

## Stage 3 (Mainstream) – Saratoga Miracle Beach in the Comox Valley Regional District

Located north of the municipalities of Courtenay and Comox, the Saratoga Miracle Beach study area within the Comox Valley Regional District (CVRD) is defined by its “**water assets**”. The predominant features are Black Creek and two high-value wetland complexes - the Saratoga (Clarkson) wetlands, and the wetlands surrounding the Black Creek slough. Black Creek is a highly productive fish-bearing stream.

The defining nature of these water assets is underscored by the fact that almost half of the existing 603 parcels are within 200 m of a water asset. The presence of wetlands differentiates the [Saratoga Miracle Beach EAP Project](#) from the other EAP case studies, and thus adds a new dimension to the EAP analysis.

The CVRD anticipates using this work, together with the Master Drainage Plan and flood mapping work, to inform the development of new regulatory tools and to assist in communicating the value of these natural assets to the public during future community engagement.

**Key Observations:** CVRD is looking at the impacts of land use changes on natural features, notably water assets. EAP findings would help CVRD understand what is happening at the parcel scale and how the consequences for water assets could play out over time.

EAP findings would support CVRD efforts to inform and educate parcel owners about the need for, and value of, a [Drainage Service Area](#) as a mechanism to avoid the future cost of water asset remediation.

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### **Landscape Character and Water Assets**

*Streams as well as wetlands play a significant role in the location of development of the Saratoga Miracle Beach Area.*

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## Why we selected Saratoga Miracle Beach

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Saratoga Miracle Beach is one of three electoral area “settlement nodes” identified in the [CVRD Regional Growth Strategy](#). During planning work undertaken in 2018, the importance of preserving and enhancing the natural function of the drainage systems in the area was identified. The EAP Project builds on that body of work.

Previous EAP case studies looked at a single stream channel and a riparian setback zone. For Saratoga Miracle Beach, the “**water assets**” distinction reflects the need for a slightly modified approach to the EAP analysis. A further distinction is that the EAP analysis is an input to the decision process for land development and proactive environmental protection.

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### **Case Study Outcome: An opportunity to be proactive, not reactive**

*The other EAP case studies consider the consequences of historical land use decisions, local governments are in reactive mode, and the spotlight is on how to move from stop-gap remediation to lasting restoration.*

*CVRD, on the other hand, can learn from the mistakes of others, be proactive in protecting the integrity of water assets, and avoid the need for future remediation of water assets.*

*The unique aspect of the Saratoga Miracle Beach EAP Project is that the research looked at ALL the parcels in the study area. This yields a more complete picture than otherwise might be possible with other approaches to land use analysis.*

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### **Context for the Big Idea**

The modified approach for Saratoga Miracle Beach involves breaking the study area into the five sub-areas. Because EAP is all about drilling down to the parcel scale, the modified approach allowed us to take a close look at the interplay between parcel conditions and water assets.

The EAP analysis provides the CVRD with metrics to better understand the link between land use practices and impacts on hydrology and woodland/riparian assets. If the community wants to continue accessing the ecological services of the water assets in the area, there must be water balance outcomes as land use (growth) continues. In short, this means that discounting of water assets must cease.

**An implementation mechanism would be a Drainage Service Area (Big Idea #17):** The [Saratoga Miracle Beach Master Drainage Plan](#) is a companion to the EAP analysis in three substantive ways: 1) creates a framework that can be applied to future land use decisions to protect the **water assets**; 2) sets out performance targets for replicating hydrologic function by design; and 3) identifies an implementation mechanism (as described below) to operationalize the plan for protecting stream system integrity.

*“Establishing a **Local Service Area** for drainage and stormwater management would be initiated with the first development and can be expanded with each subsequent development, whether a subdivision or other type of development. The funding is through an annual parcel tax based upon the costs to operate and maintain the stormwater and drainage infrastructure. In this way any future costs can be recovered by the users of the system without affecting the budgets of the CVRD.”*