



Improving the health of səliłwət together

Identifying opportunities to align Vancouver Park Board work with the Tsleil-Waututh Nation *Burrard Inlet Action Plan*

Project Summary

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Cover image:
A sunny day at CRAB Park - May 20, 2021.
Source: Tecla Van Bussel

DISCLAIMER

This report was produced as part of the Greenest City or Healthy City Scholars Program, a partnership between the City of Vancouver and the University of British Columbia, in support of the Greenest City Action Plan and the Healthy City Strategy.

This project was conducted under the mentorship of City staff. The opinions and recommendations in this report, and any errors, are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the City of Vancouver or The University of British Columbia.

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SUMMARY

This summary provides an overview of the following parts of this project:

- Project context and process
- Actionable opportunities, including highlights in Stanley Park, CRAB Park, and New Brighton Park
- Project next steps
- Researcher acknowledgments and reflection

The complete research report provides more detail in all of these areas, especially in the descriptions of future actionable opportunities for Park Board projects.

The report is not publicly available, but is being kept at this time as an internal document for Park Board staff, Tsleil-Waututh Nation, and other partners as appropriate - to be used in a living and collaborative way in order to move forward on work that aligns with the Burrard Inlet Action Plan.

PROJECT CONTEXT

The land that is currently called the City of Vancouver occupies lands and waters in the unceded territories of xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) peoples (collectively referred to as the Host Nations).

“According to Coast Salish concepts of land tenure and territoriality, the water, land, air, and resources of Tsleil-Waututh territory are their birthright. They have a profound obligation to both their ancestors and future generations to protect and care for the water, land, air, and resources and to fulfill their stewardship obligations and responsibilities.”

(Tsleil-Waututh Nation, 2017, p. 12)

In 2017 Tsleil-Waututh Nation (TWN) released the Burrard Inlet Action Plan (BIAP), a detailed marine environmental plan – described as a “science-based, First Nations-led initiative” – that calls in all governments, industries, and people living and working in Burrard Inlet to work together for the health of the Inlet. This action plan is one part of how Tsleil-Waututh are expressing and living their laws on their lands and waters.

TWN envisions a productive, resilient, and diverse Burrard Inlet environment where:

- Healthy, wild marine foods are abundant and can be harvested sustainably and eaten safely
- Water and sediment are clean especially in places where cultural, spiritual, ceremonial, or recreational activities take place
- Important habitats are plentiful, productive, and connected
- High levels of biodiversity and healthy populations of key species are viable and persistent

A primary objective of the BIAP is to initiate action-focused discussions of environmental issues and strategic solutions to advance Burrard Inlet stewardship – including Host Nations, all levels of government in the Inlet, and other collaborators.

The intent of this project is to identify opportunities for aligning Vancouver Park Board work (including marine habitat restoration and protection) with the BIAP. Informed by the project principles and early conversation with TWN staff, the project focused on gathering internal knowledge and perspectives from Park Board staff to identify and explain opportunities to align Park Board work with the BIAP.

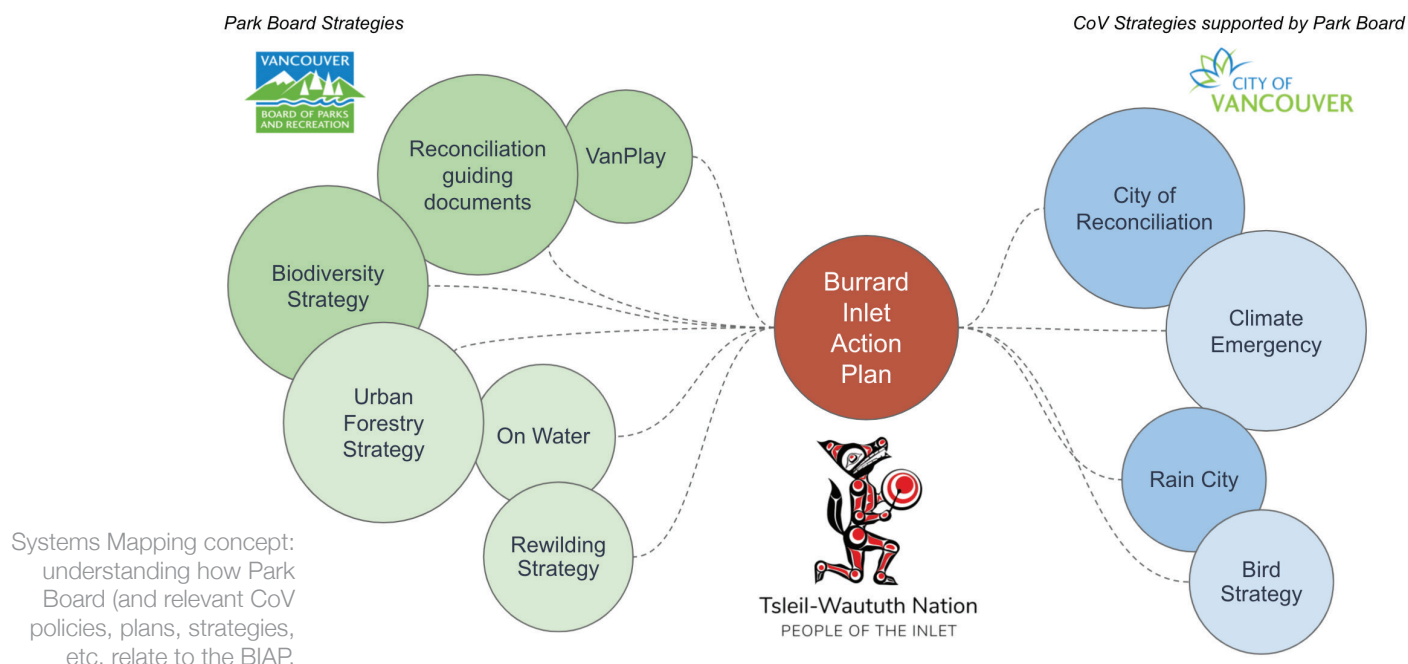
Why focus on internal Park Board knowledge?

The BIAP is grounded in scientific and Indigenous knowledge, including the knowledge, time, and energy of TWN staff and community members. Now that TWN has provided this knowledge to the public, and has called in other actors in Burrard Inlet to work in partnership toward the vision of a healthy marine environment, the Park Board has a responsibility to identify actionable ways that their work can align with the vision for a healthy Burrard Inlet expressed in the BIAP.

PROJECT PROCESS

It is important to note that the opportunities identified through the research in the project are not approved Park Board recommendations or commitments.

Process step	Description
Project principles	Articulating principles that helped guide the project approach. Based on TWN law, Indigenous planning principles, and Park Board reconciliation values.
Knowledge analysis	Analysis of information, stories, documents, and data already available.
Conversations (“interviews”)	Conversations from May to July 2021: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Park Board staff • City of Vancouver staff • NGO partners • Tsleil-Waututh Nation staff
Systems mapping	Based on knowledge analysis and conversations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the BIAP align (or not) with Park Board policies, plans, and guidelines?
Spatial mapping	Based on the systems mapping outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What current projects exist that support the BIAP? • What future opportunities are there for projects to align with the BIAP?
Actionable opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific opportunities in Stanley Park, CRAB Park, and New Brighton Park • General opportunities for broader Park Board work



ACTIONABLE OPPORTUNITIES

Through this research process, four categories of approaches to restoring the health of Burrard Inlet through Park Board work have been identified:

Policies and Plans

Policies, guidelines, strategies, and plans are all tools that provide the backbone and justification for ‘on-the-ground’ projects.

Restoration

Habitat restoration (and enhancement) are projects that seek to improve habitat conditions in park lands through landscape design and other interventions.

Protection and Maintenance

Protection actions are most often undertaken to preserve habitat areas and species and limit negative impacts from disturbances. Maintenance actions are required for ongoing operation and sustainability of projects, including restoration and protection.

Monitoring and Research

Monitoring and research generate data and knowledge that can be used to support the assessment of current projects and the development of new projects.

There are a number of projects already occurring in Burrard Inlet that align with the BIAP. Current projects include those that are completed, ongoing, in development (with committed funding and resources), or in the feasibility assessment stage.

See Map 3 for an overview of Current Projects.

The identified future opportunities are oriented to areas where there are known indicators for improving the ecosystem health of Burrard Inlet (as identified in the BIAP), such as eelgrass presence, marine riparian habitat, streams, and estuaries.

See Map 4 for an overview of Future Opportunities.

- Burrard Inlet
- Floodplain (Burrard Inlet)
- Historic streams
- Parks

Current Park Board Projects connected to Burrard Inlet

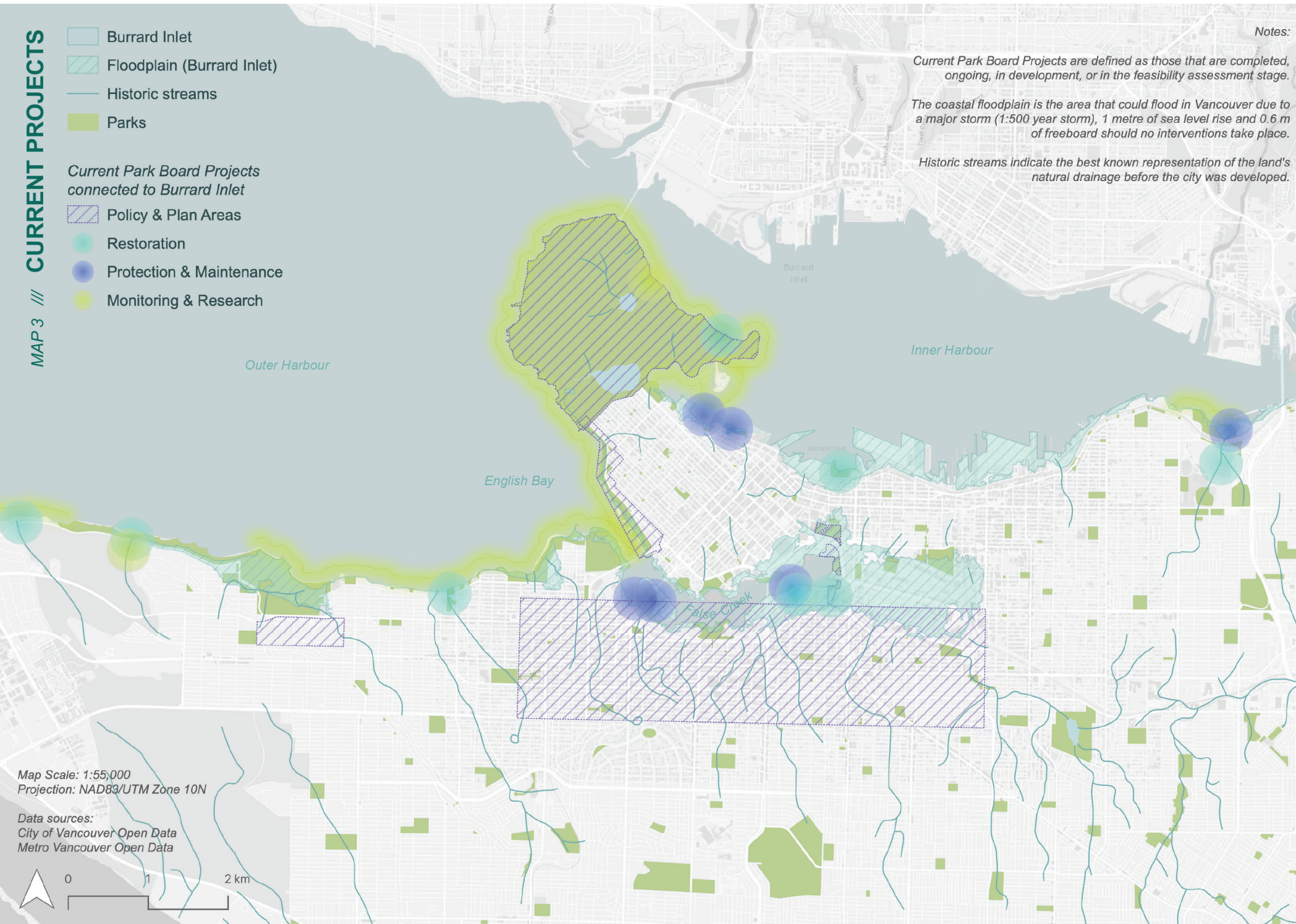
- Policy & Plan Areas
- Restoration
- Protection & Maintenance
- Monitoring & Research

Notes:

Current Park Board Projects are defined as those that are completed, ongoing, in development, or in the feasibility assessment stage.

The coastal floodplain is the area that could flood in Vancouver due to a major storm (1:500 year storm), 1 metre of sea level rise and 0.6 m of freeboard should no interventions take place.

Historic streams indicate the best known representation of the land's natural drainage before the city was developed.



Map Scale: 1:55,000
Projection: NAD83/UTM Zone 10N

Data sources:
City of Vancouver Open Data
Metro Vancouver Open Data



- Burrard Inlet
- Floodplain (Burrard Inlet)
- Historic streams
- Parks

*Future Opportunities for
Park Board Projects
connected to Burrard Inlet*

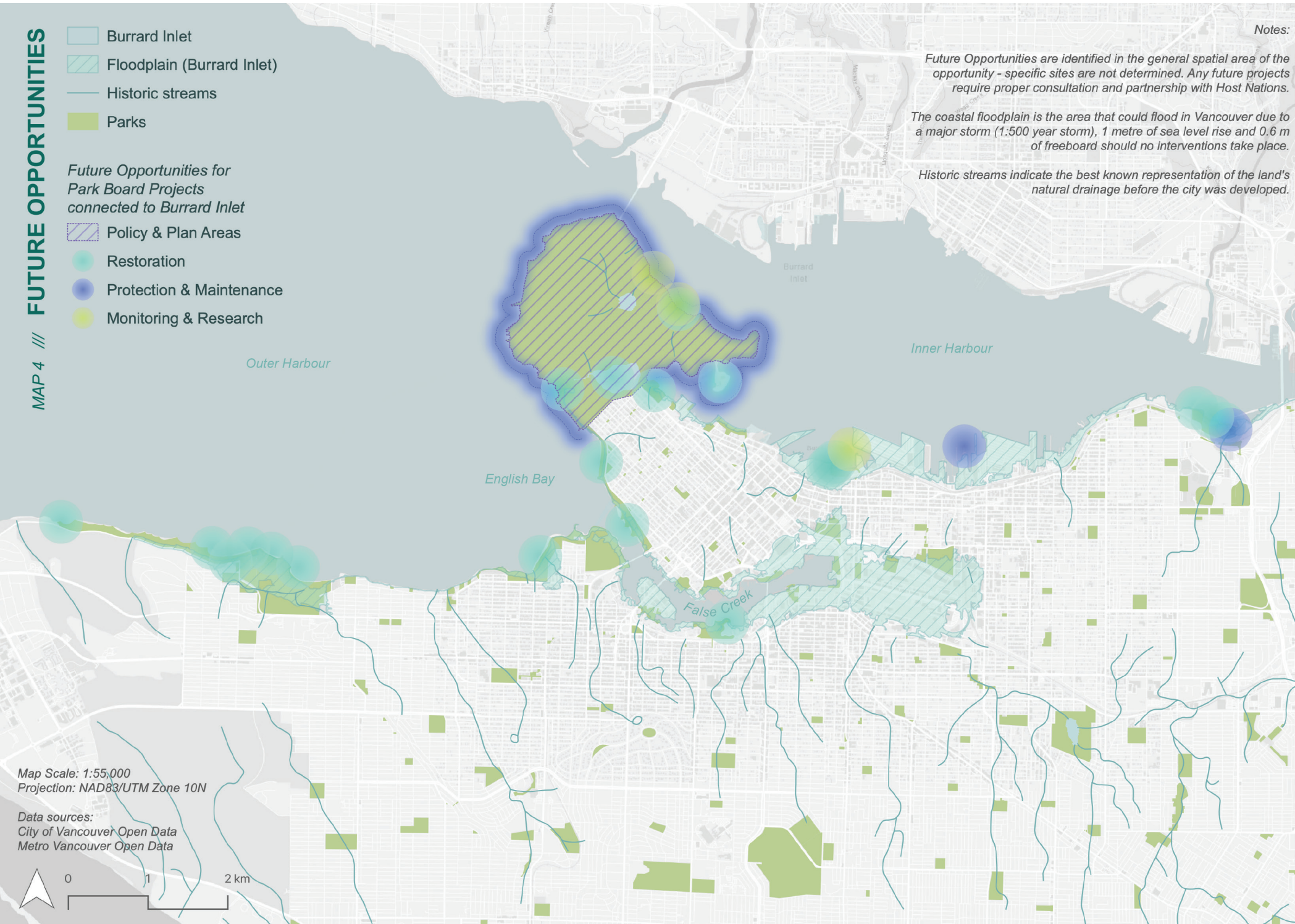
- Policy & Plan Areas
- Restoration
- Protection & Maintenance
- Monitoring & Research

Notes:

Future Opportunities are identified in the general spatial area of the opportunity - specific sites are not determined. Any future projects require proper consultation and partnership with Host Nations.

The coastal floodplain is the area that could flood in Vancouver due to a major storm (1:500 year storm), 1 metre of sea level rise and 0.6 m of freeboard should no interventions take place.

Historic streams indicate the best known representation of the land's natural drainage before the city was developed.



Map Scale: 1:55,000
Projection: NAD83/UTM Zone 10N

Data sources:
City of Vancouver Open Data
Metro Vancouver Open Data

OPPORTUNITY HIGHLIGHTS

The following are three highlights from the identified future opportunities in Burrard Inlet - the full project report provides detail for each opportunity seen on **Map 3** and **Map 4**.

The scope of opportunities focused primarily on three Inner Harbour parks - Stanley Park, CRAB Park, and New Brighton Park - because of the high rate of industrialization and the impact of shoreline modification.

<i>Actionable Opportunity</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>BIAP Action</i>
Stanley Park: Marine Protected Area Designation	The concept of a Marine Protected Area designation could influence the maintenance of the Sea Wall and foreshore area, as well as stormwater management and future habitat restoration and enhancement projects in the park. An MPA designation would need to be co-developed to ensure the ability of Host Nations to harvest in the Park, especially if shellfish, forage fish, and salmon are restored for future generations.	<i>B-2.2 Advocate for protection of identified high priority sites through acquisition, designation, or changes in management.</i>
CRAB Park: Options for Park Improvement Funding	Funding could be put to exploring options to connect the freshwater marsh with the marine environment through shoreline softening and the establishment of a tidal channel. With the Centerm expansion now complete, supporting research into water circulation and sedimentation patterns could be informative to understanding whether potential changes in hydrology could impact the habitat suitability of the shoreline area for forage fish and other species.	<i>B-1.2 Conduct more detailed mapping and assessment of trends in the extent and condition of important nearshore habitats, such as estuaries, salt marshes, tidal mudflats, eelgrass meadows, kelp beds, and productive beaches.</i>
New Brighton Park: Maintenance of Restored Salt Marsh	The salt marsh restoration project completed in 2017 at New Brighton Park is an exciting example of large scale restoration of the industrial shoreline. Further conversations could be had with the Port to improve ongoing maintenance and monitoring of the site, including processes for data sharing with Park Board and Host Nations and how lessons from this site can be informative to other potential larger scale restoration projects in other Vancouver parks.	<i>B-1.4 Conduct an analysis of the state of habitat compensation sites to assess function and quantify amount of productive habitat gained/lost over time.</i>

PROJECT NEXT STEPS

Each of the three parks of focus in this project have unique opportunities to align with the BIAP, and there are many other alignments to pursue with Park Board policies, guidelines, strategies, and plans.

There are several considerations for moving the opportunities to actions:

- Seeking out **communication and collaboration** between actors on Burrard Inlet
- Components of adaptive management for projects, including **data, monitoring, and maintenance**
- The **scale and connectivity** of habitat enhancement projects
- How these projects relate to commitments of **equity and justice** for people and communities in park spaces
- How different understandings of **Indigenous governance and land stewardship** influence these projects, and what this could mean for ‘decolonizing’ the Park Board

Beyond the scope of this UBC Sustainability Scholars project, next steps for continuing to align Park Board work with the BIAP include:

- Coordination of **collaborative living map of current and future projects** in Burrard Inlet with Host Nations, CoV, SeaChange, and other partners
- Discussion of future opportunities for projects through a **collaborative process with Host Nations**, including prioritization for implementation if appropriate
- Tying in potential projects to upcoming Park Board **financial processes of capital and operational budgeting**

Working with strategic plans like the BIAP is not just a checkbox; it’s one small part of fundamentally recognizing and following the leadership of TWN as one of the Host Nations in their territory. Which is why aligning it across Park Board policies and plans is difficult; it’s about ecosystem health, but it’s also about governance and decolonization. Moving forward with the opportunities identified in this project, it is important to ask the question: How does the Park Board vision for a citywide parks and recreation network build a future where the Host Nations are able to enact their responsibilities and governance?

Tsleil-Waututh Nation School students immersing themselves in the ways of planting and restoring eelgrass at Whey-ah-wichen (North Vancouver).

Source: Tsleil-Waututh Nation



RESEARCHER ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND REFLECTION

First, I acknowledge the unceded lands and waters of səliłwəṭ, shared territory of xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Skwxwú7mesh, and səliłwəṭ peoples. Giving my time and energy to this project is part of how I am working to embody my responsibilities as a settler living in Host Nations territory.

Second, thank you to all the people who have contributed time, knowledge, and support to this project - from Tsleil-Waututh Nation, the Vancouver Park Board, the City of Vancouver, and other partners. Especially, thank you to Krista Voth and the Park Board Environment & Sustainability team for such meaningful support and supervision, especially doing this work remotely during COVID-19. I hope to continue our connections and conversations in the future.

Third, thank you to everyone who has heard me talk passionately about parks and decolonization throughout this project. I acknowledge this project is situated within the institutional discourse and processes of ‘reconciliation’ and ‘decolonization’ in the city of Vancouver. The finding of thousands of unmarked graves at residential school sites this summer again confirmed the violence and genocide of the colonial system that has always been known. At the same time, ongoing harm and trauma are being inflicted on the most marginalized Indigenous community members in this city, including through the maintenance and restoration of parks. I hope this project can play a small part in the total systems-change pathway to meaningful decolonization – if this pathway involves returning lands and waters to Indigenous governance, and in turn fighting the harms of colonial capitalism and white supremacy by creating systems of care and reciprocity.

As a student researcher, this project has been a valuable space of learning about the relationship between municipal and Indigenous governance. A conclusion I have come to in the process of undertaking this project is that the Park Board is motivated to develop more responsible and accountable relationships with the three Host Nations, including Tsleil-Waututh Nation, and is in the process of addressing the gaps in their systems and tools to do so. Assessing alignment and opportunities with BIAP is hopefully an example of how the Park Board can engage with Host Nations governance (such as environmental plans or policies) when called in to partnership in the future.

Through this project, I have witnessed the complexity of Park Board staff trying to “do” decolonizing work in environmental stewardship – including the sentiment that making decisions from within the institution of the Park Board about what happens on the land inherently feels colonial. Ultimately, I believe “decolonizing” the Park Board has to be focused on restoring decision-making power to Host Nations on Park lands (“de”colonizing implies “removing” the colonial system). As we know, environmental stewardship and Indigenous-municipal relations are a complex, tangled web of issues and opportunities – and this project cannot provide all the interrelated solutions to decolonization and marine environmental health in a single report.

Ultimately I hope this project can raise the profile of the BIAP within the Park Board and further recognize all the good work TWN has done for stewardship of the Inlet, and I hope the knowledge gathered and shared in this project can be useful for the Park Board and TWN to partner on future actions in order to see tangible, positive changes for the lands and waters of səliłwəṭ.

“The Tsleil-Waututh people have lived along the shores of Burrard Inlet since time out of mind. The name Tsleil-Waututh means People of the Inlet in our hə́ŋqəmíŋəm̓ language. Our ancestors, who numbered in the many thousands, maintained villages around Burrard Inlet and intensively used all of the natural resources there, especially marine and intertidal resources.

Tsleil-Waututh, like our Musqueam and Squamish relatives, has a long-held legal obligation to steward the water, land, air, and resources in Burrard Inlet. This stewardship responsibility includes restoring conditions that provide the environmental, cultural, spiritual, and economic foundation for our communities to thrive.

We envision this plan as a key guidance document for a science-based, First Nations-led initiative to improve the health and integrity of Burrard Inlet.”

- Excerpt from BIAP opening message from Chief Maureen Thomas



Summer sunset on Burrard Inlet, from Locarno beach - July 27, 2021. Source: Tecla Van Bussel.

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City of Vancouver Open Data:

- Parks - polygon representation
- Parks
- Shoreline - 2002
- City boundary

Metro Vancouver Open Data:

- Municipal boundaries
- Sensitive Ecosystem Inventory for Metro Vancouver (2014)
- 2016 Generalized Land Use Classification
- Metro Vancouver Regional Parks – Park Boundaries
- 2015 Industrial Land Inventory