

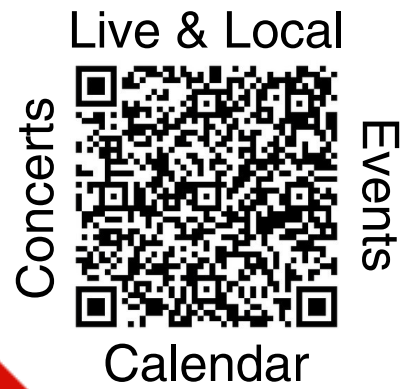
Cortes Island **Resonance**

Written by Roy Hales

30 Years of Foreshore Monitoring on Cortes Island



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30 Years of Foreshore Monitoring on Cortes Island



In 1995, standing on a Cortes Island shoreline with fellow environmental advocate Delores Broten, Sabina Leader Mense agreed to launch something that had never been done before on the island: a long-term monitoring project for its rocky intertidal zones.

“Delores said, ‘We really need to get onto monitoring the marine environment.’ And I said, ‘Okay,’” Mense recalls. That conversation marked the beginning of FOCI’s very first marine stewardship initiative, The Cortes Island Foreshore Monitoring Program (CIFMP) and today, nearly three decades later, it remains one of the longest-running environmental monitoring programs in the Strait of Georgia.

The First Ten Years: Building a Baseline

By 1996, nine permanent transect lines had been established around the island. Three more were added in 1997, bringing the total to twelve research sites. Mense surveyed these sites during the lowest tides of the summer, using standardized quadrat methods to track species presence and abundance at different tidal elevations.



These data points—meticulously recorded on paper sheets—laid a foundational baseline for understanding ecological change in the island’s intertidal zones.

2006 Onward: Citizen Science Takes the Helm

In 2006, FOCI passed the torch to the community through the Adopt-A-Transect program. Each of the twelve sites was “adopted” by volunteers who returned annually to gather data following a simplified but rigorous protocol.

“This is a 100% volunteer program,” says Sabina Leader Mense. “We’re not at the whims of somebody deciding to fund us or not. People take pride in contributing to the long-term monitoring and they’re making us aware of what’s happening.” Early volunteer Carol Tidler remembers the experience as transformative: “To this day, I never look at a beach in the same way... Now I’m very aware of where the seaweed lines are and all the things that are growing there or not.”



Data That Endures

Over 25 years of continuous data collection have made this project the most comprehensive foreshore baseline in the Strait of Georgia. In 2020, during the pandemic, FOCI passed its hard copy data to Isobel Pearsall at the Strait of Georgia Data Center. It was a “gloves-on” transfer, carefully left on Pearsall’s Nanaimo porch.

Now, the data is being digitized and entered into the University of British Columbia's master database, supported by the Pacific Salmon Foundation. "There's a student at UBC entering our sheets into the data bank," Mense noted. "This is a real success story for community science."

Discoveries and Stability

Though formal statistical analysis has yet to be done, the long-term consistency in the data has offered reassuring news.

"We have not [seen major changes], and that's good news," said Mense.

"We're not seeing any shifts in seaweed species or drastic changes in abundance year over year. We are monitoring for those things, especially as climate change warms coastal waters."



The foreshore team did make one remarkable discovery in May 2020: a fossilized specimen of a 130-million-year-old *Buchia* bivalve clam at the Coulter Bay site. Such finds remind volunteers—and the community—of the deep history encoded in these shorelines.

Why It Matters

In a world where ecosystems are changing faster than most people can track, FOCI's foreshore program provides a rare, continuous record of environmental stability—and potential warning signs. It also fosters a new generation of environmental stewards.

“Cortes has been recognized as having the longest standing record of environmental monitoring in the Strait of Georgia,” Mense added. “Our very first program, one of our most prominent programs, is now being acknowledged for the long-term efforts we put into it.”



All photos courtesy the Friends of Cortes Island Website.

1. Team Tosh at work in the Foreshore Monitoring Program;
2. Quadrat along a transect line at a low tide site
3. Sabina Leader Mense showing some of the data shared with the Strait of Georgia Data Center in 2020;
4. 130 million year old fossil specimen of the ancient bivalve clam in the genus *Buchia*.



FRIENDS *of* CORTES ISLAND

For nature, for people, for life

Friends of Cortes Island is the leading local conservation organization on Cortes Island with a remit to promote awareness and support for the natural environment by providing stewardship programs and educational activities.

We work tirelessly to preserve the natural wonders of Cortes that make the island so special. This includes our annual island wide beach clean-up; maintaining Regional Parks and Trails; developing creative conservation projects with the Cortes Island School; managing the Dillon Creek Wetland in order to prevent harmful nutrients from entering the Hague and Gunflint lakes; and working to prevent the highly invasive European Green Crab from devastating Mansons Lagoon.

We also run a host of community engagement events, from low tide and nature walks to nest box building workshops, wildlife coexistence education, and much more.

How you can get involved

You can get involved in keeping Cortes wild, beautiful and sustainable by becoming a FOCI member, volunteering on one of our many projects, or donating to support our important work.

Visit our website www.friendsofcortes.org to find out more or contact us at friendsofcortes@gmail.com

Making a Donation

Our work takes time, care, and resources. Your support helps us protect and nurture the natural beauty of Cortes Island for generations to come. If you're able, please consider donating:

Online at friendsofcortes.org/donations

By cheque, payable to Friends of Cortes, mailed to: PO Box 254,
Mansons Landing, BC V0P 1K0

Your generosity means so much—to us, and to the future of Cortes Island. Thank you.

Cortes Island **Resonance**

Written by Roy Hales

Roy Hales has been a published author since 1982 and has been the editor and owner of the local news website and daily radio program *Cortes Currents* since 2014.

Roy is also a former President of the Cortes Community Radio Society (2017-2021)

Visit Cortes Currents: www.cortescurrents.ca

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The *Cortes Island Resonance Series* is a publication of the **Cortes Community Radio Society**, located in downtown Mansons Landing on beautiful Cortes Island.

Listen to **Cortes Community Radio CKTZ** at 89.5 FM or stream online at www.cktz.ca

Cortes Island Resonance

Written by Roy Hales

Amplifying local voices and environmental themes through eight original reports promoted and distributed at Cortes Island's Village Commons Summer Concert Series 2025.

Environmental Reports

1. Restoring Life to Dillon Creek
2. Friends of Cortes Island at Mansons Landing Provincial Park
3. 30 Years of Foreshore Monitoring on Cortes Island
4. European Green Crabs Reach Cortes Island
5. Sabina Leader Mense and the Wolves of Cortes
6. Species at Risk
7. The Call That Changed Everything – Western Screech Owl
8. The Story of the Island's Streamkeepers

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