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A NEW SANCTUARY FOR NATURE IN THE FRASER RIVER

A stretch of foreshore and farmland on a quiet island in the lower Fraser River are the latest additions to a regional park reserve that's now almost as large as Stanley Park.

Metro Vancouver has acquired 7.8 hectares of land at the eastern end of Barnston Island, where there are panoramic views of the Fraser, the mountains to the north and the new Golden Ears Bridge. Metro Vancouver already owns Robert Point Rest Area on the northern tip of Barnston Island, located between Surrey and Pitt Meadows, as well as the nearby Surrey Bend Regional Park Reserve in Surrey. Now, with this latest acquisition, those parklands comprise more than 350 hectares – a biologically-rich area of floodplain, bog and forest just a little smaller than 400-hectare Stanley Park.

“Almost a third of the newly-acquired parkland is Fraser River foreshore,” Metro Vancouver Parks Committee Chair Gayle Martin said. “Foreshore along the lower reaches of the Fraser River is rapidly disappearing and preserving such habitat is critical in ensuring the long term ecological health of the region.”

The Fraser River estuary supports the highest density of wintering waterfowl, shorebirds and birds of prey in Canada. In a typical year, about 1.5 million birds and 150 bird species use the estuary and its adjacent upland. Most of the natural foreshore habitats along the Fraser River have been permanently lost or substantially altered for human use. The Fraser River Estuary Management Program estimates that 95 per cent of the shoreline of the Fraser downstream of Agassiz Bridge has been dyked, drained or dredged resulting in a massive loss of natural habitat.

Although the newly-acquired foreshore land is not currently open to the public, the Robert Point Rest Area on the northern tip of Barnston is a recreational alternative that provides a unique stopover and sweeping views for cyclists and other visitors. Metro Vancouver and the City of Surrey are jointly working on a plan for all parts of the 350-hectare Surrey Bend Regional Park Reserve.

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Photographs and a locator map are available.

