



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **Restoring Marine Habitat in Burgoyne Bay (Xwaaqw'um)**

*Salt Spring, BC*

Removal of underwater debris from Burgoyne Bay by SCUBA divers is scheduled to begin October 18<sup>th</sup> if the weather is favorable. Local observations and sonar investigation of Burgoyne Bay resulted in over 200 points worth investigation by SCUBA divers for removal of marine debris including small sunken vessels. Burgoyne Bay is the largest undeveloped anchorage in the Gulf Islands. It is flanked by protected areas on land.

SeaChange Marine Conservation Society, in partnership with the Xwaaqw'um Project and BC Parks, is beginning a project to rehabilitate the estuary. Xwaaqw'um means female merganser in Hul'q'umi'num, one of two languages of the First Nations who have traditional homelands on Salt Spring. It is also the name for Burgoyne Bay (pronounced Hwaa-qwum). Marine debris removal is taking place as part of a larger program to expand eelgrass habitats for the benefit of marine life, traditional harvest and future generations.

A survey of the southeastern section of the Bay in late August provided 227 GPS marks of sonar images that are anomalies compared to the rest of the sonar image. Divers will investigate as many of the marks as the budget allows to discover if they are debris or not. Debris discovered is attached to a line with a float at the surface to allow it to be hauled up for later disposal. A floating platform with a davit and winch is used to pull up most debris. A small barge serves as storage until a sufficient load is ready to be transported to shore for disposal. Items that exceed the capacity of the winch will require larger mechanical muscle. Those marker floats remain until the end of diving operations when it's clear how much muscle is necessary and arrangements can be made to bring the larger items up.

Many people wonder why bother cleaning up the debris if nobody can see it. Removing hard surface debris from the seabed decreases habitat for jellyfish in the polyp stage of their life cycle. Jellyfish can multiply into large numbers, called a bloom, and compete for the plankton at the bottom of the marine food chain. Other species that depend on this plankton in turn feed fish

and shellfish we humans along with many marine mammals prefer to consume. Other sorts of debris such as tires, batteries, machinery, electronics and plastics in any form contribute to the toxic load in the bottom sediment and water column. Those toxins eventually find their way into the food chain for all species in the area. And some debris interferes with marine life in other ways. Lost fishing gear often does not stop fishing. So removal of debris gives a hand in many ways for improved marine ecology and the rehabilitation of traditional harvesting areas.

In early March, restoration of an underwater plant called eelgrass is planned. There is a substantial amount of eelgrass already in Burgoyne Bay, and there are some areas where it used to be and is no longer. Much like the land above water can be thought of as drug store, grocery store and hardware store for First Nations in their traditional ways, the sea was a destination that met many needs. A key habitat that helped keep the area rich in sea life is eelgrass.

SeaChange and the Xwaaqw'um Project will invite the community to come down to the estuary to participate in the eelgrass transplant and learn about stewardship of the waters through traditional Hul'q'umi'num teachings and what SeaChange has learned from 17 years of eelgrass restoration and monitoring.

SeaChange is in communication with the Dead Boat Society and Coastal Cleanups to explore opportunities for collaboration. A permit has been attained from BC Parks and they are supportive of the work.

This clean-up will benefit boaters by removing some navigational hazards. Boaters are asked to keep well clear of the work float, debris markers and SCUBA divers

This project is funded through grants from the Recreational Fisheries Conservation Partnerships Program, the Coastal Restoration Fund (Fisheries and Oceans Canada) and the Pacific Salmon Foundation.

To learn more about SeaChange and this project visit [www.seachangesociety.com](http://www.seachangesociety.com).