

# Major Conservation Threats / Priorities for Gabriola

Provided by the Gabriola Land and Trails Trust (GaLTT)

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This document looks at conservation issues as they relate to the land-base of Gabriola Island, not the foreshore nor marine environment. They are also recognized as being viewed from a settler perspective.

## 1. Population Growth and Development

Under “Threats to Ecosystems related to Gabriola Island”, the Islands Trust Conservancy Regional Conservation Plan 2018-2027 states in part,

*“In particular, the Gabriola Island Local Trust Area is vulnerable to loss of natural ecosystems to residential and associated uses. Gabriola Island itself is a short ferry ride from Nanaimo and saw higher than average ecosystem disturbance between 2004-2014 compared with other islands in the Islands Trust Area. Most of this disturbance was deforestation for roads and rural development.” (p.70)*

Gabriola is the second most densely populated island in the Islands Trust, next to Bowen Island. Outside of climate change, this points to the root of most of the conservation threats to Gabriola – population growth and development.

“Once land is converted to human use, that land is less available to nature. As land conversion reaches or goes above a 30-40% threshold, the number of species in a given habitat decline more rapidly.” (from Conservation Status of Gabriola Island Local Trust Area (GILTA), Islands Trust Conservancy (ITC)).

The ITC calculates that approximately 28% of the GILTA has been converted to human use.

Conservation issues related to development include:

- Tree cutting – there is a lack of restrictions on tree cutting on private lots on Gabriola
- Stress on ground water
- Fragmentation of natural habitat
- Disturbance of sensitive ecosystems and rare species
- Increase in invasive species, especially plant species that crowd out native species. Key invasives include Scotch Broom, Daphne or spurge laurel, English ivy, Tansy ragwort and Yellow flag iris.

## 2. Climate Change

Without going into detail, some of the realities of climate change that we are already experiencing include: warmer and wetter winters; drier summers; changes in the timing of seasons; and more weather extremes.

Conservation issues related to climate change include:

- Summer drought stressing ecosystems, e.g., dying western redcedar
- Higher fire risk
- Heavy rainfall events, soil compaction, erosion, increased run-off
- Impacts from changes in timing of seasons
- Sea level rise.

### 3. GaLTT Conservation Priorities for Gabriola

- Increase the amount of protected land – as of March 31, 2020 the ITC lists Gabriola as having 12.13% of the local trust area protected, the 4<sup>th</sup> lowest of the 14 islands listed (<http://www.islandstrustconservancy.ca/i-am-a/local-government/Ita-protected-areas/>), and less than the current federal goal of 17%. Protection priorities include: older mature forests (150-250 years old) as there is very little older forest on Gabriola; wetlands and riparian ecosystems; Garry Oak ecosystems
- Develop regulations/restrictions to reduce and manage tree-cutting, often clear-cutting, of residential properties on Gabriola. Keeping trees alive has many benefits. The many leaves of living trees actively remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere through photosynthesis, create more tree biomass and add organic matter to the soil. Keep living trees before planting new ones as they are performing climate change roles now when we need them to. New trees will also remove and store carbon but at low overall rates until they get much older. Cutting trees also exposes the soil and leads to carbon loss as well as providing a seed bed for invasive plants, fragments habitats, etc.
- Educate landholders on ways they can help protect and enhance natural habitats on their property
- Accurate identification and mapping of sensitive ecosystems
- Develop policies to create ecological protection zones
- Develop policy and practices that allow public facilities to harvest and use rainwater
- Require water storage to be built for new construction
- Remove invasives and prevent/contain/control their introduction. Dealing with invasives is huge; much better to prevent their introduction and spread
- Work across governments and agencies to develop policies and procedures to deal with invasive plants comprehensively (i.e., disposal of invasive plants is currently very difficult)
- Reconcile contradictions in policy affecting conservation issues between different regulatory agencies and their goals, e.g., Firesmart, invasive plants
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions, e.g., build infrastructure and encourage more green and active transportation, (e.g., bikes, e-bikes, GERTIE) in ways that do not degrade parks and trails.

## Suggested References

- Islands Trust Conservancy Regional Conservation Plan 2018-2017:  
[http://www.islandstrustconservancy.ca/media/84821/itc\\_2018-11\\_rcp-2018-2027-web\\_final.pdf](http://www.islandstrustconservancy.ca/media/84821/itc_2018-11_rcp-2018-2027-web_final.pdf)
- Islands Trust Conservancy – Land Use Planning Tools and Practices for Sensitive Ecosystems:  
<http://www.islandstrustconservancy.ca/i-am-a/local-government/seplanning/>
- A Sensitive Ecosystem Guide for Islands Trust Area Property Owners:  
<http://www.islandstrustconservancy.ca/media/9590/itf-sembrochure-final-jan25.pdf>
- Coastal Douglas Fir Ecosystems:  
[http://www.cdfcp.ca/images/CDFCP\\_Coastal.Douglas-fir.Ecosystems\\_Brochure\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.cdfcp.ca/images/CDFCP_Coastal.Douglas-fir.Ecosystems_Brochure_WEB.pdf)
- Gabriola Island Local Trust Area Coastal Douglas-fir Forests brochure:  
[http://www.islandstrust.bc.ca/media/350087/itc\\_cdf\\_gabriola\\_web.pdf](http://www.islandstrust.bc.ca/media/350087/itc_cdf_gabriola_web.pdf)