Historical Garry Oak Ecosystems of Greater Victoria, Saanich Peninsula, and Cowichan Valley/Saltspring Island

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Maps compare the 1800s and present day distribution of Garry oak ecosystems in the Victoria area and Cowichan Valley. Overall, less than 5 percent of the original ecosystems still remains. The map of historical distribution of Garry oak ecosystems depicts those areas where Garry oak (Quercus garryana) was believed to be the dominant cover or co-dominant cover with Douglas-fir (Pseudotsuga menziesii) or Arbutus (Arbutus menziesii) in the 1800s. Originally, two major types of ecosystems occurred in the Garry oak areas. These include ecosystems on deep soils, known as Parkland Garry oak communities. Almost all of this ecosystem type is now gone, as these were the first areas in the Victoria region that were cleared for agriculture and urban development. The second major Garry oak ecosystem type occurs on shallow soils and is often referred to as scrub oak ecosystems, as the oak trees are often of low stature, compared to those growing on deep soils. More of this ecosystem still remains, as many of these rocky areas were difficult to develop and have been left in some parks that were difficult to build on in early days. Many species at risk are associated with Garry oak ecosystems including 60 plant taxa, 2 reptile, 9 bird, 3 mammal, 1 earthworm, 9 butterfly and 7 other insect species.

The Garry oak historical mapping is based on original land surveys done in the 1850s and 1860s and recent fieldwork. Mapping for 1997 was extracted from the Sensitive Ecosystem Inventory mapping done by the B.C. Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks (Conservation Data Centre and MELP Nanaimo) and Environment Canada (Canadian Wildlife Service).