



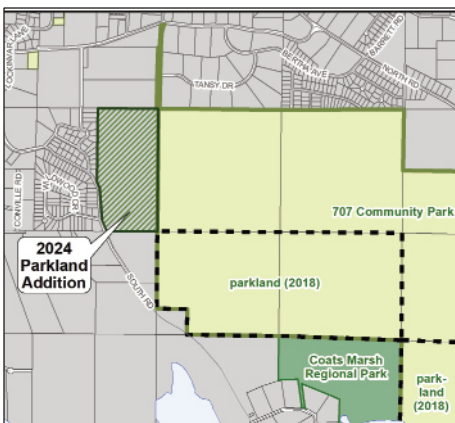
GaLTT Newsletter Report on 2024

March 2025 • www.galtt.ca • info@galtt.ca • PO Box 56, Gabriola, BC V0R 1X0

Acquiring Wilkinson Woods for parkland

One of the biggest successes we celebrated in 2024 was **the acquisition of 78 acres** that both expanded the area of the 707 Community Park and maintained some important access routes. GaLTT advocated strongly for this acquisition and contributed substantial funds to support it, because **we know that increasing protected land on Gabriola is critically important.**

GaLTT's mandate is to develop relationships with governments, private landholders, and community groups to enable more protected areas within our Islands Trust protection area. We currently have **13% of land protected**, and our goal is to achieve the Gulf Islands average of 20%. GaLTT formed in 2004 after concerned members of the Gabriola Walking Group and Gabriola Horse Group met with Gabriola Land Conservancy people, to advocate for the preservation of ecosystems on the island. Then, there was limited Gabriola parkland and far fewer legitimate public trails. This was before Cox Community Park, Elder Cedar Nature Reserve, 707 Community Park, and Coats Marsh Park were established.



Establishing Cox and 707 Community Parks

In 2002, the RDN purchased the lands now known as **Cox Community Park** on behalf of Gabriola, Mudge, and De Courcy Islands.



GaLTT President Hugh Skinner and RDN Director Vanessa Craig cut the ribbon at the official celebration of the Wilkinson Woods acquisition.

Although we had no financial involvement, GaLTT's earliest volunteers were significantly involved in developing walkable trails throughout that park in its first years. Another significant conservation improvement occurred in 2005, when the RDN established previously logged **"707-acre Community Park"**. Again, GaLTT volunteers stepped up to develop and maintain walking trails throughout the extensive park—a regenerating forest in the centre of the island. Since then, there have been several small and large additions to 707 through donations and purchases of adjacent land. **Coats Marsh Regional Park** was added by donation in 2005; and by last year, 707 Community Park had further expanded to 1052 acres, mostly through deals with developers.

Using GaLTT's Acquisition Fund

Since 2017 we have advocated, and contributed significant funds (\$167K), for the purchase of three separate properties by the Regional District of Nanaimo for conservation purposes. These efforts created **Dodd Narrows Community Park** on Mudge Island and added a total of 35 ha (87 ac) to the 707 Community Park (in 2020 and 2024). The acquisition in 2024 was **Wilkinson Woods**. Lauren Young and her husband Dean Gaudry had decided to make their carefully managed forestry land available as parkland, to prevent its development after sale. GaLTT contributed \$100,000 from our Land Acquisition Fund, partnering with the RDN to purchase their land.

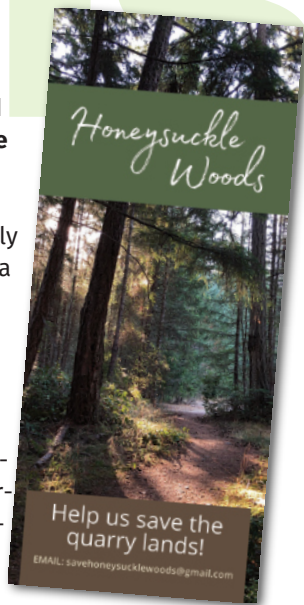
Now we need donations to refill our depleted Land Acquisition Fund! If you can help, please visit galtt.ca/donate to learn what your options are for contributing.



Conservation

Our varied work this year has included

- Attempts to conserve **Honeysuckle Woods**, rescuing it from MOTI's gravel pit designation. Currently unresolved, this goal is still actively pursued by GaLTT and the Gabriola Island Memorial Society (GIMS).
- Establishment of the **Yarrow Koontz conservation covenant**. GaLTT is a co-covenant holder with Islands Trust Conservancy.
- GaLTT's significant financial contribution (\$100,000) to the RDN's purchase of **Wilkinson Woods** as a 78-acre extension of 707 Community Park. This provides important access to the park from South Road.
- GaLTT annual **monitoring of covenants**—Elder Cedar, Link Island, Bachmann, and Robinson Woods.



Nature Stewards—raising creek awareness

At year end, **118 Gabriolan land holders** were participating in the Nature Stewards program, conserving **283 acres** of pledged habitat. They are managing a rich, biodiverse network of habitat connecting with neighbours and parkland. As the program continues, we hope for a fuller interconnected map of habitat conservation across private property, protected parkland, and indigenous lands.

PROTECTING OUR WATERSHEDS

This year, using public education, habitat enhancement, and grant funding from the **RDN Drinking Water and Watershed Program**, we have focussed on awareness of GaLTT's creeks and watersheds. Though most creeks have had stretches of their natural flow channelled, culverted, and ditched for roads, housing, and agriculture, they are still vital to the island's ecology. Learning from the engineered mistakes of the past, the best way forward is to allow our creeks and wetlands to be more natural with native plants and fallen woody debris.

We have raised awareness in neighbourhoods through which two of Gabriola's longest creeks, **Goodhue** and **Castell**, flow. Ken Gurr reported: "We went door-to-door in the neighbourhoods these creeks run through and there was an overwhelmingly positive reception to our handout and reminder about the link between how we care for our properties and how it can impact these waterways. Creeks, ponds, seasonally wet fields, ditches, these are all important parts of the watershed—It either seeps into the ground that we get our drinking water from or flows to the Salish Sea. And along the way, these creeks and seasonal wetlands are vital for maintaining nature's food-web of aquatic insects, newts, frogs, and fish. ...People are surprised to know Goodhue and Coats creeks both flow into Hoggan Lake at the golf course, and there is a population of cutthroat trout living there using these creeks for spawning. Coho and chum salmon, and sea-run cutthroat have often been spotted during the winter congregating in the lower reaches of Mallett Creek, as well as Castell Creek and Dick Brook."



Invasives management

The past year was an extremely busy and productive one for GaLTT's Invasive Species Committee and our many volunteers and supporters. The main highlight was the **transformation of the back meadow at Drumbeg**, where we were able to remove a significant quantity of tall Scotch broom from the area adjacent to the northern property boundary and to replant and reseed it with native species appropriate to this former Garry oak ecosystem. As we removed the broom, we were thrilled to discover 13 small Garry oaks that had already seeded themselves in amongst it! These seedling trees—ranging from a few inches to a few feet in height—are now surrounded by the 2100 small plant 'plugs' that thirty-seven GaLTT volunteers spent a total of 222

hours planting there in late Fall. This restoration planting was made possible by grants from BC Parks, TD Bank's Friends of the Environment Foundation, the Pollinator Partnership and by the extraordinary generosity of donors to our summer fund-raising campaign, which **raised over \$8000!**

Our other successes included collaborating with the GVFD in June to organize another very popular **invasives and general yard waste disposal event**. GaLTT was able to arrange an earlier drop off for the massive broom pile we had accumulated over several years at Drumbeg, which we delivered there with the help of Gabriola Disposal. The same day we also collected up and dropped off the many roadside invasives piles from our spring work parties around the island—very satisfying! Our other involvement in this event was conducting a survey to collect data on public usage of GVFD drop-off opportunities like this. The results provide evidence for the GVFD to present to the RDN in making a case for guaranteed funding for future disposal events.

Invasive Species committee members also worked hard to complete a new **Invasive Plants pamphlet**, which finally reached Gabriola mailboxes in the Sounder in January 2025.



Community Engagement

Community Engagement Committee had a busy year working on both conserve and connect activities. Organized trail walks have always been the backbone of our events, but we aim to build up our conservation activities. An important initiative has been getting requests out to excavators and construction contractors to call us to harvest valuable native plants before clearing a building site. Our biggest success was harvesting at the site of the in-progress affordable housing complex before the necessary trees were felled. The plants are distributed at our **Native Plant Depot** at the Commons, for use by people re-wilding their land. We encourage people clearing their land to email us at programs@galtt.ca to book our native plant recovery team.



Portrait—Robert Brockley, honorary life member

Our **7th president Rob Brockley** said he has “lived and worked and played in forests” his entire life—including working as a forest research scientist for 30 years. When he and his wife Susan retired on Gabriola Island, they discovered GaLTT at the Saturday market and immediately joined and volunteered. They worked with then President, John Peirce to sign a trail licence through their property and John invited Rob to join the Board. His first significant change was to establish a “**Big Tree Registry**” to locate and identify all the largest, mature trees on the island, overseeing the creation of a web page to list them. For several years he led the Trails Committee, and became GaLTT President in 2019, serving until 2023. His tenure included the difficult period of Covid lockdown, which affected trail work parties, organized group walks, and board meetings.

Rob emphasized respectful relationship building with the Snuneymuxw First Nation, as well as staff at RDN, BC Parks, and the Islands Trust Conservancy. This work included building awareness of accessibility issues—ongoing work. He smoothly oversaw the process of GaLTT outgrowing its capacity to simply be a volunteer organization, laying groundwork for contractual positions.

Rob prioritized GaLTT's conservation mandate, seeking to increase the amount of protected habitat through land acquisition, conservation covenants, and public education. In 2021, this led to the formation of the **Nature Stewards (NS) Program**, which provided an informal, voluntary way for landowners to pledge conservation of 30% of their property. Over 115 property owners have now pledged such conservation. Where possible GaLTT advocated and donated funds to help the RDN purchase new parkland, as in Dodd Narrows Park on Mudge Island, and to expand 707. In 2022, GaLTT was involved in the covenanting of forested **Link Island** by the Swift family, becoming a covenant co-holder of this 60-acre Nature Reserve.



20th Anniversary

2024 marked 20 years from GaLTT's founding in 2004! We celebrated with a public **Birthday Bash** event at Gabriola Sands Provincial Park.



Our other work included:

- Collaboration with other island environmental groups on a visioning event
- Organized guided interpretive walks & Stroll and Sip events
- BC Trails Day celebration with our annual End to End hike from Descanso to Pages Resort
- Engaging families in our summer BioBlitz
- Engaging with hundreds of people at the Saturday market and Fall Fair
- Volunteer appreciation event
- Celebration of the launch of *Voices for the Islands*



Trails and boardwalks

GaLTT had 41 people who volunteered for trail work in 2024. In addition to maintaining existing trails and boardwalks, they built **900 metres** of new trails and installed **50m** of boardwalk. **THANK YOU!**



Accessibility

Most of GaLTT's accessibility work in 2024 occurred "behind the scenes"—planning and consulting with the RDN and BC Parks.

- Improved drainage along the accessible trail to the picnic tables in Drumbeg Park
- Continued consultations re the feasibility study for improved beach access at Descanso Bay Regional Park Day-use area
- Increased accessibility improvements at Drumbeg Park and Gabriola Sands Provincial Park (Twin Beaches).
- Specific planning for 2 more ocean-view Commemorative Benches, one of them easily accessible.
- Research and planning for a publishable list of Gabriola's easier, more accessible walking trails and resting benches.

Membership

GaLTT's membership annually ticks up steadily, but slowly (not nearly as fast as Gabriola's population). As of December 31, 2024, we had **365 memberships** (held by 564 individuals). The biggest group are our 110 joint 5-year memberships. Sixty people are monthly donor-members. Other options are 1-year single (48); 5-year single (74); and 1-year joint (66). There also 13 honorary life members.

Membership fees are modest but are a key part of GaLTT's budget—even with our wonderful army of volunteers, our work still costs money. **Maybe YOU can recruit a new member today?**

Communications

This team provides support and communications management for GaLTT's board and committees, including writing, design and layout of almost all promotional materials for digital and print media, managing the GaLTT website, and handling member communications, social media, and data management.

Big projects this year included producing the new version of our trail map and the new Invasive Plants brochure, plus a series of blog posts on GaLTT's (past and current) presidents, the latter written by Trish Matson.

Late in 2024, we shed part of our volunteer load by hiring Kevan Heughan of Gabriola Graphics to handle some of our "backend" (hidden) website admin work, which has been very welcome relief. Contractor Paula Brent brilliantly handles social media and our e-newsletters. She also runs analytics on communications, and reports that our top content consistently relates to things that are locally relevant, especially if significant or useful, and that celebrate our successes. We've got a lot of the latter, thanks to our members, volunteers and supporters!

Thanks!

to out-going board members leaving effective the 2025 AGM: Rob Brockley, Steve Struthers, and Tom Wojcik. Thank you all for your contributions!

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 volunteers@galtt.ca and we'll put you in contact with the right group for your interests.

There's a place for everyone!

2024 GaLTT BOARD OF DIRECTORS

(As of Dec 31/24)

OFFICERS

President: Hugh Skinner
Vice-president: Sarah Kopjar
Treasurer: Rich Ketchen
Secretary: Sarah Kopjar

DIRECTORS

Rob Brockley (Past President)
Rebecca Furnell
Nola Johnston
Barry Moerkerken
Steve Struthers
Alison Thomas
Cathie Traill
Tom Wojcik