

SALT SPRING ISLAND NATURAL CEMETERY, BRITISH COLUMBIA

SUPPORTING BIODIVERSITY
DURING END-OF-LIFE

OTHER EFFECTIVE AREA BASED CONSERVATION MEASURE (OECM)

Supporting conservation is a key factor in the lives of many Canadians. And for some Canadians, this dedication to nature continues even after their lives are over.

Located off the east coast of Vancouver Island, Salt Spring Island is the largest and most highly populated Southern Gulf Island in the Strait of Georgia, the water body that separates Vancouver Island from the mainland. The island is also home to the Salt Spring Island Natural Cemetery, Canada's first entirely green burial cemetery that offers services to the public.

The cemetery owners are island farmers whose land has split zoning – 70 acres are agricultural, and another 14 acres are zoned rural. When the owners noticed that many surrounding properties with rural zoning were being subdivided for development, they wanted to find a way to keep their land in a more natural state both now and into the future. The green burial cemetery was established in part to help conserve this part of their property and create additional income for their family farm, while providing a more natural interment option for

those seeking a final resting place outside of a conventional cemetery.

Unlike most cemeteries seen across Canada that have manicured lawns, decorative flowers and little wild nature, the Salt Spring Island Natural Cemetery's mission is to return the property's forest to one with giant Douglas firs. Using caskets and burial shrouds made from natural materials, and avoiding the use of chemical embalming, natural burial is the most ecologically friendly end-of-life option. Graves are marked with natural stones from the property and the area is allowed to re-wild with native plants after a burial to help sustain the ecosystem.

By doing things differently, the cemetery helps to protect and grow the trees within the area's Coastal Douglas fir ecosystem. Their efforts also contribute to sustaining an old growth forest and helps conserve the area's biodiversity. The Salt Spring Island Natural Cemetery highlights the role private landowners can play in protecting nature as part of the global effort to counter biodiversity loss and climate change.

Photo:
Salt Spring Island Natural Cemetery

HOW DO WE KNOW THAT THE SALT SPRING ISLAND NATURAL CEMETERY IS AN OECM?



Does the property have a defined geographical space?

Yes! The property is well identified and can be found on Provincial, regional and municipal maps.



Is there an effective way of ensuring that biodiversity will continue to be conserved into the future?

Yes! The land is privately owned and is protected through a provincial Certificate of Public Interest and its license as a Provincial Place of Interment. These provisions allow for the enforcement of laws and bylaws related to cemetery operations and land use.



Is there an expectation that the biodiversity on the site will be conserved for the long term?

Yes! The BC Cemetery and Funeral Services Act says that properties for interment can only be used for burials. As well, the contracts put in place with those who buy plots in the cemetery include the promise that the property will be managed and funded to support the local ecosystem into the future.



Is biodiversity conservation the primary objective of the area?

No – and that's okay! The cemetery operates as a place of interment for those who buy the right to use the site as a final resting place. However, since the cemetery's mission is to operate in ways that support the area's Coastal Douglas fir ecosystem, their work helps to ensure that biodiversity is conserved.

Quick tip

If this answer was "yes" for the Salt Spring Island Natural Cemetery it would likely be assessed as a Protected Area. Both types of areas are important, and both achieve biodiversity conservation.



Is biodiversity on the site conserved?

Yes! The work being done by the Salt Spring Island Natural Cemetery ensures that the biodiversity in the area is conserved. Find out more about the Salt Spring Island Natural Cemetery at www.saltspringcemetery.ca.