



Photo: Chris Christie

Átl'ka7tsem / Howe Sound Biosphere Region

UNESCO Nomination

**Executive
Summary**



What is a UNESCO Biosphere Region?

UNESCO Biosphere Regions are sites with inspiring, global unique and biodiverse ecosystems, protected by locally developed strategies of sustainable development.

There are currently over 701 UNESCO Biosphere Regions worldwide, and 18 in Canada. In 2000, Clayoquot Sound and Mt. Arrowsmith on Vancouver Island were designated Biosphere Regions.

While each Biosphere Region is unique, all have three main functions demonstrating:

- **Conservation & Protection of Biodiversity**
- **Sustainable Development**
- **Education, Research and Monitoring**

Biosphere Regions are learning sites that inspire a positive future for people and nature.



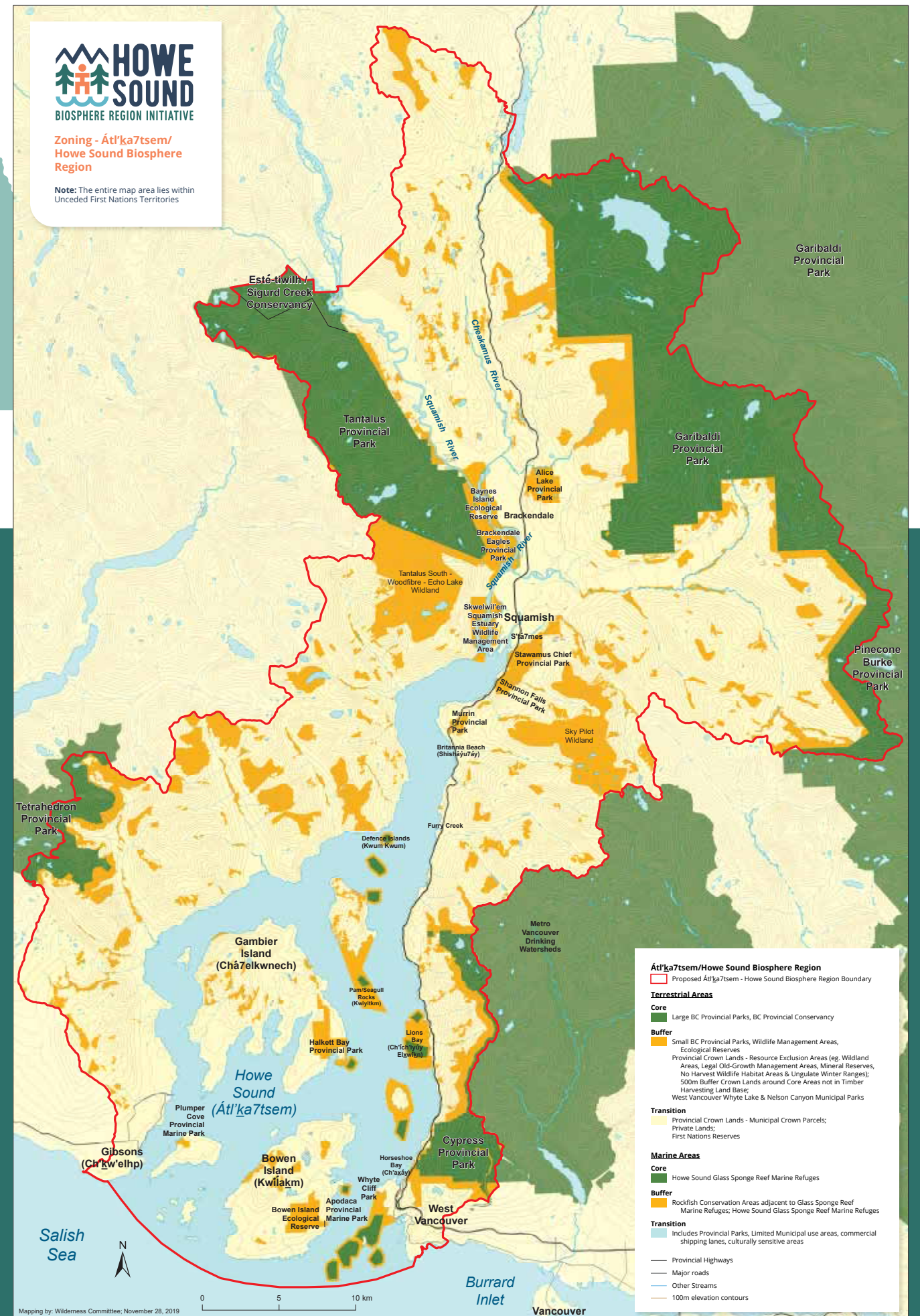
The location

The total area of the proposed Atl'ka7tsem/ Howe Sound Biosphere Region is approximately 218,723 ha, of which 84% is terrestrial and 16% is comprised of the marine environments of Howe Sound.

Every Biosphere Region must have three zones: core, buffer and transition. In Atl'ka7tsem/ Howe Sound, 19% of the the five Provincial Parks qualify as core protected areas on land. An additional 14% in enveloping buffer zones are adjacent to the protected areas. Buffer Zones are managed in a way that supports conservation objectives of the core areas.

The remaining 67% of the region is in the transition zone where sustainable use takes place.

In the marine environment, special attention has been paid to the Rockfish Conservation Areas and the recently discovered glass sponge reefs qualify as core and buffer areas.



The Howe Sound Biosphere Region Initiative Society (HSBRIS)

The Howe Sound Biosphere Region Initiative Society, or HSBRIS, is a registered not-for-profit organization that will play a central role in facilitating collaboration among its partners at work in the region, including organizations, governments and First Nations. Together, they share a passion for the natural beauty, incredible biodiversity, rich cultural heritage and great sustainable economic potential of Átl'ka7tsem/Howe Sound.

Our Vision

Our Vision is to see all communities within the Átl'ka7tsem/Howe Sound Biosphere Region (AHSBR) living sustainably within a healthy ecosystem, that has a diversified economy, and vibrant cultures.

Our Mission

To work collaboratively towards the Vision by providing logistical support for research, monitoring, education, and training that not only promotes biodiversity conservation within the terrestrial and marine environments but also promotes sustainable economic development, with high priority given to nurturing social, cultural and environmental values



sitka foundation

The project was undertaken with financial support from individual donations and the Sitka Foundation.

Full nomination document is available upon request howesoundbri@gmail.com.

This is our story.

Since time immemorial, the Átl'ka7tsem/Howe Sound inlet and adjacent mountains and valleys have been the traditional territory of the *Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw* (Squamish Nation), and these lands remain unceded to this day. After decades of industrial development and pollution, a public outcry in the 1980s led to environmental reforms and, over the past decade, a stunning recovery of marine life. The return of whales and dolphins to the inlet, and the discovery of internationally significant glass sponge reefs by citizen and government scientists, has swelled public pride and inspired further conservation and scientific efforts.

This emerging reconciliation between people and Nature now forms a basis for relationship-building and reconciliation between local settler culture and First Nations. Energized by Nature's recovery, yet concerned that no single jurisdiction has political responsibility for this place, a Howe Sound Community Forum of local elected officials has for two decades sought a comprehensive approach for the region. This Forum has brought together a broad coalition of interests – local communities, First Nations, senior governments, businesses, industries,



Gambier Island Forum, photo: K. Hemmelgarn

organizations, and citizens - who come together to learn, to share, and to explore a way forward.

The success of the Forum to create community in Átl'ka7tsem/Howe Sound has recently inspired major investments by NGOs and governments in the form of environmental and social health reports about the region, a regional conservation strategy, a provincial cumulative effects assessment, the development of a marine database, and new protected areas. This progress has paralleled significant advances by local First Nations to plan land use, protect Wild Spirit Places and other cultural lands, create new economic ventures in forestry and land development, and promote language use and culture. Today, the conversation in Átl'ka7tsem/Howe Sound between First Nations and settler culture sits within a larger pan-Canadian dialogue that seeks truth-telling, reconciliation and relationship-building.

This enhanced knowledge infrastructure, community building, and strengthened relationships with First Nations sets the table for a natural next step for Átl'ka7tsem/Howe Sound – a UNESCO Biosphere Region designation

The Squamish were a travelling people. They paddled up and down the Sound, along the rivers and inlets, and to the islands. One name for paddling up the sound *Átl'ka7tsem* pronounced At-Kat-sum - and the other name for paddling down, *Texwnewets'*, pronounced Chock-Now-it.

that will formalize our biodiversity conservation commitments, strengthen First Nations – settler relations, and build capacity for community building, decision making, education and research. This application for Biosphere Region designation carries the collective support of local communities, First Nations, regional governments, provincial and federal governments, and non-government organizations – a true testimonial to our community desire to achieve this status and commit to a legacy for generations to come.

The Nomination Process

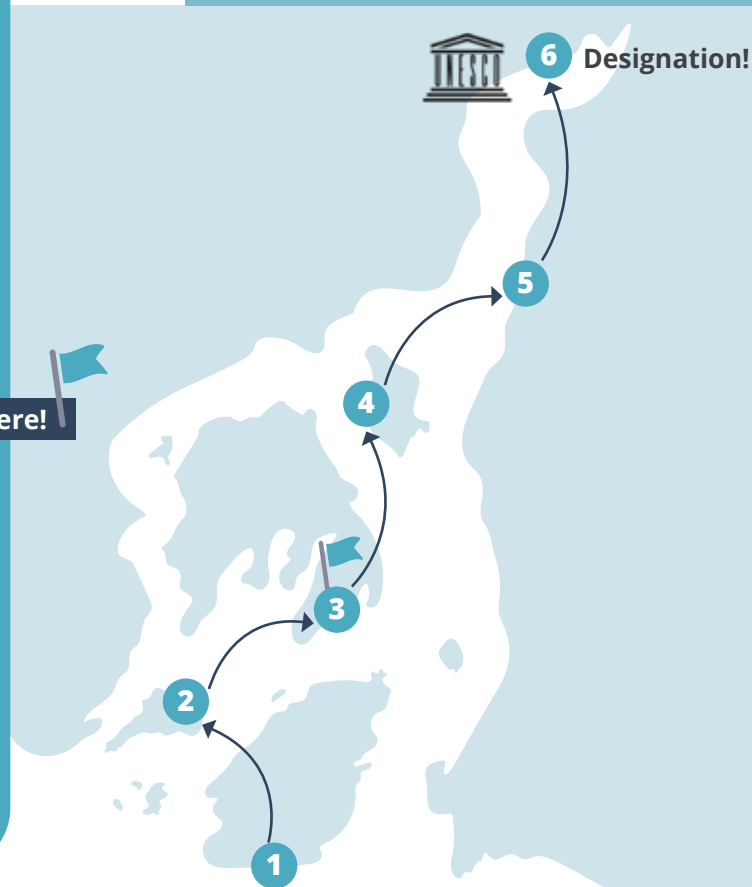
It is not easy to create a Biosphere Region. The process requires a rigorous data collection and extensive public involvement. The UNESCO Biosphere Region nomination form has 20 sections. It takes an average of eight years for an area to be designated.

More than living up to UNESCO – and National – objectives, is the expectation that all Biosphere Regions will participate actively in the national and international Biosphere Region networks. The primary door to participation in these networks is through the Canadian Biosphere Regions Association (CBRA).

Steps in the nomination process

- 1 **DECEMBER 2019**
Submitted complete Nomination Dossier to the Canadian Commission for UNESCO
- 2 **JULY 2020**
Re-submitted updated Dossier based on comments from reviewers appointed by CCUNESCO
- 3 **SEPTEMBER 2020**
Received formal endorsement from CCUNESCO. Document forwarded to UNESCO Paris
- 4 **SEPTEMBER - MAY 2021**
Review by UNESCO's International Advisory Coordination Committee
- 5 **APRIL/MAY 2021**
Recommendation
- 6 **SUMMER/FALL 2021**
Designation

We are here!



Project Lead Ruth Simons attended the EuroMAB conference in Dublin in 2019 and has actively participated in the Canadian Biosphere Region Association events.

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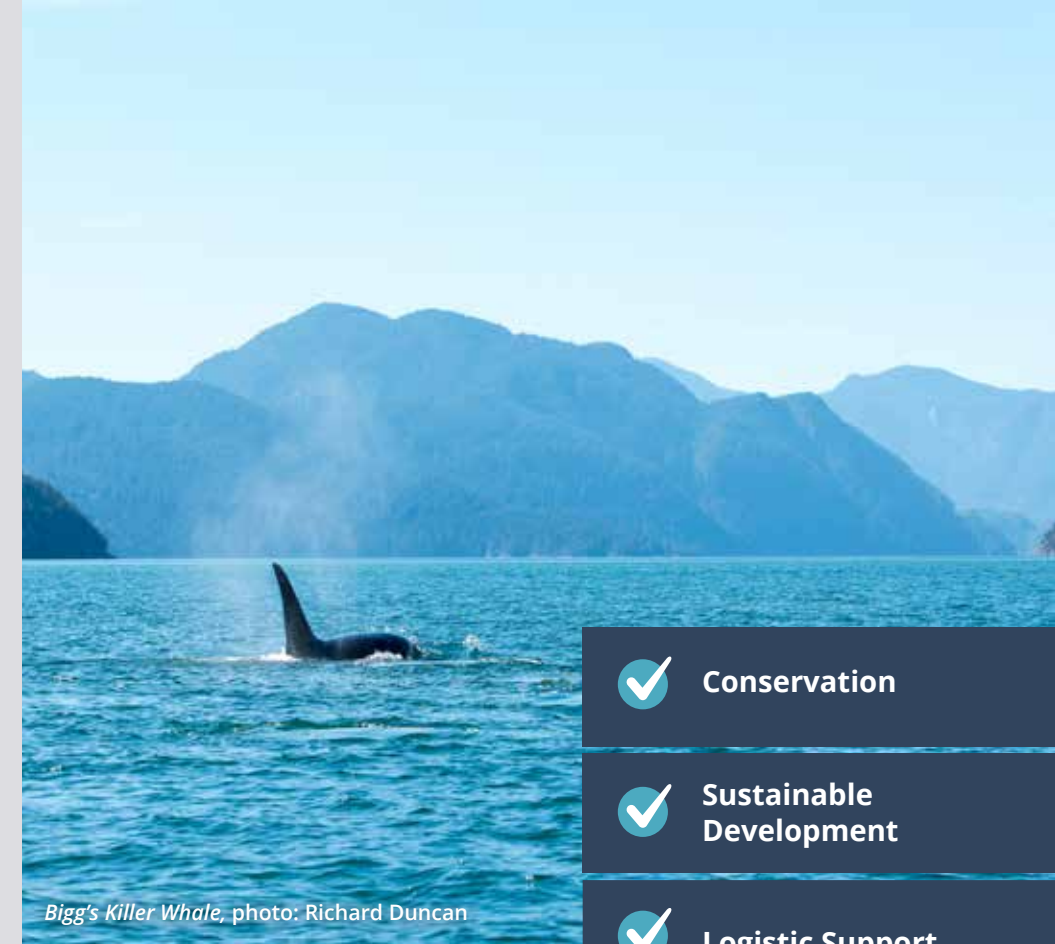
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Bigg's Killer Whale, photo: Richard Duncan

- ✓ Conservation
- ✓ Sustainable Development
- ✓ Logistic Support

Fulfillment of the three functions of Biosphere Regions

The communities, First Nations, governments and non-government organizations of Átl'ka7tsem/Howe Sound are committed to facilitating the ecological recovery and the future integrity of the terrestrial and marine ecosystems in this important region. Following a century of environmental deterioration, the adoption of a strong community-based **conservation** ethic during the past four decades has born witness to a significant renewal of ecological health and an emerging dedication from all sectors to sustainable resource **development**. Partnerships and collaboration among all involved parties within the fabric of a 'common vision for a common geography' have been the hallmarks of this progress. Home to twelve youth camps for over 40 years, Átl'ka7tsem/Howe Sound continues to be a place for people to connect with nature and the soul. Continued **logistical support** provided by the mandate and structure of a Biosphere Region will foster the collective allegiance among the Átl'ka7tsem/Howe Sound Biosphere Region Initiative and it's partners to embrace the importance of balancing conservation and development in this most special place.

Meeting the Criteria for Designation as a Biosphere Region



In preparing the nomination dossier for a Biosphere Region, it is necessary to demonstrate to UNESCO that sufficient lands that are ecologically representative of the region are already set aside and are appropriately managed for conservation, and that existing and future management regimes in the region support and promote sustainable development for the wellbeing of people, the economy and the environment.



Demonstration of Sustainable Development

The AHSBR is well served by many community plans and regional strategies that create a sound foundation for sustainable development. For example, approximately 74% of the AHSBR lies within the Sea-to-Sky Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) which lays the ground work for a strong and sustainable future. This LRMP is complimented and further strengthened by the *Xay Temixw* Land Use plan which presents the vision of the *Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw* (Squamish Nation) for their traditional territory, and for the conservation and protection of their special places.



Tetrahedron Park, photo: R. Simons



Representing the Ecological Mosaic

The Átl'ka7tsem/Howe Sound Biosphere Region (AHSBR) incorporates the full scope of the area's ecological mosaic, in its land- and sea-scapes, and in the highly diverse flora and fauna of its terrestrial and marine environments. This rich mosaic is highly representative of the biogeographic characteristics of the Region as described at the international, national and provincial level.



Seal feeding on anchovy school, photo: B. Turner



Role in Biological Diversity Conservation

It is a marvel that this extensive biodiversity of the AHSBR is found in such close proximity to the 2.5 million people of Metro Vancouver. In less than a one-hour drive, urbanites can be in the habitat of grizzly bears and wolves, and witness the feeding on salmon by thousands of bald eagles. Recreational divers can be in the company of Pacific giant octopus, colorful sponges and corals without travelling far from home.



Grizzly bear on Squamish River sandbar, photo: J. Buchanan



Conservation through Appropriate Size and Zonation

Of the total area of 218,723 hectares in AHSBR, 33% of the Reserve is within the combined terrestrial and marine Core Areas and Buffer Zones. Additional lands and marine areas are also protected or conserved in the Transition Zone. There is every confidence, therefore, that the AHSBR is large enough and has an effective zoning configuration to meet the long-term conservation objectives while also working with local communities and stakeholders to demonstrate sustainable development.



Quillback Rockfish, photo: A. Taylor



Organizational Arrangements

The AHSBR is blessed with a wide range of organizational arrangements already in place, with more envisioned for the future, to implement the functions of a Biosphere Region and to facilitate the collaboration and co-management among governments, First Nations and the NGO community necessary to move forward with a common vision for the region. Further, there is a wealth of information available on Átl'ka7tsem/Howe Sound that informs decision-making. Resources for this work are sourced from provincial and federal governments, non-government organizations, environmental consulting firms, citizen scientists, regional districts and universities.

The education system is also well equipped to help facilitate this collaboration through the engagement of young people and reconciliation with First Nations, focussed on the revitalization of their culture and language. For example, through partnership, support, and a strong mandate, *Kwi Awt Stelmexw* is an educational program designed to strengthen all aspects of *Skwxwú7mesh* heritage, language, culture and art. *Aya7ayulh Chet* (Cultural Journeys) is a Kindergarten to Grade 6 program of choice guided by the principle that all learning is grounded in understanding the connected relationship of language, land and culture. With its growing population and wealth of natural resources located on Metro Vancouver's doorstep, the region is, and will continue to be, a place for learning and discovery that is highly attractive to a wide array of government and university researchers and NGO groups as well as youth camps and field schools.



Howe Sound Community Forum, photo: K. Hemmelgarn



Mechanisms for Implementation

On the land of AHSBR, the mechanisms for implementing the intents of the Core Areas and the Buffer and Transition zones are already in place through the many laws, regulations, policies and procedures practiced and enforced by provincial government agencies, local governments, municipalities and First Nations. A Biosphere Region does not alter these instruments, although they may evolve over time, but works with them and their implementing agencies to work toward the Reserve's common Vision.

Similarly, in the marine environment, where the water column is in federal jurisdiction and the sea floor is managed by the BC government, the Biosphere Region will work with federal and provincial government agencies in their management of Core Areas and the Buffer and Transition zone areas in the ocean.

There will never be a single administrative authority for the Biosphere Region, but upon its approval by UNESCO, a priority will be to facilitate the preparation of a comprehensive and holistic land and marine use plan for the entire AHSBR region that can then be implemented by the relevant authorities within their respective jurisdictions. The role of HSBRS and the AHSBR Roundtable will be central to facilitating the collaboration and cooperation that will be necessary to achieve the Vision.



Ceremony from *Kwi awt stelmexw* students after their completion of *Skw xwú7mesh sníchim* (Squamish language) program, photo: J. Williams.



Monitoring in the Squamish estuary, photo courtesy of the Squamish River Watershed Society.

Acknowledgements

The nomination document is content-rich due to the generous contribution of time from many authors, researchers, reviewers, and contributors.



Ruth Simons, Joyce Williams with MP Patrick Weiler delivering the nomination document at the offices of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, Ottawa. December 2, 2019

Many thanks to the professionals, individuals and organizations for their photographs. Special mention goes to The Wilderness Committee for their contribution of resources, skills and patience in producing many versions of the boundary maps.

This nomination is produced mostly through “in kind” donations of time, and we thank the many individual donors and the Sitka Foundation for their financial contributions.

I am very grateful to the project team and founding directors for this journey starting in 2016 towards UNESCO Biosphere Region designation. It has been enjoyable, rewarding and a demonstration of the collaborative and cooperative working relationships that exists amongst our community of communities.

I acknowledge and thank the Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw Squamish Nation members for collaboration and support as we chart a new course together for future generations.

**Ruth Simons, Project Lead, Manager and content contributor,
Howe Sound Biosphere Region Initiative Society**



Contact Us

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A copy of the complete nomination dossier is available on request.