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# Paddlers worry boating ban in the works for Esquimalt Lagoon

Some boaters who use Esquimalt Lagoon are worried a plan to buoy off areas of the waterway will eventually lead to a ban on kayaking or rowing in the popular recreation area.

DEBRA BRASH, TIMES COLONIST



**Rowers worry restrictions proposed by the Canadian Wildlife Service to protect birds could lead to a ban.**

But officials say while there are preliminary discussions about enhanced protection for spots frequented by migratory birds, a ban on boating isn't in the cards.

"They've been trying to do this as quietly and as quickly as possible," said Brett Malcolm, centre manager of Go Rowing and Paddling, a non-profit that operates paddling programs.

The primary boat-free zone would be at the south end of the lagoon. Others under discussion are near the boathouse at Royal Roads and near the north entrance to the lagoon, Malcolm said.

"They won't disallow you from boating in the lagoon, but they won't allow you to boat into the lagoon or boat out of the lagoon. They said they might make some concessions to allow traffic to come in and out, but that's still to be seen."

The restrictions are proposed by the Canadian Wildlife Service in co-operation with Esquimalt Lagoon Stewardship Initiative.

The Esquimalt Lagoon Migratory Bird Sanctuary has been in existence since the 1930s, said Dave Smith, protected areas manager for the wildlife service.

He said buoys would mark off areas of higher bird concentration. "The idea was we would ask people not to go into these areas and disturb them."

The buoyed-off areas shouldn't affect the rowing groups, which primarily use a channel in the middle of the lagoon, he said.

The goal is to concentrate boat-launch points to minimize the impact on migratory birds, he added. "We have to find a balance that can allow human uses that don't negatively impact the conservation values for migratory birds and I believe we can do that if we all work together and we all have open minds."

The earliest any restrictions could be imposed is this summer. Nothing will happen until the public and user groups are fully consulted, he said, rejecting the idea of a ban on boating on the lagoon.

Malcolm said one of the problems is that there's been no public consultation so far.

"We want to have some zones that are not buoyed off zones but zones that people understand that at heightened times of the year they are important zones for birds."

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