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## ***Editorial: Gulf Islands—Species At Risk***

Reasonings in the Trust Area have to be dealt with according to two streams of wellbeing; not only the wellbeing of the built and occupied environment but also the fragile, natural (and mute) environment. In a market system (read capitalism), the purpose of a trust is to provide stewardship to something which would otherwise fall victim to the advance of untrammelled for-profit progress. Something which been designated of such high value, and has been determined to be so at risk, that a trust needs to be put in place to guide its future.

Hence the provincial *Islands Trust Act*. Given that the Islands were not a pristine environment, that a small number of people lived and worked here long before the trust was enacted (in 1974), the trust took on a special democratic structure which gave those island-dwellers a voice in stewardship.

There is an awkwardness here, but perhaps also a robustness; trustees in the Islands Trust Area are elected, Island-by-Island, not appointed. Appointment would be customary for trustees—if there were a wise over-arching body with the power to appoint.

So although election gives residents (and property owners) a voice, the election route also allows a well-heeled, pro-development lobby to influence the outcome of elections—the ways are many. This lobby may cause the election of trustees who are not committed to the fundamental tenet of ‘preserve and protect.’ These ‘rogue trustees’ can cause a great deal of anguish to naive Islanders who suppose that trustees must, of course, be impeccable. They also give the Islands Trust a bad name. (If you don’t think your trustees support the trust as they sworn to, organize to elect better ones.)

The pro-development lobby has a set of allies among some of the old guard who wish to remain the main movers and shakers in their fiefdoms, as well as among some disaffected newcomers.

Naturally we have disaffected people: often they are those who wittingly, or unwittingly, made mistakes by

building or altering first and then finding out that the Islands were not the last ungoverned frontier. Then there are those who invested in land, sometimes heavily, expecting to find a way to develop and make money. Their investment mistake is blamed on the Trust.

Curiously, there is often an element of disappointed romanticism when the dream place and community do not live up to expectations—when the Islands turn out to have feet of clay, or at least shale, not to mention regulation.

Some others are just into trust-bashing as a convenient target for anger and disaffection residing inside themselves.

Some, bearing a grudge, are willing to listen to voices which care nothing for the Islands Trust and which would like to sweep it aside to encroach however they wish on the environment.

Many do not realize that restrictions in the Islands Trust are quite mild compared to those in many jurisdictions in the world, inside or outside land trusts. The Canadian ethos of a huge wild west to be beaten into submission often gets in the way of understanding the small-scale and fragility of the islands in the Salish Sea.

Many move to the Islands but fail to understand the complex values of Island dwellers. These folk also often take a look at ‘quaint’ organizations and think they can show the way in which things can be run better. These well-meaning folks may wreak havoc, not achieve their goals and often leave, or remain, disappointed and angry—what a shame! Closer attention, and listening, and less hurry might have made them happier Islanders.

Nonetheless, all these folks are the people we have to live with, with whom we have to try to find a way forward. This is democracy and it is alive and well on the Islands—democracy is also not a romantic ideal.

In all this argy-bargy, thank goodness we have an advocate for this *place*, this astonishing place. It’s our Islands Trust; if we want a vibrant future in this complex

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and radically shifting world, we have an amazing community structure with which to make a start.

If we want to use it we must be community-minded and participate: look, listen, listen, listen, and speak in good faith, not in mean-mindedness and anger. Healthy democracy is not simple, it's complex, slow moving, full of twists, turns and setbacks—no quick fix.

In the process of participating, occasionally we find the golden nugget of community vision and a glorious feeling of belonging.

Our most urgent need is not to review the Islands Trust. This is a mischievous red herring (which has received an absurd, unwarranted amount of media and internet attention); our urgent need is to live up to the shining potential the Islands Trust offers us by getting involved, informed and bringing our considered ideas to the table. ☞