



2025

# Supporter Survey Results

## ABOUT US

Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary is a charitable, non-profit organization responsible for the care of the trails, infrastructure, lands, and water of the nearly 170 acres that is the Nature Sanctuary—including the wetland around Swan Lake and oak meadow—kwetlal system on Christmas Hill. The Nature Sanctuary is a critical habitat for migratory birds, plants, and other wildlife.

Since 1975, Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary has offered a meaningful gathering hub for people of all ages to connect with nature and with one another through educational programs and hands-on ecological restoration opportunities. We have an interpretive Nature House on site with a classroom and library.

## LAND AND WATER

We acknowledge the  $lək^wəŋən$ -speaking Peoples (Songhees and Esquimalt/Kosapsum) on whose territory the Nature Sanctuary stands, and the  $lək^wəŋən$ -speaking-speaking and  $W̱SÁNEĆ$  Peoples — including the  $W̱JOŁEŁP$  (Tsartlip),  $BOĆÉĆEN$  (Pauquachin),  $S̱ÁUTW̱$  (Tsawout),  $W̱SIKEM$  (Tseycum) and  $MÁLEXEŁ$  (Malahat) — whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

We respect the vital relationships of First Peoples with these lands and waters for countless generations. We are honoured to receive Indigenous guidance and welcome collaboration in stewardship and appreciation of the Nature Sanctuary.

## Message from the Board Chair and Executive Director

We are so grateful to the 266 people who participated in our 2025 Survey to support our 50th anniversary work of community engagement and listening. This update to our June 2021 survey effort helps ensure that we are aligned in our work to sustain the Nature Sanctuary as a thriving urban greenspace through 2075 and beyond.

For this survey, we reached out to people via our social media channels, e-newsletters, posters, and by delivering flyers to our nearest neighbours. We found the following themes:

### Gratitude for our exceptional site work and education over the last 50 years

- The impact and direction of the Nature Sanctuary are generally agreed upon, with habitat restoration and invasive species removal seen as our most valued programs, followed by nature education.
- Many people noted that hands-on work and teaching about local ecosystems translates to long-term climate mitigation and community resilience.

### Desire for expanded partnerships, offerings, and accessibility

- There was appreciation for efforts to engage meaningfully with local First Nations, including integrating Traditional Ecological Knowledge into programming on site as well as strengthening partnerships and collaborations.
- There were many requests for more workshops and events for adults outside of regular working hours, as well as free or subsidized programs for those in need.
- There is hope that the Nature Sanctuary will grow as a regional hub that fosters long-term stewardship, cultivates future environmental leaders, and continues to serve as both a refuge for wildlife and a centre for learning.

### Concern for impacts and hope for more communications

- Many commented on the impacts of increased densification with more pollution, loss of native species, and the health of the lake and wetlands as top concerns. Respondents also expressed distress over the regional impacts of climate change.
- Some confusion exists around the Nature Sanctuary's relationship with the District of Saanich, with differing views on future municipal involvement.
- People hope for more Nature Sanctuary updates through enhanced communications efforts, including more active use of social media, news stories, and other outreach channels.

We appreciate all of the great input. Some of the ideas are outside of our reach in the near term as our charitable non-profit is not immune to the intense challenges and constraints that we are seeing throughout society today. The pace of change has changed dramatically, and we must adapt also.

However, we continue to be astonished at the extraordinary skill, dedication, and vibrancy of our community! We are excited as you stand beside us, helping us to adjust the ways that we operate for financial sustainability, and to maintain our important work of nourishing people's connections to nature and one another.

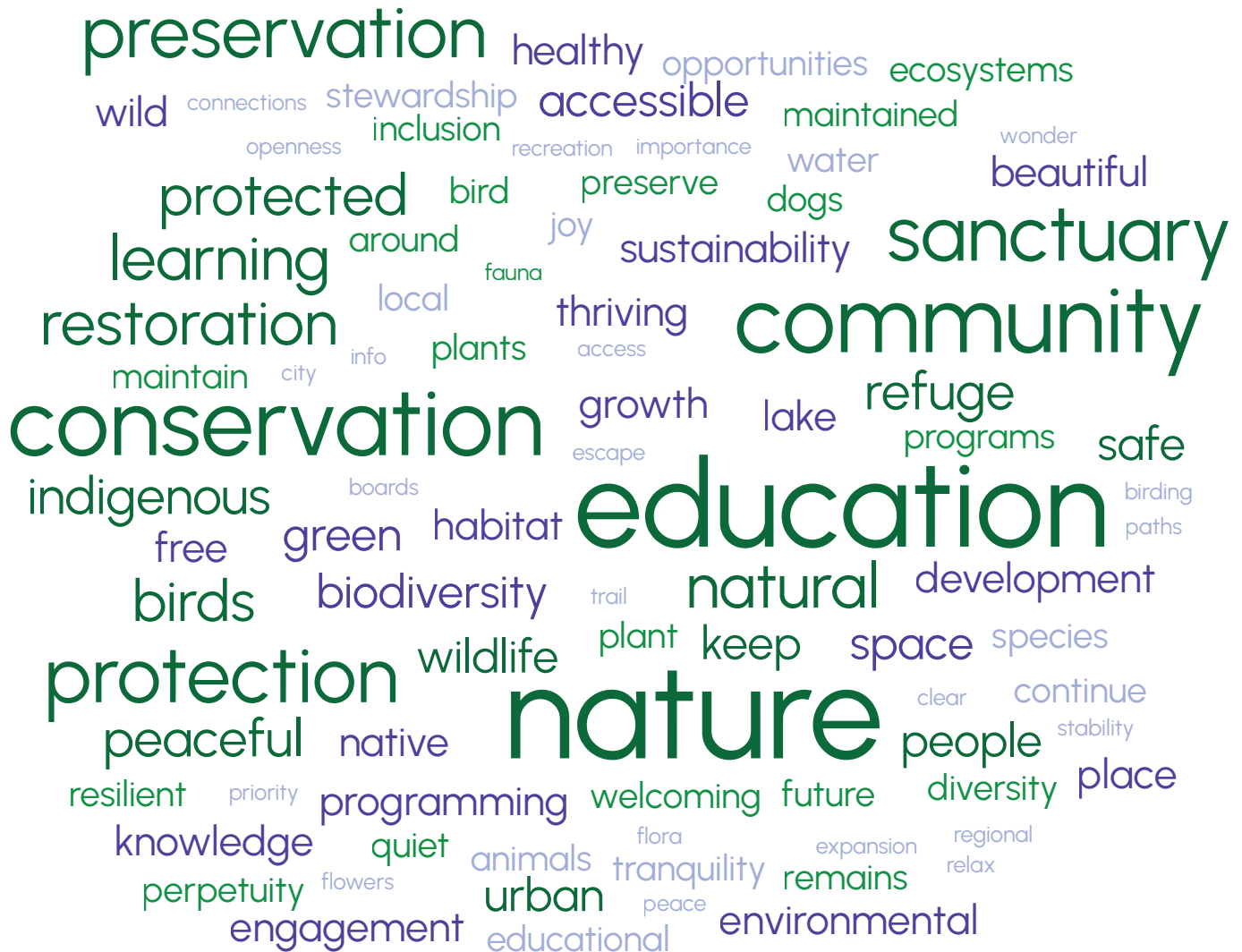
We are grateful to you for engaging with us and our key partners, donors and community members who continue to make Swan Lake a true sanctuary for nature.

Thank you,

**Cara Gibson,**  
*Executive Director*  
**Sharon Daly,**  
*Board Chair*

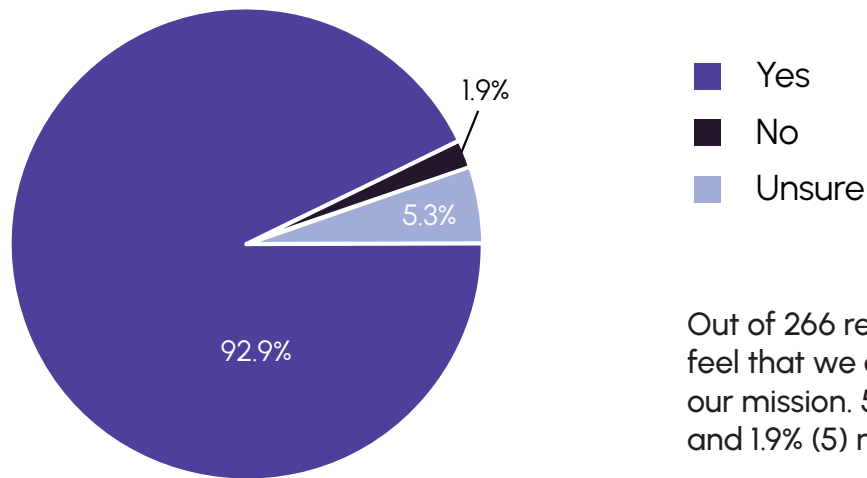


**Question 1:** What are three words or phrases that come to mind when you think about your hopes for the next 50 years at Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary?



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**Question 2:** Over the past 50 years, the Nature Sanctuary has worked to steward healthy, diverse ecosystems and provide a welcoming space where people and nature connect. Do you feel that we are successful in fulfilling this mission today?



Out of 266 respondents, 92.9% (247) feel that we are successful in fulfilling our mission. 5.4% (14) marked unsure, and 1.9% (5) marked no.

**Question 3:** Please tell us more about your response. What makes you feel this way?

Of 230 responses, most expressed gratitude for the Society's work and appreciation for the Sanctuary as a whole. Key themes that arose from these responses include:

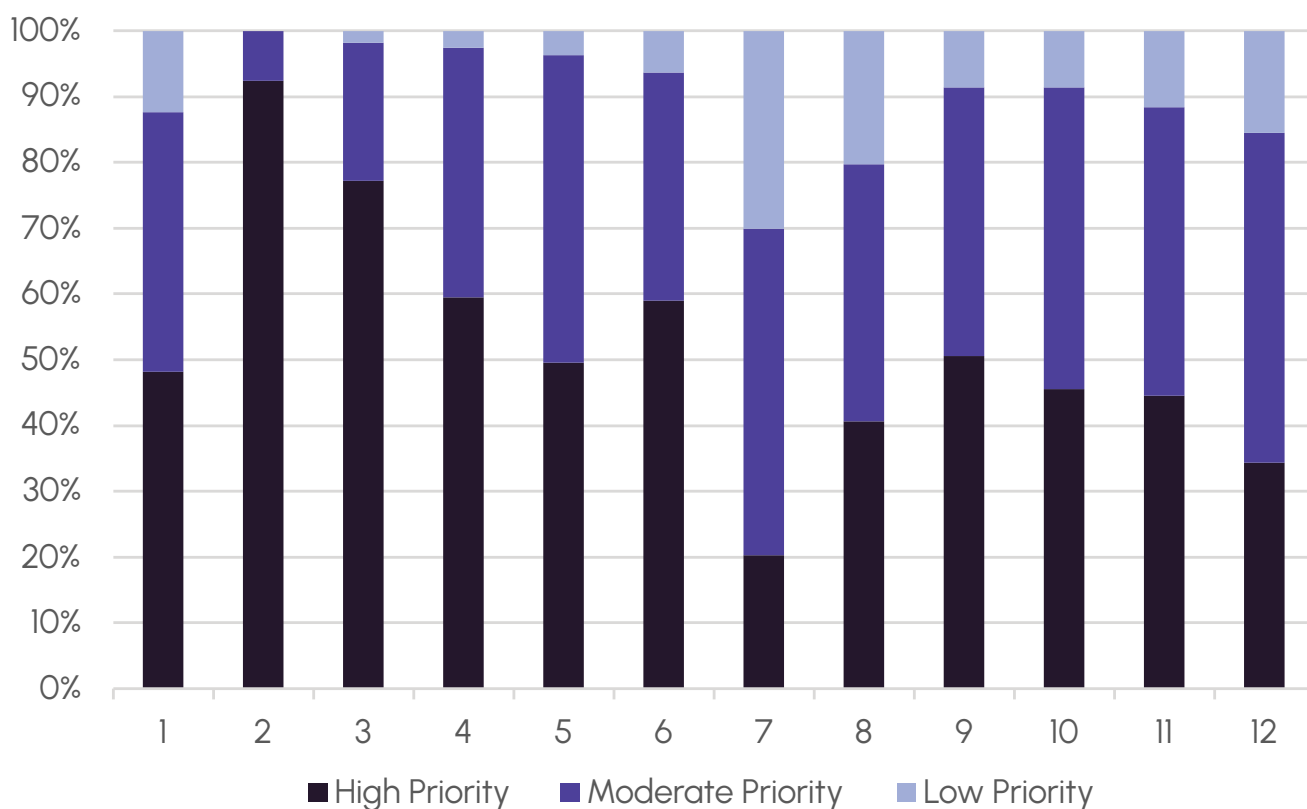
- Appreciation for nature education, programs, and workshops (24%)
- Trail access and maintenance (9%) and rule enforcement, particularly no dogs (3%)
- Sense of community (8%).
- Urban sanctuary (6%), accessibility (7%), and connection to nature (7%)
- Gratitude for staff and volunteers (7%)
- Appreciation for ecosystems and wildlife (6%)
- Appreciation for access (by donation) to Nature House facilities and exhibitions (4%)

14 respondents expressed concerns, particularly over the following subjects:

- Education programs insufficient for community demand (1%)
- Environmental mismanagement, pollution and ecosystem degradation (1%)
- Overuse and urban development (1%)
- Lack of community engagement (1%)

**Question 4:** Thinking about the next 50 years, which of the following do you believe are the most important aspects of our work and mission in the future?

1. Supporting, collaborating, and building relationships with Indigenous partners
2. Actively conserving and restoring Swan Lake and Christmas Hill ecosystems (including species monitoring and mapping)
3. Nature education for children up to age 13
4. Nature education for youth and adults (14+)
5. Providing opportunities for volunteering and building skills
6. Public outreach campaigns to increase nature conservation and inspire stewardship
7. Providing space for community events
8. Working to acquire additional land around Swan Lake and Christmas Hill
9. Mental and physical well-being community support through nature connection
10. Advising public and community organizations on conservation
11. Raising funds for environmental protection
12. Nature Sanctuary representation at community events



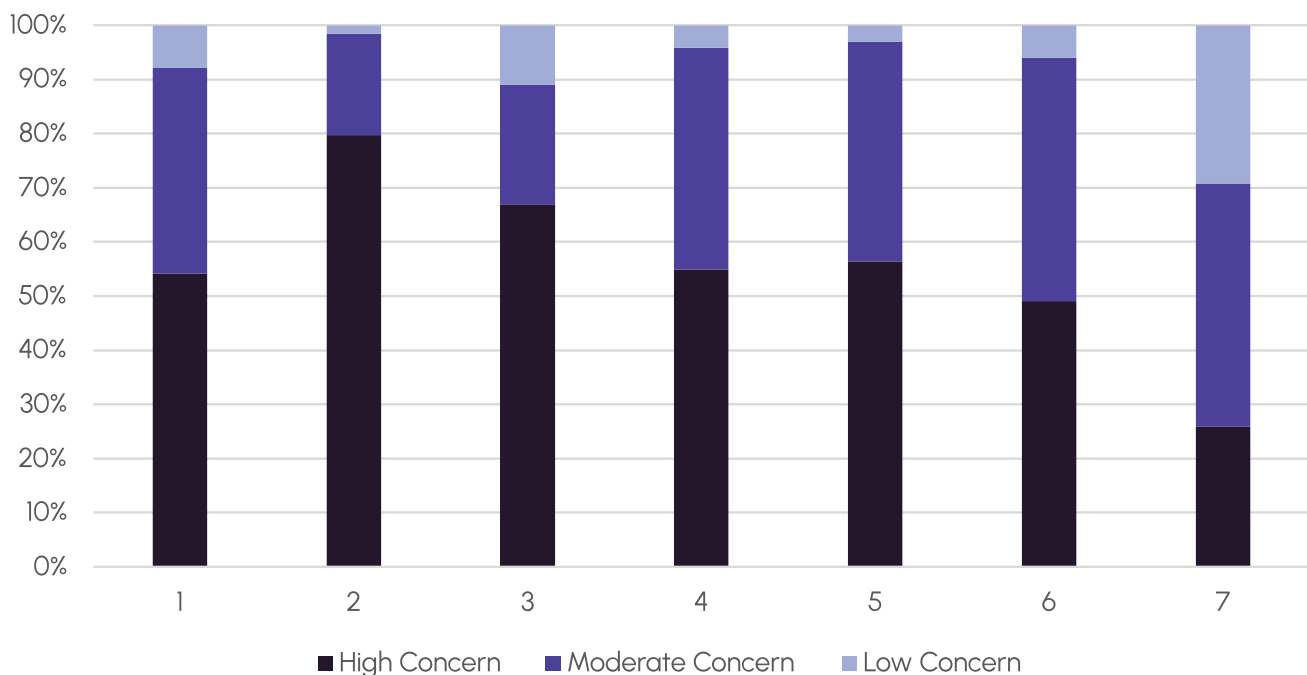
## Question 5: Other comments about important aspects of our work in the future?

103 responses were collected for Question 5 with the following arising as consistent themes:

- Education initiatives, including youth programs, community awareness, adult workshops, online outreach, and events (9%)
- "Keep up the good work" and continue as is (5%)
- Conservation, ecosystem restoration, and invasive species management (4%)
- Importance of engaging with local First Nations and incorporating Indigenous knowledge (3%)
- Desire for stronger partnerships with non-profits and municipalities (3%)
- Desire for more engaging and informative signage on site (3%)

## Question 6: Looking ahead, what concerns you most about the future of the Nature Sanctuary?

1. Climate change and extreme weather events
2. Loss of biodiversity or native species
3. Increase of urban density
4. Pollution
5. Invasive species
6. Funding and organizational sustainability
7. Overuse or overcrowding by visitors



### Question 7: Do you have any additional concerns that are not listed?

23% of respondents expressed additional concerns. These were:

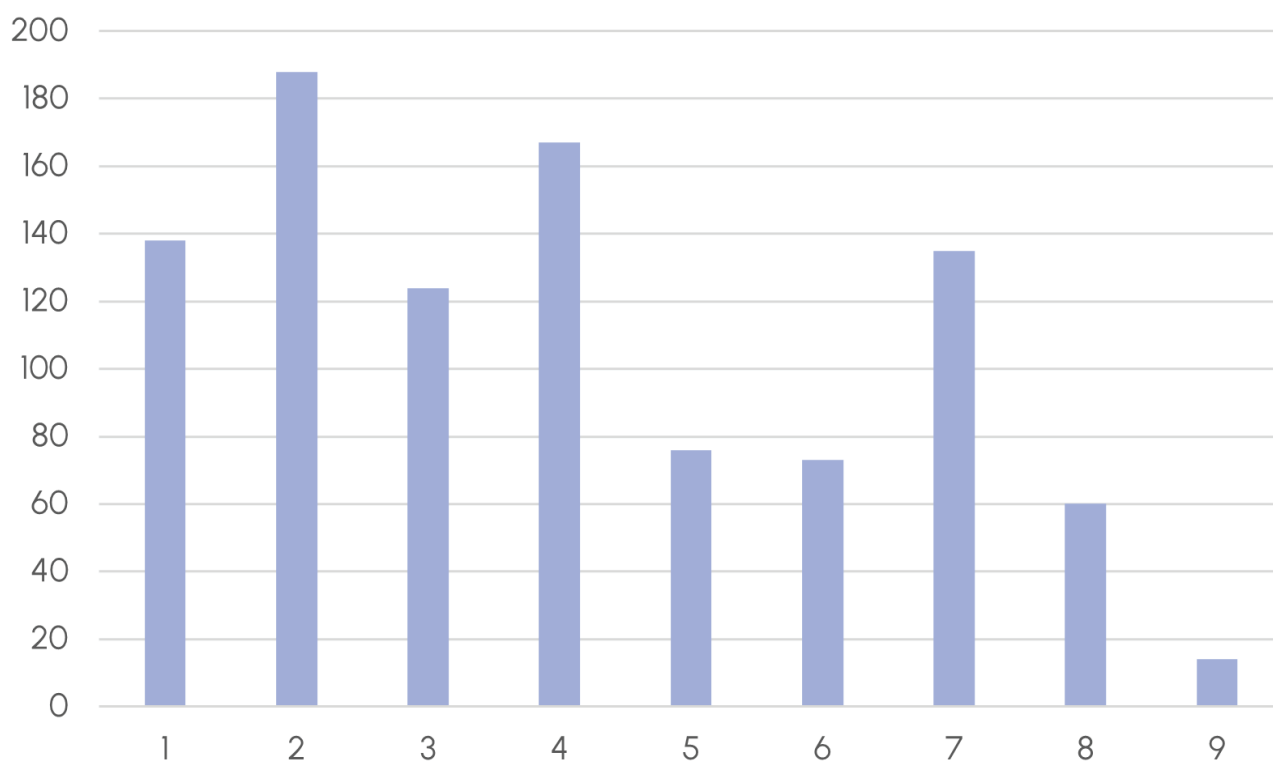
- Rule breaking such as dogs, bikes, litter, and overnight camping (5%)
- Increased urban densification in the area (4%)
- Impacts of pollution, climate change, fire risk, and ecosystem degradation (3%)
- Education programs insufficient for community demand (2%)
- Decision-making disjointed from community interests (2%)



A volunteer and a community member at the 2025 Native Plant Sale. Photo: Ashleigh Talbott

**Question 8: What kind of Nature House exhibits do you think would help with our mission the most? (Select up to three)**

1. Indigenous curated displays and place-based knowledge
2. Interactive displays about local ecosystems and species (e.g. opportunities to learn about invasive plants)
3. Climate change and its impact on local habitats
4. Seasonal wildlife exhibits (e.g., bird migration, pollinators, etc)
5. Historical timeline of the Sanctuary and surrounding region
6. Youth-led or student art and science projects
7. Hands-on natural history exhibits (e.g., touch tables, specimens)
8. Art inspired by nature (local artists, photography, sculpture)
9. Other



Additional responses for exhibit ideas included:

- The impacts of development and mitigation solutions
- Wetlands and climate change adaptations
- The spiritual aspect of nature, herbal remedies from nature, and nature mindfulness
- More interactive displays and activities in the Nature House

Respondents also emphasized that Indigenous ways of knowing should be clearly incorporated in all exhibits and that effort should be made to ensure that collaboration with First Nations are not tokenistic but are grounded in genuine partnership.

## SECTION 1: KEY TAKEAWAYS

There is a generally positive view of the work and future of Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary. Responses commended the staff and volunteers for maintaining an important accessible greenspace and creating a successful model for urban conservation. Ecosystem restoration and nature education were identified as top priorities.

Appreciation was noted for:

- Invasive species control and trail maintenance
- Protection of critical local habitats
- Passion and dedication of staff and volunteers
- Space to connect with nature

Next Suggestions for Nature Education on site:

- Emphasize youth programs (e.g. school groups and summer camps), as well as evening and weekend adult programs and workshops, and community events.
- Expand partnerships, so that offerings for school-aged children are sustainable and cost-effective to run.
- Improve Nature House exhibits and on-site signage to be more engaging and informative.

Tensions exist between accessibility and densification

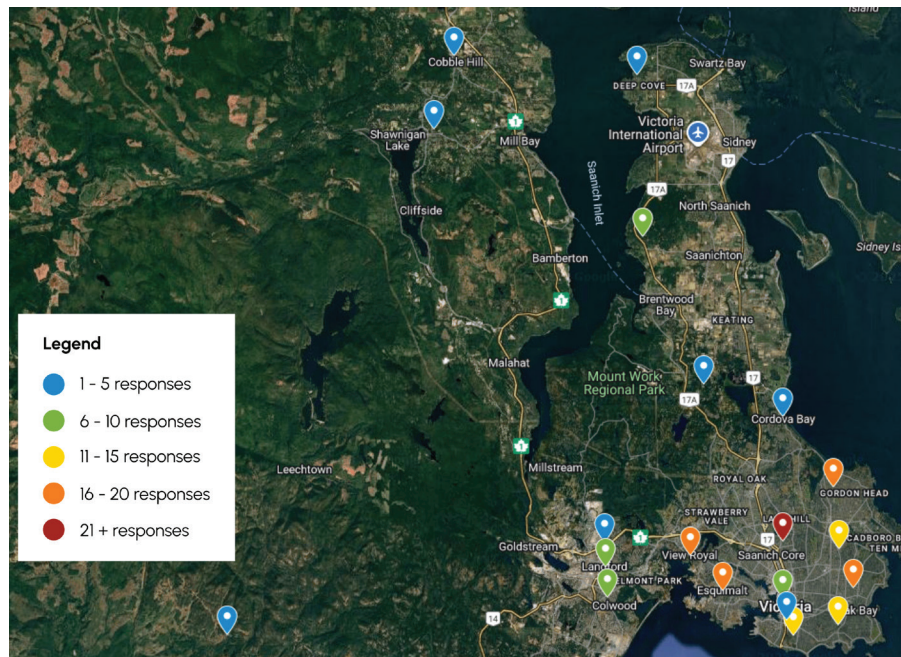
- Given the benefits of nature for health and wellbeing, many hope that the Nature Sanctuary will remain accessible to serve the broader community.
- Respondents voiced strong concerns about the negative impact that densification in the neighbourhood will have on the Nature Sanctuary's sensitive ecosystems.
- Overall, survey responses underscored the challenges of our work to mitigate the impacts of increased use while continuing to serve as a site for community connection to nature.



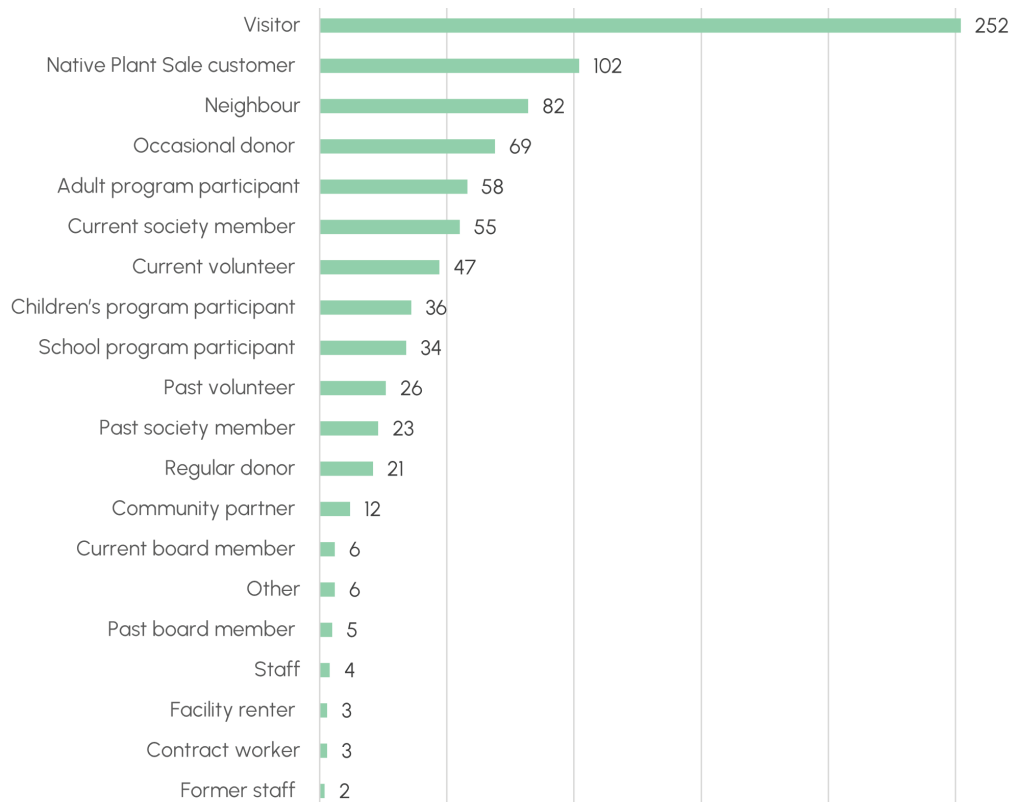
Licorice fern, *Polypodium glycyrrhiza*. Photo: Taylor Nishimura

## Section 2: You and the Nature Sanctuary

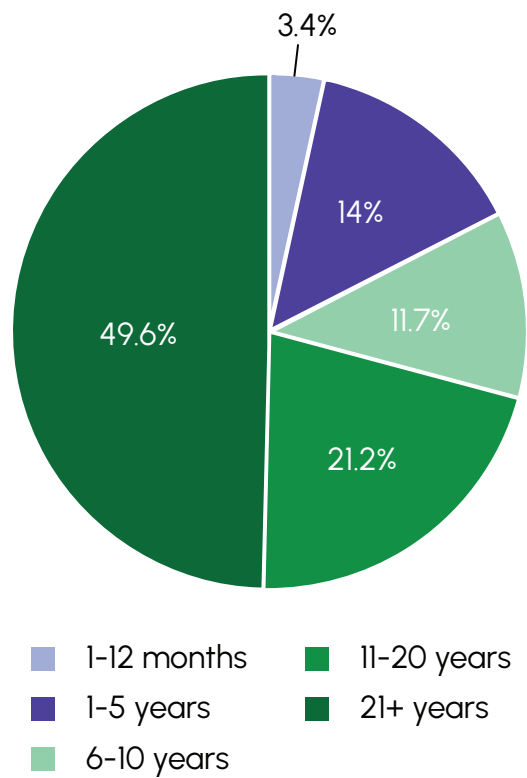
**Question 9:** Please submit the first 3 digits of your postal code so we can identify which communities connect with the Nature Sanctuary.



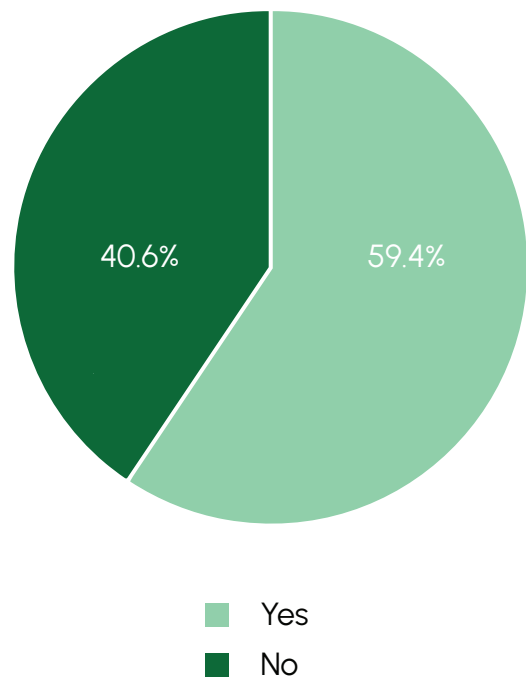
**Question 10:** Please identify any/all of the ways that you interact with the Nature Sanctuary.



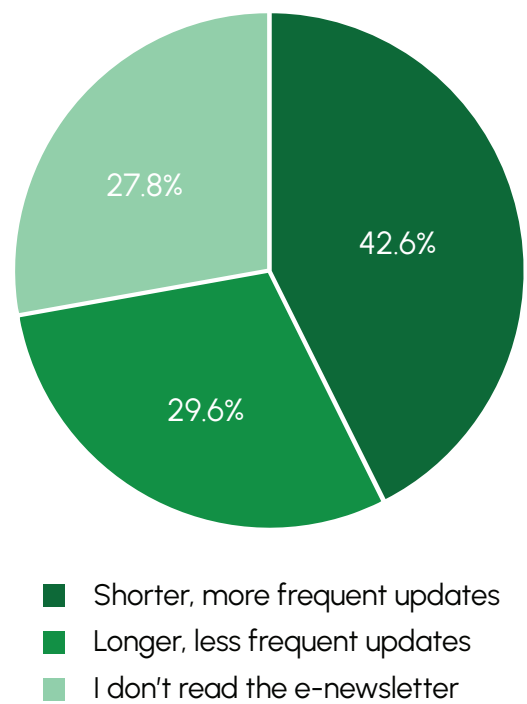
**Question 11:** How long have you lived in the Greater Victoria area?



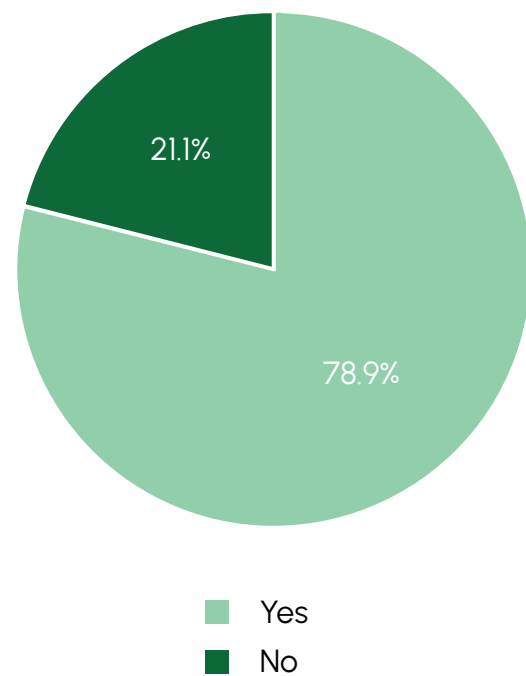
**Question 12:** Do you regularly read the Nature Sanctuary e-newsletter?



**Question 13:** Would you rather receive shorter, more frequent updates, or longer, less frequent updates?



**Question 14:** Do you feel well informed about what is happening at the Nature Sanctuary?



**Question 15:** If you are not already receiving the Nature Sanctuary e-newsletter and you would like to, please enter your email address below.

27% of respondents requested to be added to the Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary e-newsletter mailing list.

**Question 16:** If you do not feel well-informed, how could we improve our communications?

We received the following comments about our communications:

- Respondents who have not yet subscribed to the newsletter hope to be more informed once they have subscribed (7%)
- A few respondents expressed that they are satisfied with communications as is (2%)

A number of respondents wish to be more informed and expressed a desire for more in-depth communication (6%). Suggestions included:

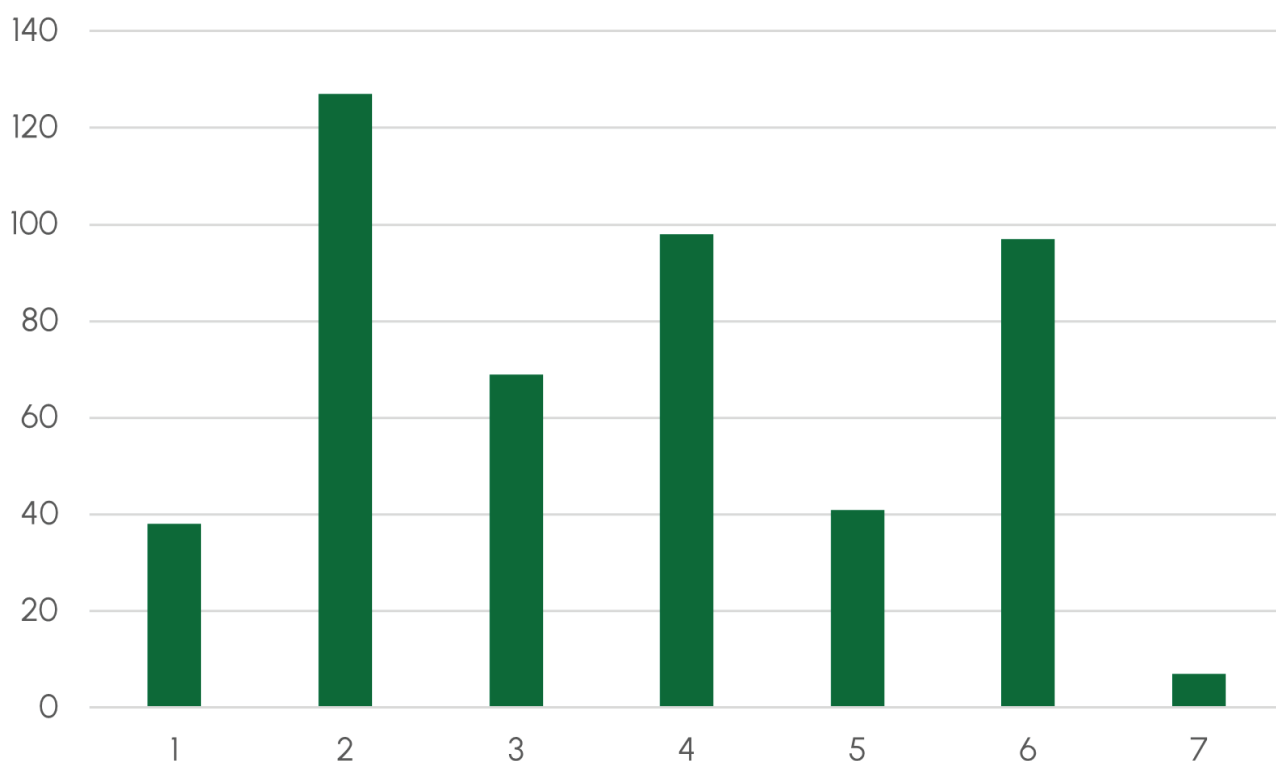
- Information on current research and management projects, wildlife sightings, and what is happening at the Board level
- Increased publishing in local media outlets and newspaper
- Expanded printed presence on community notice boards
- More social media updates featuring current projects, staff and volunteers, and wildlife



A Nature Educator and a youth program participant at the Founders Wharf. Photo: Taylor Nishimura

**Question 17 :** If you are a current donor, or considering making a donation, what area would you most like your donation to make a difference?

1. Nature House renovations and exhibitions
2. Habitat restoration and invasive species removals
3. Research and ecosystem monitoring
4. Environmental education programs
5. Community outreach and inclusion
6. Area of greatest need
7. Other

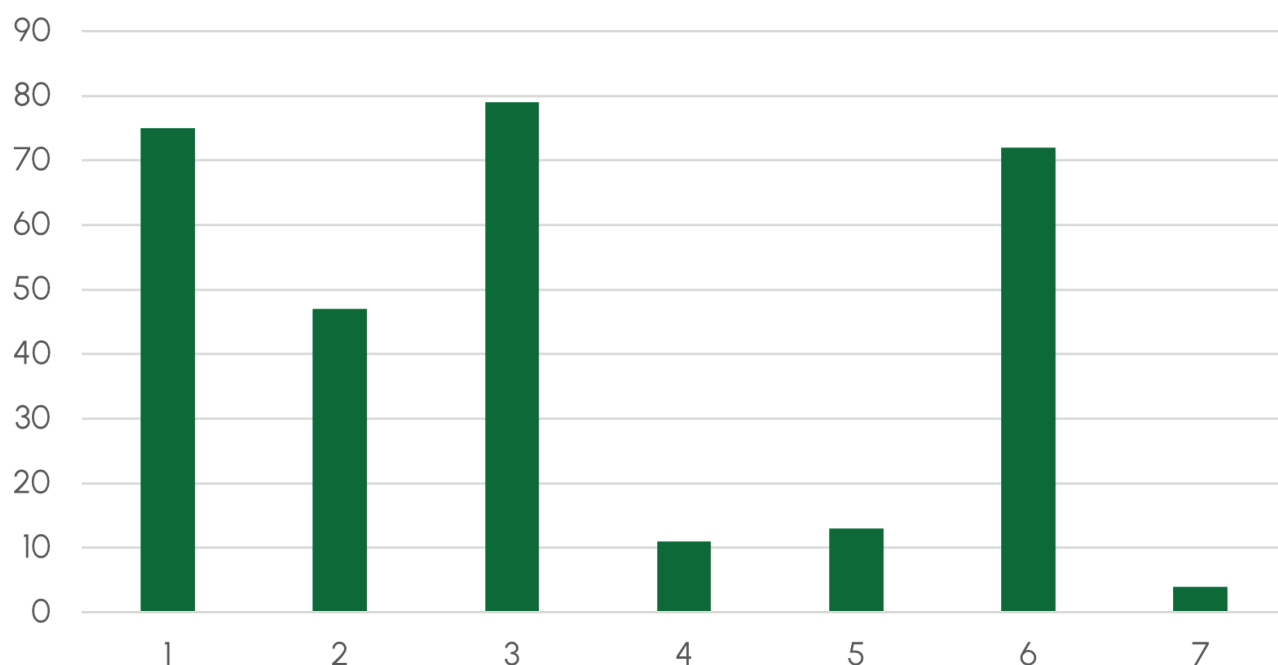


'Other' areas included:

- Increasing capacity for greater number of visitors
- Land acquisition
- Minority inclusion programs
- Infrastructure improvements such as bridge repairs and a 24 hour bathroom on site
- Increased site signage about Nature Sanctuary rules

**Question 18 :** If you are a current donor, or considering making a donation, which of the following would increase the value or impact of your giving experience?

1. More updates on how donations are making a difference
2. Invitations to exclusive donor appreciation events or learning tours
3. Opportunities to direct your donation toward specific projects or programs
4. Recognition in our communications
5. More options for monthly or legacy giving
6. No changes are needed
7. Other



'Other' areas include:

- Subsidized program costs
- Option to pay it forward through sliding-scale program fees

**Question 19 :** Do you have any other changes, improvements, or adaptations that you would like to share?

Of the 84 respondents, 24 expressed gratitude for the Society's work and to continue on with operations as they are, and 19 respondents articulated that they had no further comments. Key themes that arose from these responses include:

- The importance of educational and community programs (6%)
- Appreciation and suggestions for the newsletter and communications (2%)
- Concerns about urban encroachment and development (2%)
- Suggestions for partnerships with fellow community organizations (1%)
- Wishes for food and drink service on site (1%)

## SECTION 2: KEY TAKEAWAYS

Survey respondents primarily live in the immediate 5km surrounding the Nature Sanctuary and have lived in the Greater Victoria area for 10+ years.

- No survey responses were collected from beyond the Capital Regional District; the furthest responses were collected from Sooke and Cobble Hill.
- Efforts should be made to simultaneously keep neighbours engaged while expanding reach throughout the Greater Victoria area.
- Newcomers to the area are under-represented in survey results, likely related to neighbourhood demographics.

The majority of respondents (79%) feel well informed with what is happening at the Nature Sanctuary

- Overall, respondents were happy with the frequency and content of our communications.
- Some suggested that more in-depth site updates could help to further connect the organization's mission to local residents.
- Respondents demonstrated a desire to learn more about the work being done by Sanctuary staff, and volunteers, conservation stories, as well as the work being done at the board level.
- Current and potential donors are most interested in habitat restoration and would like the opportunity to direct their donations to specific programs on site.
- Respondents also expressed interest in more updates on donor impact at the Sanctuary.



Nature Sanctuary staff conducting water quality monitoring. Photo: Taylor Nishimura



A great blue heron overlooking the lake. Photo: Taylor Nishimura

**Support Our Work**

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**Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary Society**

3873 Swan Lake Road. Victoria, B.C. V8X 3W1

(250) 479-0211 | [info@swanlake.bc.ca](mailto:info@swanlake.bc.ca) | [swanlake.bc.ca](http://swanlake.bc.ca)

