potholes (63 hectares). The Sooke municipality had initially blocked the use of the acquisition fund for the purchase, due to interest in development and pressure from 4-wheel drivers in their community. However, this section was critical for the protection of river habitats.

"It's Like You're Standing on the Edge of a River and You've Got to Get Across It. If You Don't, the Wolf Is Going to Eat You."

The participants' temporal experiences during the campaign were shaped by how they **1)** remembered their past and **2)** valued their future.

1. Nature as Home

All participants had close relationships with nature and/or activism from a young age, and they stressed that this connection was crucial for their environmental awareness as adults. In a way, the success of their campaign has ensured that Victoria's landscape, both spacial and cultural, continues this kinship between the wild and future generations.

- "I've been going back there [the forest] regularly. For me, it's like missing a friend."

The finite tangible value placed on the natural world was argued to be a result of spatial disconnection. Many explained that by framing their spiritual and wellness practices around the forest, they become one with the rhythm of life in the Greenbelt.

- "I told myself I'm going to go live in one place and not move because I want to lay a little bit out of it... If you don't have roots, you can't love the place. You go along with the destruction of it."

2. Leaving a Legacy

While the majority were skeptical about future human survival and agency when it comes to stopping environmental destruction, nature's resilience to human action, in terms of returning once left alone, was a source of reassurance for participants when discussing the fate of the world.

- "Personally I felt like, "Okay, I can die now, I made it". And I still feel that way."

Because the Sea-to-Sea Green Blue Belt is made of public parks, as opposed to private land like the Ontario Greenbelt, the eternal life of the forest rests on the collective expectation that it will remain untouched.

- "When I talked to people that were involved in it, we all agree it was the best time of our lives. And it still feels alive because every time you look out there, it's there. And every time you walk in it, it's there. And so much is lost all the time. So much is changing all the time. It's rare to be able to go back to something that's still the same."

Conclusion

The Sea-to-Sea Green Blue Belt will remain a timeless tribute to the passionate individuals dedicated to preserving the natural world. Embodying a success story, this landscape can act as a source of inspiration for future environmental activists.

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