

Departure Creek and You

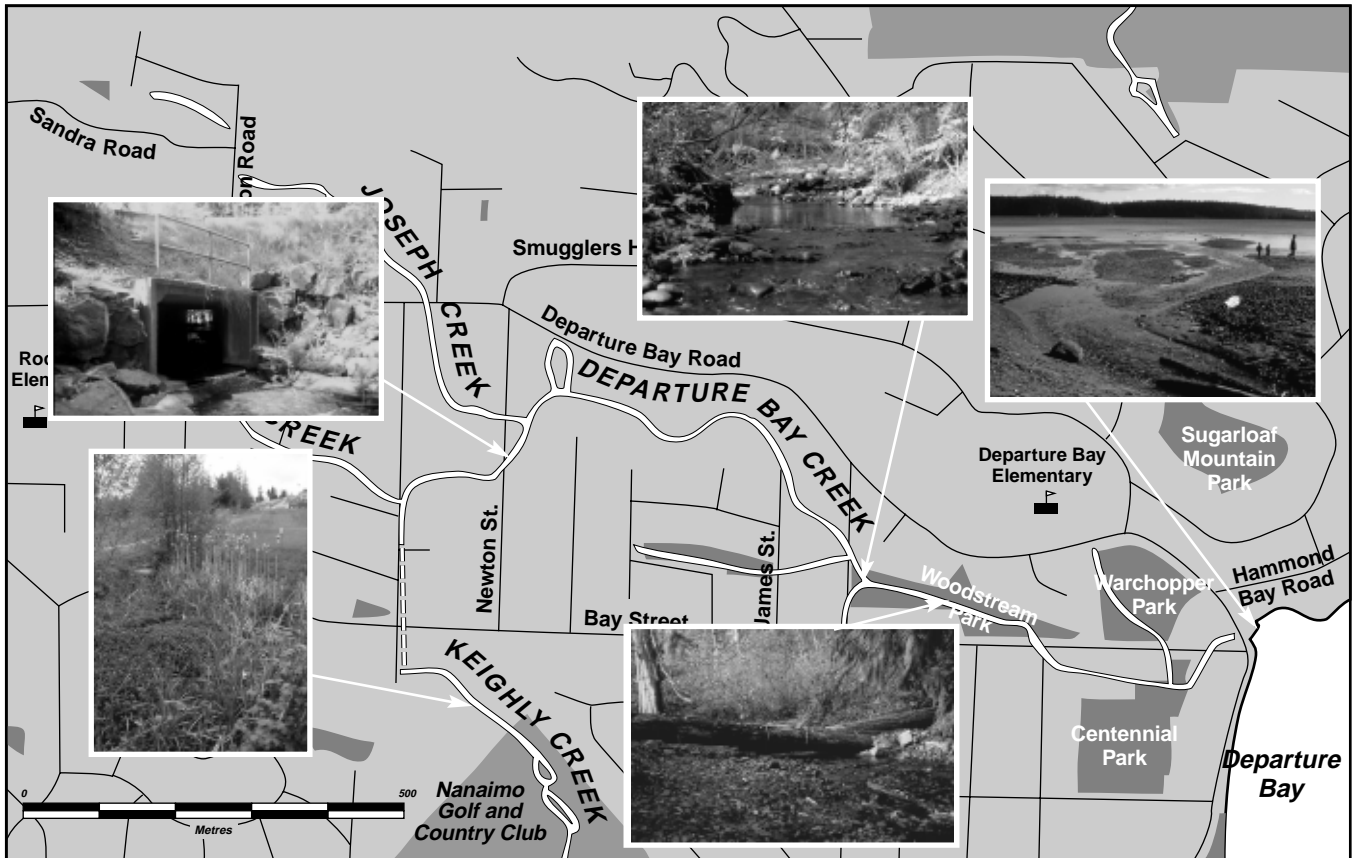


Photo credits: C. Thirkill

Where is Departure Creek?

Departure Creek originates as two tributaries – Joseph and Keighly Creeks – in the Country Club area of North Nanaimo. Dropping steeply through residential neighborhoods, the creek runs parallel to Departure Bay Road and through a forested ravine in Woodstream Park, before it crosses Bay Street and Centennial Park and discharges onto the beach at Departure Bay. About 3 km long, Departure Creek drains most of the Departure Bay neighborhood, a watershed of approximately 3 square kilometers.

Fish and Wildlife

Departure Creek is home to coho salmon, cutthroat trout, stickleback and sculpins. Coho are restricted to the lower part but cutthroat trout live throughout the entire creek. Pileated woodpeckers and black tail deer are common in the forested ravine. Raccoons and a variety of songbirds also live through most parts of the riparian (streamside) areas.



What's Happening

Almost all of the watershed has been developed for housing, and that means roof tops and paved road surfaces have replaced most of the natural vegetation. This in turn means that rather than being absorbed into soil, rain water is diverted into a network of ditches and storm sewers which run directly into the creek. As a consequence, during heavy rainfalls, water flow in the creek increases dramatically, resulting in erosion of the stream bed and bank. Silt and soil are washed into the creek which can smother fish eggs and other aquatic life.

Local groups are trying to help Departure Creek survive these and other effects of urbanization. Since 1995, native trees and shrubs have been planted in Woodstream and Centennial Parks to stabilize eroding banks and to increase shading and cover along the creek. Rock “weirs” and logs were placed in the channel to provide habitat for salmon and trout.

How Can I Help?

The following "actions" can help make Departure Creek a better place for fish, wildlife and people.



LOSS OF STREAMBANK

VEGETATION: Streamside vegetation and root systems filter out contaminants and stabilize banks. Trees and shrubs also provide, shade, shelter and food sources for fish and wildlife. When vegetation is removed, banks erode, temperatures increase, water levels fluctuate and fish habitat is lost.

ACTION: Preserve existing natural streamside vegetation and replant degraded areas.



REMOVAL OF WOOD:

Large pieces of downed wood provide shelter and food for fish, animals and birds. Logs in the stream create pools and stabilize the stream bed.

ACTION: Avoid removing stumps and dead trees in or along the stream when they do not create a fish barrier or a hazard to people.



MANAGING RUNOFF: Water quantity and quality are often reduced when the surrounding neighbourhood replaces natural

vegetation with pavement, houses and other hard surfaces. Surface water no longer filters slowly through the soil and vegetation, but instead, runs off these surfaces very quickly into storm drains, ditches and streams.

ACTION: Use gravel, loose bricks or flagstones instead of impermeable surfaces like pavement and concrete whenever possible. Let rainwater from roofs drain into the soil or use it in gardens.



WATER QUALITY: Clean water with high levels of oxygen is essential to a healthy stream, but fertilizers, pesticides, car

oil, and other wastes can end up in storm drains and then streams.

ACTION: Keep fuel spills, paint products and detergents away from storm drains. Reduce the use of pesticides and fertilizers and control soil erosion, manure and septic runoff so it doesn't flow into streams.



PET DROPPINGS: Disposing of animal waste close to creeks and riparian areas can contaminate the water.

ACTION: Don't dump pet wastes near the creek. Use "baggies" to pick up after your pet in public areas.



GARBAGE ACCUMULATION:

Plastic containers, tires, newspapers, batteries, metal scraps etc. can reduce water quality, damage habitat and make the stream unattractive.

ACTION: Remove garbage from the streams and rivers but leave woody debris in place.



UNNATURAL BARRIERS:

Structures such as culverts and retaining walls along the creek can block fish movement,

increase bank erosion or disturb stream habitat if not installed properly.

ACTION: Modify or remove those structures which threaten water flow, fish access or bank stability.

WHAT'S IN STORE FOR DEPARTURE CREEK?

OR...

It's another rainy winter in the year 2020, and Departure Creek is raging again. After every rainstorm, sediment plugs up the channel, raising fears of serious flooding. Over the last 20 years, the creek has doubled its width as a result of banks eroding, and pools where coho fry used to swim have long filled in. Sunlight beating on the exposed creek has caused it to dry up in the silted up areas.

On a field trip, students from Rock City School are surprised to learn that woodpeckers and deer used to live in the neighborhood.



The coho have returned to Departure Creek in record numbers in the summer of 2020.

Thanks to the efforts of local citizens over the last 25 years, stream habitat has been improved, streamside vegetation replanted, stormwater systems upgraded, and stream beds and banks stabilized.

Residents often walk the shaded interpretive trails in Woodstream Park to watch the coho spawning. Songbirds, great blue herons, deer and mink are regularly seen during strolls through the neighbourhood.

The Future is Ours to Create

Whatever Departure Creek will look like in the future depends on working together.

Efforts need to focus on planting native vegetation throughout the watershed, using better stormwater management measures, and generally observing what is going on in and around the stream. Working together, residents, community groups, and the City can restore and maintain a healthy Departure Creek.

For more information on voluntary stewardship, contact the Nanaimo Area Land Trust (see below).

If you have an idea to share or would like more information, contact one of the following:



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