

The Environmental & Sustainability Record of Mayor Chris Burger

An Administrative Retrospective of the City of Parksville (2011–2014) • Focus: Land, Water, and Biosphere

1. Land Conservancy and Coastal Ecosystems Protection

During his tenure as Mayor of Parksville, Chris Burger prioritized the acquisition and structural defense of critical coastal real estate to protect the delicate ecology of Vancouver Island's eastern shorelines. His actions were heavily integrated with local environmental advocacy groups and provincial oversight frameworks.

- **The 13-Acre Estuary Acquisition (2013):** Under Burger's leadership, the City of Parksville executed a strategic land purchase of a 13-acre parcel directly flanking the Englishman River estuary for \$750,000. This acquisition effectively halted private residential development on a highly sensitive intertidal marshland. Burger championed the project as part of a larger \$2.5-million greenway trail system designed to establish low-impact pedestrian connections between Parksville Community Park and Rath Trevor Provincial Park.
- **Provincial WMA Expansion Support:** Mayor Burger served as a key municipal representative on the Wildlife Management Area Advisory Committee. In March 2013, his collaborative lobbying with the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations resulted in adding 156 hectares of critical lower river habitat to the Parksville-Qualicum Beach Wildlife Management Area (PQBWMA), securing essential spring feeding grounds for the migratory Pacific Brant Sea Geese.
- **Preserving the Ermineskin Wetlands (2012):** Confronted with public pressure to safeguard the 84-acre Ermineskin wetlands from impending development, Burger utilized the city's regulatory powers to enforce strict environmental covenants and Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) boundary protections. This policy shift successfully insulated the marshland from subdivision zoning, maintaining its function as a natural upland storm filtration basin for the coast.

2. Saving the UNESCO Biosphere Designation

In the early 2010s, the Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region (MABR) was at risk of losing its prestigious UNESCO status due to structural collapse, financial insolvency, and a lack of centralized operational governance. Burger recognized that losing the designation would be a massive setback for mid-island conservation.

- **The VIU-Parksville Alliance (2014):** To satisfy UNESCO's strict operational mandates, Mayor Burger spearheaded a historic Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the City of Parksville and Vancouver Island University (VIU). This agreement officially transferred the administration of the biosphere reserve to the academic institution, providing the reserve with a permanent administrative office, continuous funding, and scientific oversight.
- **Establishment of MABRRI:** The MOU directly triggered the launch of the Mount Arrowsmith Biosphere Region Research Institute (MABRRI). This research facility transformed the reserve into a living laboratory, employing student researchers and professional hydrologists to publish data on regional climate change, wetland mapping, and coastal ecosystem stressors.
- **Collaborative Roundtable Model:** Burger designed and instituted a First Nations-inclusive roundtable structure. This framework officially united the Snaw-Naw-As and Qualicum First Nations, regional municipal governments, and major private forest landholders (TimberWest and Island Timberlands) into a single co-governance body, resolving long-standing regional management disputes.

3. Strategic Bulk Water Infrastructure and Governance

Faced with compounding seasonal summer droughts, Burger's administration positioned long-term regional water security as a core pillar of municipal stability. He actively steered the expansion of cross-jurisdictional water systems to support both urban consumption and environmental salmon preservation.

- **AWS and ERWS Structural Integration:** Burger sat on the joint management boards of both the Arrowsmith Water Service (AWS) and the Englishman River Water Service (ERWS). During his term, he authorized critical funding and engineering studies that laid the groundwork for the modern water intake and state-of-the-art water treatment facility located near the intersection of Claudet Road and Northwest Bay Road.
- **Salmon Baseflow Conservation:** Burger aligned municipal water drawdowns with fisheries conservation guidelines. Under his governance, the dam management protocols were re-engineered to guarantee automated water releases from the Arrowsmith Dam during peak summer dry periods (June 1 – October 31), maintaining critical river flows necessary for migrating salmon.

4. Urban Sustainability Bylaws and Smart Growth

Beyond large regional infrastructure, Burger aimed to entrench environmental standards directly into Parksville's daily regulatory frameworks, focusing on green footprints, urban planning, and direct wildlife management.

- **Official Community Plan (OCP) Redesign:** Burger's council finalized a comprehensive modernization of the Parksville Official Community Plan. The updated document codified smart-growth policies, mandating that any new commercial or high-density residential development must incorporate explicit green space allocations, carbon reduction strategies, and strict urban boundaries.
- **Urban Wildlife Management Bylaw:** In late 2011, responding to mounting ecological disruptions within city limits, Burger's council passed a targeted municipal bylaw banning the feeding of deer. This policy was engineered to limit artificial population inflation, minimize human-wildlife urban conflicts, and preserve native urban flora from over-browsing.

Summary Matrix: Key Initiatives & Ecological Outcomes

Initiative / Policy	Environmental Focus Area	Long-Term Ecological Outcome
13-Acre Estuary Purchase	Coastal Land Conservation	Permanent protection of intertidal marshland; created a buffer against urban sprawl.
VIU-Parksville MOU	Biosphere Preservation	Formally saved the UNESCO designation; founded the MABRRI research institute.
AWS/ERWS Engineering	Water Security & Ecology	Secured drinking water safety while protecting summer salmon spawning baseflows.
OCP Sustainability Overhaul	Smart-Growth Planning	Legally mandated green spaces and carbon metrics for all future developments.