



**\*\* Sent via electronic mail to [info@naturetrust.bc.ca](mailto:info@naturetrust.bc.ca) \*\***

September 8, 2021

Dr. Jasper Lament  
Chief Executive Officer  
The Nature Trust of BC  
500-888 Dunsmuir Street  
Vancouver, BC V6C 3K4

**Re: Coats Marsh Regional Park Drainage Issues**

Dear Dr. Lament:

I am writing on behalf of the Gabriola Land and Trails Trust (GaLTT) to voice concern about recent activities at Coats Marsh Regional Park on Gabriola Island where water levels of the marsh ecosystem are being significantly lowered by the Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN). I've contacted the RDN twice about this issue and have received some useful background information and project rationale from Yann Gagnon (Manager, Parks Services). However, as the co-owner of Coats Marsh, I want to you to know we still have serious misgivings about this project and the effects it is having on the marsh ecosystem and on the valuable wildlife habitat it provides.

As you likely know, the water level in Coats Marsh has been slowly rising in recent years due to beaver activity. In 2020, the RDN hired a Professional Engineer to assess the condition of the existing concrete weir at the marsh outlet and to recommend remedial actions. According to the RDN, the report confirmed the water level behind the beaver dam was approximately 1.1 m above the height of the weir. Although the dam is in good condition, there is apparent concern that a sudden release of water caused by a future breach in the dam could possibly result in the failure of the weir and downstream damage and liability issues. As a result, the wetland level behind the beaver dam has recently been drawn down by approximately 40 cm to facilitate placement of a permanent siphon that will help maintain levels over the longer term closer to the elevation of the concrete outlet weir.

GaLTT is somewhat sympathetic to the potential liability issues caused by the elevated water levels behind the beaver dam and the need to find a solution that will stabilize water levels over the long term. However, we share the concerns of many other Gabriolans about the harm the current actions are having on the marsh ecosystem. GaLTT is especially alarmed about the rapidity of the draw down and the fact it is occurring during a period of prolonged and severe drought and high summer temperatures.

The RDN has assured me the current actions are being guided by an environmental plan prepared for the project and that the work schedule was specifically timed to coincide with a low-risk window to avoid any potential impacts to native wildlife. I've also been told the work is being supervised by a Registered Biologist and that TNT participated in the planning and have had an opportunity to review and comment on the project.

An 'eye test' of the outcome of lowering water levels by GaLTT and others raises doubt about assurances that environmental impacts to the marsh will be minimal. After 40 cm of draw down, the effects on the marsh perimeter are already very visible. Apparent plans to lower the water level a further 70 cm to attain, and maintain, the approximate level of the outlet weir will undoubtedly result in further loss of valuable marsh

habitat. If you haven't already done so, I urge you to have a TNT staff member visit the site and view the results first-hand.

Gabriola Island has very few large wetland ecosystems, so the responsible stewardship of Coats Marsh is especially important. The beavers have done a masterful job of improving wildlife habitat at Coats Marsh in recent years and it is disheartening to see their efforts being deliberately dismantled. We remain hopeful that an effective, but less environmentally damaging, compromise can be reached.

GaLTT is a charitable, non-profit society focused on protecting Coastal Douglas Fir ecosystems on Gabriola and nearby islands, developing and maintaining a network of public trails, and providing public education and awareness of outdoor recreation and conservation issues. Our conservation work includes advocacy, land acquisition and conservation covenants. We have built a respectful working relationship with the RDN, Islands Trust Conservancy, and BC Parks on a range of conservation and trail issues.

Sincerely,



Robert Brockley  
President, Gabriola Land and Trails Trust

cc: Kees Langereis, Islands Trust Trustee, Gabriola  
Scott Colbourne, Islands Trust Trustee, Gabriola  
Vanessa Craig, RDN Director, Electoral Area 'B'