



March 17, 2021

Josie Osborne
Minister of Municipal Affairs
Room 310 Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4
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Re: Enabling legislation for the Islands Trust

Dear Minister Osborne:

I am writing on behalf of the Directors of Gabriola Land and Trails Trust in support of the Islands Trust's appeal for greater authority to implement and enforce environmental protection measures within the rare and threatened Coastal Douglas-fir forests and habitats found within the Trust Area's Gulf Islands.

The Coastal Douglas-fir (CDF) biogeoclimatic zone is the smallest of the 14 ecological zones in British Columbia. It occurs on a narrow strip of south-east Vancouver Island, most of the Gulf Islands, and small pockets along the coastal mainland. Over thousands of years, a unique mix of trees and plants have found their niche in this seasonal temperate rainforest, including rare Garry oaks and arbutus. The CDF has the highest number of species and ecosystems at risk in the province. According to the Islands Trust Conservancy, "when ranked for sensitivity to climate change, carbon storage capability, biodiversity habitat, and the degree of human impacts, the Coastal Douglas-fir is the most important BC ecosystem". The Islands Trust area represents one-third of the provincial extent of CDF forests.

Despite its importance, the CDF ecological zone is the least-protected in BC with less than 1% of old growth remaining and only 10% that are older than 120 years. It is also the most altered by human activities, including timber harvesting, industrial development, recreation, and urbanization. This has included construction of the highest density of roads, resulting in some of the province's most fragmented habitats.

Despite their tremendous ecological value, trees, canopy cover and forest stands are disappearing across the Islands Trust area at an alarming rate. This is especially troubling given that the Island Trust's unique local governance structure was designed around a single mandate: "**to preserve and protect the Trust area and its unique amenities and environment**" [Islands Trust Act, 1974].

Last year, a review of the tools available to the Islands Trust to fulfill the "preserve and protect" mandate charged to them by the *Islands Trust Act* was conducted by the Environmental Law Centre at the University of Victoria. Among other important findings, this report highlights that:

- The Islands Trust lacks the authority needed to protect forest ecosystems with Development Permit requirements and further lacks the enforcement powers to make Development Permit Areas effective.

- Local Trust Committees have not been afforded the same power made available to municipalities to design and implement regulations on tree cutting and forest removal.

Ultimately, the report found that provincial law reform is "clearly needed" and recommended that the Trust petition the Province "to reform the law to [provide] the legal tools necessary to protect its precious forests".

I am writing today to request the law reform necessary to allow the Trust to carry out its mandate. It has been almost 50 years since the *Islands Trust Act* brought the federation of the Islands Trust into being. Now, after nearly five decades of struggling to fulfill their mandate with both hands tied behind their backs, it is time the Province provided the tools necessary to ensure biodiversity, climate change resiliency, and long-term stability in one of the rarest and most threatened ecological zones on the planet.

Sincerely,



Robert Brockley
President, Gabriola Land and Trails Trust

cc Douglas Routley, MLA for Nanaimo-North Cowichan
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