

OPP and NOTH 2021 Conferences

Mid-February was a busy week for the MLSS President and Vice-President who attended two virtual conferences that ran simultaneously: The Ocean Protection Plan (OPP) Dialogue Forum Winter 2021 was the 7th Forum organized by Transport Canada; and Nature on the Hill 2021 (NOTH) was the 3rd annual event organized by Nature Vancouver. Glen and Sheila split our time to cover as much of the conferences as we could.

The Transport Canada OPP:



https://whova.com/portal/webapp/ocean_202102/

OPP covered several themes in the Overview and Environmental Protection session that highlighted improved marine safety and prevention practices along the BC Coast: Prevention (modern hydrography and charting, six new radar station installations, cumulative effects of abandoned and wrecked vessels, underwater noise on the Southern Resident Killer Whales, and marine shipping); Preparedness and Response (significant advances with Coast Guard towing capacity, emergency kits, places of refuge); Partnerships and engagement with Indigenous Nations (marine training programs, projects and growing dialogue).



Some of the topics within these themes were of direct interest to the MLSS team although concurrent sessions made choices difficult.

We both attended the Anchorages Initiative which we found somewhat disappointing from our MLSS perspective. The session focused mostly on large commercial ships and the speaker was full of facts and figures for the Port of Vancouver but was not knowledgeable about local issues and was unable to

answer most questions about local vessel anchorage and damage to the environment. Glen queried concern about glass sponge reefs and potential anchor damage but received no information. It appeared that the presenter was not aware of BC glass sponge reefs. During the Conference wrap-up Panel Discussion, the Pacific Regional Director responded that Transport Canada carefully monitors commercial anchorage in Howe Sound and thus the risk to the sponge reefs was at low risk. Unfortunately, the impacts from recreational vessels did not seem relevant or on their radar.

Glen found the OPP Progress, Transformation and New Products session with the Canadian Hydrographic Service more informative and the speaker had specialized knowledge. Better, modern charting capabilities for safe vessel navigation was the primary focus. The last workshop that Glen attended covered important aspects of Preparedness and Oil Spill Response. The speaker was very knowledgeable and covered a wide range of oil spill information but again there was no definitive response to Glen's question:

"In Howe Sound, plans are underway to have large LNG tankers moving through the Sound. What can be done to protect the glass sponge reefs from an oil spill if one of these tankers hit a reef?"

At present there seems to be no oil spill response capabilities. What will the response be if the north storms are blowing over 100 km winds?" other than 'the comment was noted for our analyses and it will be shared with the Transport Canada colleagues'.

The Forum was well organized and well attended with a considerable amount of information. Unfortunately, much of it was geared towards commercial transport of goods and the large commercial shipping industry. Benefit to the MLSS was low to medium. Mechanical damage to the glass sponge reefs from vessel anchorage falls under the purview of Transport Canada creating a disconnect with Fisheries and Oceans Canada that provides protection to the sponge reefs only through fishing regulations in the newly created Marine Refuges Conservation Areas.

Nature on the Hill (NOTH) 2021:



Nature's Voice Was Heard Loud and Clear – That's a Wrap on Nature on the Hill 2021! <https://naturecanada.ca/news/blog/nature-on-the-hill-2021-wrap-up/>

This 2021 week of action, the 3rd such annual event (albeit the 1st virtual one), was organized by Nature Canada to remind Canadians that Nature is INVALUABLE! NOTH provided nature-loving and nature-based organizations the opportunity to advocate and engage our Members of Parliament on the important issues around Nature, the need for protected areas and the need to bring Nature to the heart of Canada's recovery. Nature Canada, as part of the Green Budget Coalition submitted a \$4.8 billion

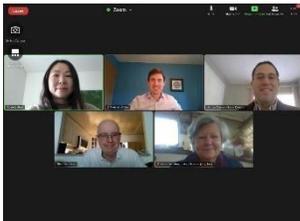
proposal for the Federal Government to invest in nature. The Green Budget Coalition (GBC), founded in 1999, brings together 25 leading Canadian environmental and conservation organizations which collectively represent over one million Canadians, through volunteers, members and supporters.

As NOTH participants, it was our job to promote the importance of Nature and to encourage the MPs to invest in protected areas by supporting inclusion of the GBC budget in the new upcoming Federal Budget. Sheila scored well by getting a full 30 minutes in conversation with the Honourable Minister Ken Hardie, MP for Fleetwood-Port Kells.



She covered many aspects of the importance of the glass sponge reefs in Howe Sound and Minister Hardie suggested that she follow up with an email stating ‘what MLSS wants’. Sheila did just that, ‘in spades’, and copied the other important MPs who weigh heavily on the outcome of the budget: specifically, Honourable Jonathan Wilkinson, Minister of Environment and Climate Change; Honourable Bernadette Jordan, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans, and the Canadian Coast Guard; and Honourable Patrick Weiler, Minister of West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country

Glen was able to meet with the Honourable Patrick Weiler, Minister of West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country along with four other NOTH participants.



Glen found this meeting a productive one and that it will lead to better communications with our government representatives. MP Weiler has a background in transboundary water management, an important connection with the Water Agency, and he also has expertise in Payment for Ecosystem Services work. The team’s impression was that MP Weiler acknowledged the importance of MPAs, enforcement and research, especially with regard to the Howe Sound glass sponge reefs. He was aware of the local PSEC research station and was willing to set up a meeting with the Federal Liberals Pacific Caucus to explore details of Marine Protected Areas and to discuss in more detail, the need for local investment in protected areas. MP Weiler did note that that the Federal Government is focusing the budget on economic recovery, potentially diminishing potentials for investment in protected areas.

Sheila attended the final wrap-up session hosted by Nature Canada - a Town Hall meeting with Minister Jonathon Wilkinson and Minister Bernadette Jordan. Three brief presentations representing cross-Canada perspectives of Nature – NatureKids BC (connecting Kids with outdoor wildlife, plants & wild spaces), Green Ummah, ON (creating a green movement in the Canadian Muslim community) and

Ecology Action Centre, NS (sustainability in seven focus areas: Built Environment, Coastal and Water, Wilderness, Food Action, Marine, Transportation, and Energy) – highlighted the need for the Federal Government to invest in Nature and protected areas. Both Ministers Wilkinson and Jordan noted the difficult choices that are needed to address the multitude of requests to ensure the protection and sustainability of Nature, both on land and in the ocean.

NOTH participants were assured that Ocean Health was a top priority for the Federal Government. Canada was striving to become a global leader in marine and coastal protected areas with the target of achieving 30 % protection by 2030. Thanks to Nature Canada, with 1000 participants listening in, for putting on the pressure for our MPs to make this protection happen.