

# Comprehensive Planning: progress continues but collaboration remains key

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## What is happening?

Since 2017, there has been encouraging progress towards a comprehensive plan that will direct stewardship and growth for Átl'ka7tsem/Txwnéwu7ts/Howe Sound. Defining the boundary for the Átl'ka7tsem/Txwnéwu7ts/Howe Sound region is an important step to allow further planning to occur.

Several important tools have either been developed or are in progress. These include the Provincial Cumulative Effects Assessment, the Ocean Watch Health Rating, the creation of the Atl'ka7tsem/Howe Sound Marine Conservation Assessment online map, and the commitment of local governments



Howe Sound Community Forum, April 26, 2019, at Camp Fircom, Gambier Island.  
(Credit: Kyla Hemmelgarn)

through the Howe Sound Community Forum (HSCF) to develop an Atl'ka7tsem/Howe Sound Marine Reference Guide. These are all important tools designed to better inform decision makers about the region and support their decisions to enhance nature and the lives of the people who reside in the Átl'ka7tsem/Tx-

wnéwu7ts/Howe Sound region. In addition, work continues towards the goal of Átl'ka7tsem/Txwnéwu7ts/Howe Sound to be designated as a United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) biosphere region.

## What is the current status?

At the May 2017 Howe Sound Community Forum, members agreed to form the Ocean Watch Task Force (OWTF). The OWTF is comprised of members of local governments, First Nations, government representatives, planning staff and NGOs. Members meet regularly to advance the recommendations presented in Ocean Watch Howe Sound Edition (OWHS) 2017. The OWTF has been focusing primarily on local governance tools and opportunities, with the goal of increasing the protection of the natural environment in Átl'ka7tsem/Txwnéwu7ts/Howe Sound and contributing towards more holistic comprehensive planning in the region. The OWTF reports back at the twice-yearly HSCF (see Resources).

The Ministry of Forests, Lands, and Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development (FLNRORD) South Coast produced the Provincial Cumulative Effects Assessment (CEA) project of the Átl'ka7tsem/Txwnéwu7ts/Howe Sound Region.<sup>1</sup> The project assessed the current condition of five environmental and wildlife values. The CEA provides general information for all levels of government to consider within their authorizations, management and planning in the Átl'ka7tsem/Txwnéwu7ts/Howe Sound region. FLNRORD is incorporating the results from these

assessments into new decision-support/integrated monitoring tools that will continue to improve integrated monitoring and assessment throughout the South Coast.

The David Suzuki Foundation, in collaboration with Ocean Wise, and together with scientists, individuals and government agencies, developed the Atl'ka7tsem/Howe Sound Marine Conservation Assessment online map (see Resources). This map features more than 140 layers of data, ranging from the biophysical (e.g.,



Ruth Simons, Drew Copeland, Bob Turner (Credit: Tracey Saxby)

hydrology, oceanography) to cultural, ecological and human use (e.g., recreation, economic, proposed use, etc.). The project uses a computer modelling analysis called Marxan, which is a decision-support tool used in conservation planning to help identify priority conservation areas. It is compatible with both the province's CEA project as well as the Marine Reference Guide. This valuable resource highlights marine biodiversity hot spots throughout the region. Consequently, 34 high-priority conservation areas have been recommended for protection and management. The maps are publicly available via the above website and support further community dialogue.

The OWHS 2017 included an [Action Plan](#) (see Resources). At the top of the list was the development of a Marine Reference Guide (MRG). Under the leadership of the OWTF and the Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw/ Squamish Nation, and together with Ocean Wise, the David Suzuki Foundation and Make Way, a project director was appointed to establish this project. A Steering Committee, consisting of nine representatives from various sectors in the region, oversees the development of the Guide. Building on the Marine Conservation map, the MRG is forming an online interactive map that displays spatial data associated with the Sound's marine environment and watersheds (see Resources). This will support decision making, marine social planning and community education by allowing the visualization of how ecological and human values interact and overlap. Narrative resources that describe best practices will enhance the value of the MRG for local residents, scientists, boaters, planners and policymakers, and help to protect significant ecological and human values associated with the aquatic environment in the Sound.



Local governments and many organisations are working together to protect beautiful Átl'ka7tsem/Txwnéwu7ts/Howe Sound. (Credit: Amanda Weltman)

Support and progress towards the Átl'ka7tsem/Txwnéwu7ts/Howe Sound region being designated a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve continues to advance. The Howe Sound Biosphere Region Initiative Society (HSBRIS) (see Resources) is fostering support and commitment using a roundtable governance model that works towards objectives of comprehensive planning, sustainable development, and providing logistic support.

While the authority for decision making remains with the various legal entities governing the region, the roundtable governance committee could be considered the most inclusive and representative decision-making body to help steer the direction of the Biosphere

Region. The representatives appointed to the roundtable, co-chaired by First Nation and non-First Nation members, will represent various sectors in the Sound. The body will consist of elected or appointed representatives from local government, First Nations, industry, tourism, BC Government, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada, as well as conservancy organizations, academia and science. Qualifications for appointment to the roundtable will be based on commitment to the objectives of UNESCO and the framework of the Man and the Biosphere program, and the objectives of the Átl'ka7tsem/Txwnéwu7ts/Howe Sound Biosphere Reserve.

In the meantime, the mandate of the current provincial government is to modernize land use planning.

This modernization, combined with the ongoing work of reconciliation with First Nations, will also influence the overall future of the region. More than ever, good relationships and effective collaboration are essential in shaping the future of the Átl'ka7tsem/Txwnéwu7ts/Howe Sound Region for generations to come.

Fostering cooperation between the “community of communities” has continued through ongoing Howe Sound Community Forums, and through the development of these various tools and groups, and many gatherings. Consequently, the network around the Sound has strengthened the awareness of this area as a unique and special region.

## What are the potential impacts of climate change on comprehensive planning?

Winter storms of 2018/2019 were evidence of the unpredictable intensity of storms and resulting consequences. Extreme wind gusts combined with king tides caused unprecedented damage in Átl'ka7tsem/Txwnéwu7ts/Howe Sound. The storms caused erosion to shorelines resulting in damaged and sinking boats; broken, sinking docks and wharves; and enormous amounts of debris landing on shorelines and floating around the Sound. The need for ongoing communica-

tion and collaboration between the various authorities and communities is critical to aid in the prevention of further widespread damage and mitigate the effects of future storm events. Comprehensive planning supports knowledge of best practices so all the communities within the watershed are working on the same basis of information and together implementing changes needed to adapt to a changing climate.

# What has been done since 2017?

The table below reports on progress made on recommended actions from the previous 2017 article, where identified. Many of these require ongoing action.

2017 ACTION	ACTION TAKEN
<b>GOVERNMENT ACTIONS AND POLICY</b>	
Undertake/collaborate on comprehensive marine and land use planning for Átl'ka7sem/Txwnéwu7ts/Howe Sound.	Progress has been made, as detailed above in the "What is the current status" section.
Participate in the Howe Sound Community Forum meetings.	Local municipality representatives attend the HSCF meetings.



Planning a vision for Átl'ka7sem/Txwnéwu7ts/Howe Sound. (Credit: Tracey Saxby)

# What can you do?

A detailed overview of recommended actions relating to climate change is included in *The path to zero carbon municipalities* (OWHS 2020). In some cases, no progress was identified on previous recommended actions; these remain listed below. Additional actions marked as **NEW** also follow.



## Individual and Organization Actions:

- Engage and contribute to your Regional Plans and Official Community Plans (OCPs); they always include public input!
- Encourage your OCP to consider how impacts of growth, development and zoning relate to the whole of Átl'ka7tsem/Txwnéwu7ts/Howe Sound. (Transportation is a perfect example. Moving from Squamish to Vancouver on transit means passing between BC Transit authority and Translink's authority. Efficient services suffer because neither authority is focused on the Squamish to Vancouver commuter.)
- Work to make Átl'ka7tsem/Txwnéwu7ts/Howe Sound live up to your own vision for the area. You can, for example, join and follow one of the many non-profit organizations focused on Átl'ka7tsem/Txwnéwu7ts/Howe Sound conservation and protection. Volunteer for restoration programs, such as the wetland work on the Squamish foreshore, or work with local conservancies to improve trails. Give your time to marine groups who are looking to citizen vigilance to monitor illegal fishing or trapping. Attend events and learn about the diverse communities around the Sound, starting with First Nations and their history and culture.
- Experience the awesomeness that is Átl'ka7tsem/Txwnéwu7ts/Howe Sound! Get on a boat and experience the sound from the water. Hike a ridge or kayak the new Sea to Sky Marine Trail.



## Government Actions and Policy:

- Recognize the value of ecosystem services in Átl'ka7tsem/Txwnéwu7ts/Howe Sound when considering the best allocation, use and regulation of Crown Land, foreshore and marine areas.
- **NEW** Consider new/revised governance options to strengthen local government regional coordination and representation on Átl'ka7tsem/Txwnéwu7ts/Howe Sound-wide planning and development issues.
- **NEW** Maintain an inventory of reports, plans and strategies on Átl'ka7tsem/Txwnéwu7ts/Howe Sound ecosystems and make them publicly available.
- **NEW** Fund increased regional marine planning capacity for Átl'ka7tsem/Txwnéwu7ts/Howe Sound as a bioregion.

# Methods

Information for this article was sourced from websites specific to the projects and tools discussed above.

# Resources

This list is not intended to be exhaustive. Omission of a resource does not preclude it from having value.

OWHS 2017 Action Plan

Please see the [Executive Summary](#) from 2017, which includes the action plan.

Atl'ka7tsem/Howe Sound Marine Conservation Assessment online map

<https://howesoundconservation.ca/mapapp/#>

<https://davidsuzuki.org/project/howe-sound/>

Howe Sound/Atl'ka7tsem Marine Reference Guide

<https://howesoundguide.ca/>

<https://makeway.org/project/howe-sound-atlkitsem-marine-reference-guide/>

Howe Sound Biosphere Region Initiative Society

[www.howesoundbri.org](http://www.howesoundbri.org)

The Future of Howe Sound Society

<http://futureofhowesound.org>

Howe Sound Community Forums (2019)

<https://www.howesoundbri.org/howe-sound-community-forum>

# References

<sup>1</sup> BC Government. Howe Sound Cumulative Effects Projects [Internet]. Available from: <https://catalogue.data.gov.bc.ca/dataset/howe-sound-cumulative-effects-project-area-data-howe-sound-cumulative-effects/resource/4cc98644-f6eb-410b-9dfo-f9b2beac9717>