

Bowker Creek's Journey

Did you know that an urban creek flows underground through some of the most urbanized parts of the capital region? Bowker Creek begins at its headwaters at the University of Victoria, then disappears underground for the majority of its length, rushing through pipes under busy roads like Shelbourne Street and below the Hillside Mall parking lot. It emerges to the surface several times during its journey, through parts of Cedar Hill Park, Browning Park, near Richmond School and St. Patrick's school. Through Oak Bay it travels under the tennis bubble then surfaces through a newly restored creek bed beside Oak Bay High. The creek's journey ends at its vibrant estuary near Willow's Beach.

Bowker Creek is one of Greater Victoria's most urbanized creeks, and undoubtedly one of its most loved. The creek's story of degradation and its possibility for revival has inspired remarkable action and commitment among citizens, community groups and local governments. Ten years ago, the CRD worked with the municipalities of Saanich, Oak Bay and Victoria along with numerous environmental groups, community associations, and institutional partners to develop the Bowker Creek Blueprint, a 100 year plan for renewal of the Bowker Creek watershed.

Ten years into the implementation of the Blueprint, many of its short-term actions have been achieved. Successes in rainwater management, control of invasive plants, and restoration projects have helped improve the health of the creek. The creek has also built important community ties, as groups like the Friends of Cedar Hill Park and the Friends of Bowker Creek gather for regular weeding and planting work parties. Recently, the Friends of Bowker Creek imagined the possibility of chum salmon once again swimming through the creek, and have created a Streamkeeper's group to try to make this dream a reality.

As the Blueprint enters its second decade, new momentum is building that could bring the revitalization of the creek to a whole new level. A study looking at the feasibility of daylighting buried sections of Bowker Creek revealed exciting opportunities for opening up sections of the creek that are currently piped underground. Bringing buried waterways back to the surface can create habitat for plants and animals, improve water quality, and give the community a valuable public open space. With the predicted increase in severe weather events due to climate change, daylighted creeks can also help to prevent flooding, and offer an important tool in climate adaptation.

With so many community champions rooting for the creek and the possibility of more daylighting on the horizon, there is a lot to celebrate about the future of Bowker Creek. For more information about Bowker Creek and ways to get involved, go to <https://www.crd.bc.ca/bowker-creek-initiative>.

