

LETTERS

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Good compromise for lagoon boating

Re: Wildlife service limiting lagoon access, News, Nov. 6 2009.

Thank you for the informative article published regarding the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) establishing wildlife refuge areas within the Esquimalt Lagoon Migratory Bird Sanctuary.

As co-ordinator of the Esquimalt Lagoon Stewardship Initiative (ELSI), I would like to provide some background to issues raised in this article. ELSI has been working in the community since 2001 with the goal of achieving a balance between recreational use and wildlife needs at Esquimalt Lagoon. As the regional population grows, maintaining this balance has become increasingly more difficult and requires everyone's co-operation.

Boating activity and areas within the lagoon regularly used by boats have expanded in recent years. Concerned residents have reported numerous incidents of birds being disturbed and leaving the area when boats approach. In response, CWS commissioned studies of bird distribution on the lagoon, and the initial recommendation was to create a 100 metre "no go" buffer area around the entire perimeter of the lagoon.

In the interests of creating a balance between the wildlife needs and the recreation community, CWS and ELSI held lengthy discussions with West Shore Rowing and Paddling, an ELSI member group quoted in the Nov. 6 article. These discussions resulted in CWS proposing the establishment of four wildlife refuge areas within the lagoon, rather than a continuous "no go" buffer.

The areas represent less than 25 per cent of the lagoon, and are the areas most frequently and consistently used by birds for resting and foraging.

Boaters are still able to use most of the lagoon, including a 1200 m rower training course. Several groups that use the paddling centre have stated that the wildlife refuge areas will not affect their programs.

The establishment of wildlife refuge areas on Esquimalt Lagoon represents a compromise necessary to achieve a balance that considers the welfare of the birds that rely on the resources of this beautiful lagoon. Our co-operation will help ensure that the lagoon remains an oasis for wildlife and people far into the future.

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