



# GaLTT Newsletter Report on 2023

March 2024 • [www.galtt.ca](http://www.galtt.ca) • [info@galtt.ca](mailto:info@galtt.ca) • PO Box 56, Gabriola, BC V0R 1X0

## “Descanso to Drumbeg”—20 years in the making!

We hoped in 2004 to complete trail connections from one end of the island to the other by 2010, but everything is more complicated than you expect. Large tracts of privately held land are obstacles to trespass-free walking, so gaining the ability in 2009 to hold trail licences with private land holders greatly enhanced the process, enabling GaLTT to bypass the more cumbersome RDN legal process. GaLTT’s insurance protects the landholder against lawsuits from injured walkers or volunteer workers, and GaLTT undertakes to mark and maintain the trail in good condition. GaLTT continues to work cooperatively with the RDN, BC Parks and with various land holders to enable and maintain the needed end-to-end connections. The latest “Descanso to Drumbeg” links were made late in 2023 by the **Cox Park to Burnside Drive connection**.

The Cox Park extension and the trail linking Cox Park to Burnside Drive resulted from an approval process for the Sitka Spruce development between the Village and Taylor Bay Road. The land use development agreement between the land developer (Dr. Bob Rooks), the Islands Trust, the Regional District of Nanaimo, and the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure, enabled public access trails through the development lands, linking Cox Park to the village. As part of the density transfer agreement, over 300 acres of parkland were also added to the south of 707 Community Park and 40 acres of parkland were added to the southeast of Cox Community Park, resulting in a substantial net benefit to the community in parkland and trails. Thank you to all parties involved!



*GaLTT president Hugh Skinner holds the tape for RDN Director Vanessa Craig to cut at the official opening of the 105-metre Cox Park to Burnside Drive trail. A good crowd turned out for the trail opening ceremony and subsequent guided walk.*

As well as building and maintaining the trails in co-operation with RDN Parks Department, GaLTT’s volunteers have built boardwalks to protect the Mallett Creek streambed and wetlands where they are crossed by trails.

## Expanding our activities

GaLTT community programs have always included a lot of trail walking, and this year was no exception but we also expanded into activities with a conservation focus

### Guided walks

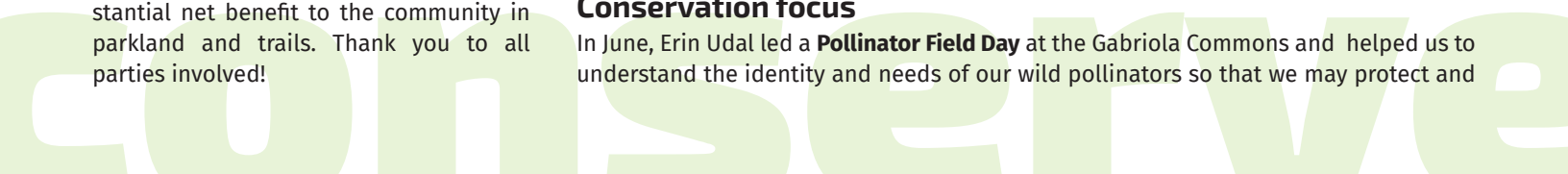
Winter walks saw islanders learning about our natural and social history. Guides shared information about Gabriola’s industrial history, geology and bird life along **False Narrows**. We explored **Coats Marsh Regional Park and Stumps farm**, a very different environment, in the March walk.

Our annual **End-to-End Walk**, held on June 3rd to celebrate BC Trails Day, saw 80 people walk 13 kilometers from the Silva Bay Catholic Church to the Skol Pub for well earned appies and drinks.

We started a new series of **“Stroll and Sip”** summer walks that ended up at local businesses for social time and drinks. Ravenskill Orchards, Surf Lodge and the Skol Pub all welcomed the walkers who enjoyed the opportunity to explore trails and meet fellow hikers.

### Conservation focus

In June, Erin Udal led a **Pollinator Field Day** at the Gabriola Commons and helped us to understand the identity and needs of our wild pollinators so that we may protect and



enhance habitat on Gabriola. Tips included keeping areas of our land undisturbed (no tilling or mulching) because mining bees make holes in hard packed bare land soil for egg laying and others nest in holes in fallen trees. Native plants such as snowberry, gumweed and pearly everlasting have long bloom times and are valuable food sources for pollinators.

Maintaining or increasing the biodiversity of native plants and animals to sustain healthy ecosystems on Gabriola is a focus of both our **Nature Steward Program** and the conservation education we offer generally. GaLTT offered support sessions for learning to use iNaturalist to inventory and map species and held our first **Bioblitz** in August. Watch for it again in 2024.

*"As I reflect on my upbringing on Gabriola Island, I am struck by the profound impact it has had on my values and my deep-rooted care for the environment. Attending Gabriola Elementary School was a formative experience that instilled in me the importance of community resiliency and taking responsibility for the things we care about, including our environment. At Gabriola Elementary, the teachers and staff taught us the value of stewardship and the interconnectedness of our actions with the health of our surroundings. We learned about the delicate balance of ecosystems, the impact of pollution on our oceans, and the importance of conserving resources. I felt invested in."*

—Erin Udal, "Why Earth Day Matters on Gabriola Island"

## March 2023 AGM

Thirty-nine people attended our March 4th AGM and enjoyed pizza during a presentation by Libby Gunn and Alison Thomas about GaLTT's restoration work over the past couple of years at Drumbeg Provincial Park. They explained how ongoing invasives removal project has helped to build a strong relationship with BC Parks and led to developing our knowledge and capabilities for restoration work.

Outgoing President Rob Brockley gave an overview of GaLTT's 2022 work. The meeting ratified proposed updates to our Constitution & Bylaws that better reflect our mission and work. Outgoing board members Jenni Gehlbach and Lars Hulstein were thanked, and new Directors Brad Nixon and Alison Thomas were welcomed. Jenni received an honorary lifetime membership in recognition of her 14 years on the board and many contributions to GaLTT. (Leaving the Board doesn't always mean stopping working entirely. Lars remains on the Trails committee, and Jenni continues to work on our Communications and Accessibility Committees.) Several volunteers were honoured for outstanding work: Leanne Hewlin (Community Engagement Committee), Rose Alderson and Darci Swinton (Invasive Species Committee) and Peter Danenhower and Don Machell (Trails Committee). At the next board meeting Hugh Skinner was elected our new President, and Sarah Kopjar took over the role of Secretary.

## Conservation and covenants

Much of GaLTT's important conservation work happens behind the scenes, including annual monitoring visits to properties with conservation covenants. There are 7 conservation covenants in the Gabriola Island Trust Area. We co-hold 3 and are the local manager for a 4th, held by American Friends of Canadian Conservation. In the summer and fall, experienced GaLTT volunteers

visited and reported on the various properties to ensure the ecological qualities that the covenant was established to protect are maintained. Invasive plants are one of the main issues on these covenant properties and landholders are encouraged to work to reduce their impact. Conservation covenants are a powerful tool to help protect Gabriola's ecosystems in perpetuity. For more information, visit: [galtt.ca/covenants](http://galtt.ca/covenants)

### The Macrae lands

On May 20, 2023, a dedication ceremony was held for a resting bench crafted by Andre Nobels (and installed by the GaLTT trail crew) to recognize the contributions of Stan and Maxine McRae to the Gabriola community. The event was a great time to think about what community means in relation to conservation, and how we all can contribute to both.

In 1991 the McRaes generously donated a piece of their land to the Gabriola Historical and Museum Society, for a museum site. They were the first landholders on Gabriola to establish a NAPTEP conservation covenant (held by what is now the Islands Trust Conservancy/ITC) on most of their property. When they passed away, all their covenanted land was acquired by the Museum, who now steward the covenant, carrying on their legacy. With the generous cooperation of the Museum and adjacent land holders, GaLTT holds trail licences with the Gabriola Museum and an adjacent land holder giving public access to a trail system linking Fell Rd to South Rd. "Gabions" (wire caged bundles of rock) support our signage installation without damaging the sandstone or fragile meadow plants. GaLTT helps to maintain the trail and have provided advice and support to the museum on covenant matters.

### Working together to protect special places

The McRae lands are a wonderful example of what people can accomplish, formally and informally, individually and working together within organizations. If you have the privilege of being a landholder on Gabriola, you can **donate** or **covenant** your property as the McRaes did, leaving a tangible legacy to our community. Or get involved with GaLTT's **Nature Stewards** program to protect native habitat and species on your land. When clearing land, donate plants to GaLTT's **Native Plant Depot** so they can be re-homed. Or **volunteer** with us!



Covenant monitoring at Elder Cedar

### A few stats on our work in BC Parks:

- **105 individuals volunteered in BC Parks on Gabriola Island in 2023 (an increase of 91% from 2022)**
- **325 service hours performed by all individuals in 2023 (an increase of 66% from 2022)**

**Thank you, volunteers!**

### Conserving owl habitat on Link Island

The Swift family's vision for Link Island Nature Reserve is as a site for climate-change research and a refuge for threatened species vulnerable to human disturbance, including the western screech owl, barn swallow, and great blue heron. Research on Western Screech-Owls is ongoing, and in September '23 we visited Link Island to support the installation of 8 nest boxes under the supervision of owl biologist Ren Ferguson. This visit, organized by the Species at Risk Program Coordinator from the Islands Trust Conservancy (ITC), included biologists and representatives from the ITC, NALT (Nanaimo & Area Land Trust), and Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC).

### Invasive plant control and habitat restoration

It takes a village! Trail trimming and invasives bashing (especially broom-bashing, which kicked off at the end of April in Drumbeg) ran through early summer in Rollo McClay Park, the Honeysuckle Woods, on Petroglyph Way, in Joyce Lockwood Community Park, and all around the island unidentified individuals and organised group work parties pulled broom in their neighbourhoods. This year GaLTT's 11 broom work parties, generated 236 volunteer hours

August meant tansy ragwort removal on Fleet Street and elsewhere. Later we were happy to announce that newcomer Barb Ellis (who attended all but two of our summer work parties!) was the winner of the bucket of flowers generously donated by Just Another Weed Patch Farm.

### Thank you to Camp Miriam!

Every summer, Camp Miriam kids help GaLTT with conservation tasks. This commitment is inspired by *tikkun olam* — Hebrew for "repairing the world". Three groups of campers, ranging in age from 9 to 14, worked hard to remove invasive tansy ragwort and scotch broom this year.

### Garry oak meadow restoration

Restoration work in **Drumbeg Provincial Park** is well into its third year! Small broom plants were removed from inside and outside previously cleared sites, where native species are being planted, with a special mid-week work party providing a hands-on opportunity for volunteers to learn more about the work. This project is supported by BC Parks' Park Enhancement Fund grants and is carried out in consultation with BC Parks Conservation Specialist Erica McClaren. Erica and Kristen Miskelly from Satinflower Nurseries visited the park in September to discuss progress and to plan for the next phase of our restoration work.

*"We marvel at the wonderful work GALLT is doing to create and enhance the trails on Gabriola all the while protecting the surrounding ecosystems. Thank you and Bravo!"*

### Restoration in community parks

In Queequeg Community Park, volunteers watered the native shrubs planted last year to help them through the summer drought. Until now the RDN had been providing us with water for this, but with that agreement ending we were very grateful to get a free refill of our cistern from Summer Rain Water Delivery (THANK YOU!), which saw us through to our rainy season.

### Yard Waste drop-off

The GVFD secured a RDN Firesmart grant to cover the cost of a large (30 cubic yard) disposal bin for invasives and yard waste drop-off. Although the bin was booked for two days it was full by noon on the first day.

GaLTT Invasive Species volunteers and the GVFD duty officer assisted with loading and packing down large quantities of invasive broom, daphne, ivy, holly and Himalayan blackberry into the bin.

**It's helpful to receive tips about invasives hotspots on public land that need our attention. We use this info in planning our work parties! Email [invasives@galtt.ca](mailto:invasives@galtt.ca)**

### Nature Stewards

Our Nature Stewards program continues to be wildly successful—107 properties totalling about 205 acres have pledged to conserve native habitat.

Gabriolans were invited to celebrate Earth Day with Nature Stewards by taking a self-guided tour of properties on Gabriola to learn more about how other islanders are conserving native habitat and gardening with nature and biodiversity in mind. Seven Nature Stewards landholders graciously opened their gates to the public, with several hosts having over 80 visitors during the three hours.

### Native Plant Depot

Gabriolan Deborah contacted us for support with native plant recovery when fire-smarting her home in October! Any native species within the recommended 5ft (1.5m) FireSmart BC zone around her primary structure were potted up and delivered to the Native Plant Depot for rehoming.

Caring for nature is an essential part of supporting our collective resilience! Please consider using the Native Plant Depot if you must remove and/or rehome native plants, and when you're restoring wild spaces. Oregon grape, sword ferns, grand fir seedlings, and ground covers like Yerba buena, woodland strawberries and bedstraw... there are so many plants to save. Contact [programs@galtt.ca](mailto:programs@galtt.ca) if you need help digging up native species.

### Trails and boardwalks

Some highlights of work done by our trail crew in 2023...

#### Robinson Woods

This lovely 22-acre property is protected with a conservation covenant and the landholder generously allows the public to enjoy walking there. GaLTT maintains the trails (including constructing sections of boardwalk over the damp areas) and deals with invasive plant removal.

Sixteen volunteers shared an April Sunday removing invasive holly and ivy between Cooper and Thompson roads. In November, thanks to 14 volunteers, including 2 first-timers, we were able to install a new 19 metres (64 ft) boardwalk on a trail in an ecologically sensitive area.

*"I have 2 dogs that take me out for forest walks twice a day, every day, and cannot express just how much I appreciate the amazing trail network we have access to on Gabriola, thanks in great part to the fantastic work you do. I hope this small donation will assist with some of your work."*

### Keith Road ROW—thank you, neighbours!

A lovely new dry boardwalk has greatly improved the viability of muddy Keith Drive trail. Many thanks and kudos to the neighbourhood members who participated in the work and organized fundraising to cover the cost of materials—a grand total of \$2000.75.

### Boardwalks are expensive!

Our ability to improve trails is sometimes limited by a lack of volunteers, but increasing material and supply costs have an effect too. If there's a trail improvement project happening in your neighbourhood, why not consider contributing financially to offset the costs?

**DONATE HERE:** [galtt.ca/donate/](https://galtt.ca/donate/)

### Cox Park ditch clearing

It's not all building trails and boardwalks. Keeping ditches clear is important to help with water diversion and flood/erosion mitigation on our trails. On Dec 3 we dealt with accumulated debris along a section of the River Place Trail in Cox Community Park. Thank you to volunteers past and present for this important regular maintenance work!

## Accessibility

Our ability to build strong collaborative relationships with government agencies such as BC Parks, the RDN, and MoTI (Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure) in the course of accessibility projects, helps to turn our visions into reality. We greatly appreciate their willingness to work with us, and we hope to do much more in the future.

### Resting stumps in 707

Our direct work on accessibility began in 2020 with the Jeanette Avenue access to 707, where we worked with the RDN to remove a berm and improve trail conditions. Woodworker Jamie Doig built a beautiful resting bench which GaLTT installed under a destination maple tree, though reaching it still required a there-and-back walk of 2 kilometres. So, to really improve accessibility, we needed to create resting places en route. The RDN granted GaLTT \$500 to purchase the needed gravel to level some areas for six firmly attached stumps. These were donated by Peter Danenhower and varnished and stenciled with GaLTT's name and logo by Sarah Kopjar. In April seven damp volunteers worked in the rain to install the resting stumps along the first kilometre of the Jeanette trail, from the yellow gate to the bench and maple.



### Beach access at Descanso Bay day-use area

Improving accessibility at beaches has been a goal since 2017. In 2023 we presented a proposal to the RDN that they meet this need by providing mobility-impaired access to the Descanso Bay day-use area beach through the use of a retractable ramp and portable beach access mat. We're happy to report that RDN has allocated money for a feasibility study in 2024.

*"My grandson has Cerebral Palsy and uses forearm crutches to walk. Walking is difficult for him, and impossible on uneven surfaces. Being able to come to the park and walk independently to areas, such as the picnic tables, provides him with a greater sense of inclusion in the community, and is an indication that he is a valued member of our society."*

### Drumbeg Park picnic area

With the assistance of a BC Parks Enhancement Funding (PEF) grant, 10 volunteers spread gravel over path liners to connect the trail and parking lot to the picnic tables and raise the adjacent ground level. The tables have been turned 90°, enabling easier wheelchair access and a better ocean view for everyone seated. The work generated an enthusiastic response from visitors who encountered our crew. This is just the start at Drumbeg! More improvements are in the works for 2024.

**WE'RE  
ALWAYS  
LOOKING  
FOR  
VOLUNTEERS!**

Please join any of GaLTT's working committees and bring your skills and energy to help with our work. Email [info@galtt.ca](mailto:info@galtt.ca) and we'll put you in contact with the right group for your interests.

**There's a place for everyone!**

### 2023 GaLTT BOARD OF DIRECTORS

#### OFFICERS

President: Hugh Skinner  
Vice-president: *vacant*  
Past President: Rob Brockley  
Treasurer: Frank Shoemaker  
Secretary: Sarah Kopjar

#### DIRECTORS

Peter Danenhower (appointed)  
Rebecca Furnell  
Nola Johnston  
Anne Landry  
Barry Moerkerken  
Brad Nixon (stepped down)  
Steve Struthers (appointed)  
Alison Thomas  
Tom Wojcik