

Reprint **Island Tides**

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15% of Trust Area now protected

Public and non-profit conservation organizations now protect more than 15% of the Islands Trust Area land base. If combined, these 12,000 hectares of protected area would equal the total area of Galiano and Gabriola Local Trust Areas together.

The Islands Trust Area covers the islands between the British Columbia mainland and southern Vancouver Island, including Howe Sound and as far north as Comox. This is a unique and special place composed of 13 major islands and more than 450 smaller islands covering approximately 5200 square kilometres of land and water.

'Reaching this milestone in the Islands Trust Area speaks to the time and effort island communities, conservancy groups and government partners have dedicated to the protection of natural spaces on the islands,' said Sheila Malcolmson, Chair of the Trust Fund Board.

Over 25 conservation organizations work in the Islands Trust Area. Since 2005, the Islands Trust Fund alone acquired five new nature reserves and 18 new conservation covenants adding an area of more than 380 hectares—about the size of Stanley Park—to the protected area network in the Islands Trust Area.

Why Protect the Islands Trust Area?

In a report released in June, the Province of British Columbia identified the ecosystems in the Islands Trust Area as among the most bio-diverse of all in BC. *Taking Nature's Pulse: The Status of Biodiversity in BC*, a collaborative effort of more than 50 science experts, reports on the state of BC's natural environment and provides the basis for the Conservation Framework, BC's new plan for proactive solutions regarding species and ecosystems at risk and in decline.

Taking Nature's Pulse identifies the Coastal Douglas-fir biogeoclimatic zone—the zone which encompasses most of the Islands Trust Area—as being the stronghold for many species at risk of extinction or extirpation. The Coastal Douglas-fir zone has the highest density of species of both global and provincial concern in all sixteen zones in BC—more than one hundred species at risk are found in the region.

The Islands Trust Area supports some of Canada's last

remaining Garry oak ecosystems and the associated rare plants, mosses, butterflies, and reptiles. Its location along the Pacific Flyway makes the Gulf Islands an important wintering and migratory stopover area for many migratory birds. BirdLife International identifies ten important bird areas within the Islands Trust Area, including Baynes Sound, Active Pass, and Sidney Channel.

The Coastal Douglas-fir biogeoclimatic zone comprises less than 1% of BC's land base and is limited to a part of south-eastern Vancouver Island, the Gulf Islands south of Cortes Island and a narrow strip of the adjacent mainland. The Province of British Columbia has identified the ecosystems in the Islands Trust Area among those of greatest conservation concern in the entire province. Ninety-seven percent of the diverse and rich ecosystems that make up the Coastal Douglas-fir zone are of provincial conservation concern, suffering high rates of conversion due to urban and rural development.

Partnerships Key to Protecting the Islands Trust Area

Conservation and stewardship of the Islands Trust Area is vital to the survival of the Coastal Douglas-fir zone. However, establishing new protected areas is difficult and expensive: while 93% of BC's land base is publicly-owned Crown land, only 7% of the Coastal Douglas-fir zone is provincial Crown land. This means that the protection of this important ecosystem relies significantly on the stewardship of private land.

The Islands Trust Fund, a regional land trust established by the Province to preserve the unique environment of the Islands Trust Area, has worked with communities and private landowners since 1990 to protect natural areas in the Strait of Georgia and Howe Sound islands.

The Islands Trust Fund offers tax incentive programs for conservation covenants and land donations. The Islands Trust Fund also continues to work with local island conservancies to improve the awareness of Gulf Island residents and visitors about sensitive ecosystems and the effects of everyday activities on this fragile environment.

Despite the progress the Islands Trust Fund and its local partners have made in conserving island ecosystems, much work remains. Several islands in the Islands Trust Area fall

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short of the goal of 15% protection. Furthermore, almost every island in the Islands Trust Area continues to fall short of the protection objectives for the following individual natural ecosystems: streams, wetlands, mature forest, freshwater, shoreline, cliffs, herbaceous and woodland. The Islands Trust Fund and its local partners need community support to continue to protect the unique ecology and character of the islands.

Whether the gift is cash, land or a conservation covenant, donors to the Islands Trust Fund and other conservation organizations give because they care about the future of these beautiful and fragile islands and the rich variety of plants and

animals living here. As Alasdair Gordon, donor of the Mount Trematon Nature Reserve on Lasqueti Island said, 'The Gulf Islands are an extraordinary part of the world, but are also under extraordinary pressures. We wanted to ensure that the area we cared so deeply for retained its unspoiled beauty, remaining ancient trees, and great value to the community.'

The Islands Trust Fund issues tax-deductible receipts for all donations. Tax incentive programs for conservation covenants and land donations are available. For more information on protecting the Gulf and Howe Sound Islands contact the Islands Trust Fund at 250-405-5186 or online at www.islandstrustfund.bc.ca. 

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