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The Islands Trust Story:—Intermission—The Islands Trust Fund

Peter Lamb

Acts I, II and III of this series told about the formation of the Islands Trust in 1974, subsequent amendments in 1977 to make the organization more 'mature and responsive,' and its survival of a proposal to abolish the Trust in 1982. (These episodes are available on *Island Tides* website, www.islandtides.com.)

We now take an intermission to look at the success story of the Islands Trust Fund—the land conservancy arm of the Islands Trust.

The Islands Trust Fund Is Conceived But Not Yet Born

The original *Islands Trust Act*, passed in June, 1974, did not provide authority for the Trust to hold land or receive donations from the public. This is corrected about a year later.

It is an offer of a property which prompts the government to amend the *Act* to authorize a trust fund 'to develop and look after the islands, to acquire land for possible park purposes and for wilderness areas.' Minister James Lorimer states that 'we have found in the past year that people who are prepared to give donations objected to giving them to government as such or to a department of government.'

Over the next decade, Trust Council repeatedly asks the Province to proclaim the trust fund provisions of the *Act*, but without success. In 1987, Social Credit Minister Rita Johnston finally agrees to the establishment of a Islands Trust Fund as part of a broad review of the Islands Trust and the trustees set up a special Committee under Trustee Mike Humphries to work on its structure.

An important aspect of his work is to identify lands in the Trust Area that could be considered by the trust fund.

Trustees benefit from a 1975 study by consultant Don Benn and the Nature Conservancy of Canada that identifies ecologically sensitive areas on the islands. All trustees are invited to suggest other lands for protection in their areas.

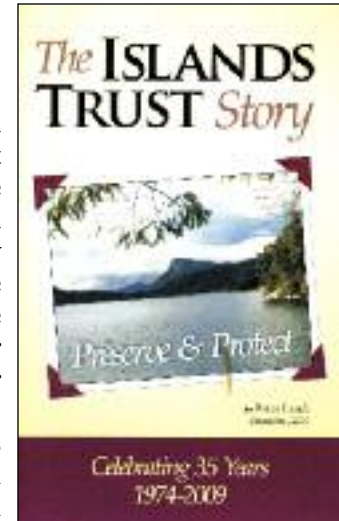
However, it is two years before Minister Johnston finally introduces Bill 78, in May 1989, proposing major amendments to the *Islands Trust Act* including the establishment of a Trust Fund Board 'giving it a clear mandate and budgetary and staff support through Trust Council.'

The NDP opposition comments that it 'is meaningless unless seeded with sufficient money and/or land.' The Minister responds that this will not be considered until an approved Trust Fund Plan is in place. The amended *Islands Trust Act* is passed in July 1989, to be effective on April 1, 1990.

In this transition period, three trustees are appointed to a Trust Fund Committee to work with Ministry staff on a program and budget for the first year under the new legislation and to prepare the framework for the required Trust Fund Plan. A new Trust Fund Board will consist of three of the elected local trustees and three Ministerial appointees, a structure under which the trust fund still operates.

Newborn

The first Islands Trust Fund Board meeting is held on May 17th, 1990 and, in the following four years, the initial trust



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fund plan is approved by the minister, staff is hired by the board and the minister makes the first provincial appointments to the Board. The Islands Trust Fund is finally operational.

Regional Conservation Plan

Since then, much has been accomplished including the following major initiatives. A comprehensive Five Year Regional Conservation Plan was prepared for the period 2005 to 2010, with targets for ecosystem protection in each Local Trust Area. By 2008, a target of 15% of protected lands in the whole Trust Area had been met. A subsequent plan for the next five years is now being prepared.

Tax Exemption Program

In 1994, green space was being taxed at the same rate as residential property. Newly elected trustee Kim Benson led a prolonged process with the BC Assessment Authority, provincial ministries and others to 'untax nature' in much the same way as taxes on eligible farm and forestry lands can be reduced.

In 2002, the Natural Area Protection Tax Exemption Program (NAPTEP), unique to the Islands Trust Area, was finally launched on islands in the Sunshine Coast Regional District. (See also advertisement, page 17.) Landowners can qualify for a 65% reduction in the property taxes owing on the portion of their land they are willing to protect under a strict conservation covenant held by the Islands Trust Fund and monitored annually. The Trust Fund currently holds NAPTEP covenants on 15 properties, with 4 more NAPTEP covenants in the works. The program has been expanded to islands in the Capital, Nanaimo and Cowichan Valley Regional Districts.

Crown Lands

Because of its unique status as a land trust under the umbrella of a local government, the Islands Trust Fund is able to acquire vacant crown land under the provincial Free Crown Grant program. To date, the Trust Fund has acquired three new nature reserves through this program, on Gabriola and Gambier Islands and Bowen Islands.

A Success Story

The Islands Trust Fund has protected 19 nature reserves and holds an additional 56 conservation covenants in 12 of the 13 trust areas, protecting a total of 982 hectares of land. Thanks to the generosity of island landowners, donors, partners, and the Free Crown Grant program, the Islands Trust Fund has spent less than \$5 million to protect more than \$31 million worth of land. Even so, the ecological, cultural, and social value of the lands and habitats protected by the Island Trust Fund far exceeds their monetary value.

The Islands Trust Fund truly is a success story, significantly contributing to the 'preserve and protect' mandate of the Islands Trust.

The number of bookstores carrying the print version of 'The Islands Trust Story' is burgeoning. Get yours at: Salt Spring Books, Volume Two Book Store, Black Sheep Books, and Watermark Books on Salt Spring Island; Saturna General Store; Galiano Island Books; Talisman Books & Gallery on Pender Island; Miners Bay Books on Mayne Island; Abraxas Books & Gifts on Denman Island; The Island Book Shoppe on Gabriola. ☺

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