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Editorial: Reviewing the Islands Trust

The islands included in the Islands Trust Area vary from small islands, sometimes owned by a single family, to larger, more complex communities with many differing interests (Salt Spring and Bowen).

Obviously, islands are different in size, geography, and geology. Over the years of human occupation, they have also become somewhat different in land use patterns, transportation links, economic activity, and the character of human community.

It is now nearly 40 years since the original *Islands Trust Act* was passed by the provincial government. The Islands Trust was a response to the creation of an increasing number of small-lot subdivisions, particularly the huge 1200-lot Magic Lake Estates on North Pender Island.

It was clear to the government of the day that the real estate boom and the resulting population explosion on the islands in the Strait of Georgia would change the nature of these hitherto self-sufficient, rural communities. Rapid development would destroy the ecological uniqueness and the sheer beauty of the islands.

Hence the 'preserve and protect' mandate of the Islands Trust: the only such legislated mandate given to any local government in the province. (The *Islands Trust Act* was reviewed and ratified again in 1989.)

A structure was set up to implement this mandate: locally-elected Local Trust Committees (LTC) were given land-use planning powers and responsibilities, but all the other local government powers were left with regional districts, or in some cases with provincial government ministries. To give cohesion, the third person in each committee is an elected trustee from another island.

At first, it was financed by the provincial government; now it is funded by part of the property tax levy.

Over the years, the Islands Trust has stuck to its mandate, and used its powers, sometimes creatively, sometimes restrictively. Nonetheless, the Islands have changed radically, as anyone who has lived here for more

than a quarter of a century can tell you.

The Islands Trust has grown in stature and influence and Trust Council has worked in a creative way to address much wider 'preserve and protect' issues brought to the fore by a changing world and increasing scientific information; though often without effective power within its landuse tools to create the necessary 'preserve and protect' response.

The People, Too

In an ecosystem way, the 'preserve and protect' mandate is now thought to include not only the environment but also the community of each island. And, given a rapidly changing world, the current structure of the Island Trust may not now be able to meet the needs of various Gulf Island communities in their initiatives in supporting the preservation and protection of culture and ecology.

Maybe it is time for an extensive public process to review and re-empower this venerable institution, though clearly its current powers should not be placed in limbo during the years a review might take.

Any restructuring that might follow a broad people's review would not necessarily bring solutions to the wide variety of individual complaints represented in a 2010 web petition (recently present to Ida Chong, Minister of Community, Sport & Cultural Development). However, this petition does bring to mind the greater issue: how can the Trust be re-empowered to best carry out its mandate? ☞

For those wishing to know more about the history of the Islands Trust, Peter Lamb has written an excellent short history. The Trust Story is available at Islands' bookstores and can also be read online at www.islandtides.com.

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