

# Reprint **Island Tides**

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## Peace in the forest - Suzanne Fournier

For the first time on Galiano Island—after eight elections over the last 22 years—the divisive dispute over development of forest lands is no longer the hot button issue in the Islands Trust elections slated for November 15.

Ever since MacMillan Bloedel in 1990 put half of the island's land mass—virtually all of its Galiano commercial tree farm—on the open real estate market, conflict has ensued. Those who purchased forest land at bargain prices were angry they could not develop the land into profitable subdivisions, without following local rules. But BC's highest court upheld the made-on-Galiano bylaws requiring preservation of the forest-base, groundwater supplies and the rural character of Galiano. After years of standoffs, with candidates (unsuccessful in all but one election) endorsed by forest-lot owners, Galiano Island has found a pathway to relative peace, at least on the forest front. Trust policies have been followed to rezone forest lots and at the same time provide benefit to the community.

Since the last election, in 2011, the out-going Galiano trustees have worked with several large landowners to achieve rezoning while offering benefits like parks and seniors' housing. At the same time, the integrity of forest lands will be respected, as will water supplies, shoreline access and other precious environmental values. Housing sites will be clustered and planned in an orderly fashion, rather than breaking up Galiano's predominant Coastal Douglas Fir ecosystem.

'We set out to achieve as trustees an approach of planned, orderly development,' says Galiano trustee Louise Decario, who will be stepping down after many years of public service and not running for a third term. 'Through careful good government, we've been able to plan, not prohibit, development, to protect our forest lands for the future and provide some waterfront for the public to enjoy as well.'

The approach followed by Decario and her fellow incumbent trustee Sandy Pottle, who is running for a third term as Galiano trustee, also is applauded by Richard Dewinetz, Galiano's largest private owner of forest-zoned lands. The Islands Trust paid tribute in January, 2014, to the 'years of work' by the Local Trust Committee leading up to the comprehensive Dewinetz rezoning. Along with 12 five-acre Rural Residential lots Dewinetz calls 'The Estates at Panorama Ridge,' 65 hectares were rezoned to nature protection and transferred to BC Parks to expand the existing Bodega Ridge Park. Dewinetz said he consulted closely with trustee Pottle on the development. 'I would say Sandy was 110%

responsible for advising on the community benefits,' said Dewinetz. In addition to a condition requiring him to transfer the proceeds of the sale of one lot to seniors' housing, Dewinetz also has offered—as his lots sell—\$50,000 to the new North Galiano fire hall, and \$100,000 to the Galiano Museum Society.

Dewinetz himself credits Decario and Pottle for 'taking a more reasonable approach and being prepared to sit down and talk to find a solution.' He admits his fellow forest-lot owners have been paying close attention to his cooperative approach, after years of 'fighting that was just too much for everybody.'

Dewinetz acknowledges 'there has been a complete change of attitude on Galiano—I decided this had been going on long enough and that I could find some co-operation if I offered to give something back to the community.'

Meanwhile, forest lot owner Bowie Keefer, who was an unsuccessful candidate in the 2011 election and a key protagonist in the forestland dispute since its inception, is coming forward with his partners on November 3 to a community information meeting and public hearing. Keefer's proposal combines two options for forest rezoning into one, by dividing a large district lot into his own 50-acre lot which would be rezoned to F3, a Galiano land-use designation that permits one house accessory to forest use. Keefer also would sign a covenant permitting him to practice sustainable forestry outside the non-residential portion. The rest of the development would be rezoned into five 5-acre residential lots with the rest to BC Parks to expand Dionisio Point Provincial Park, and another portion going to the Capital Regional District parks and recreation commission for a new waterfront park.

Decario says the Keefer proposal shows the options available to forestland owners, allowing residential use while 'still keeping the forest working for us rather than transferring it to BC Parks, and at the same time getting a new waterfront park for the whole community.'

Now Dewinetz has been offering advice and consultation to his fellow forest-lot landowners, with some success. 'The Flemming Larsen group of six to seven landowners is coming forward with a proposal right after the election,' says Dewinetz, who notes he has also been talking to the two individuals who own a large lot right at the entrance to Dionisio Point Provincial Park, which has been a marine-access-only park since the road was blocked off to the public in 1995. If the Keefer and Larsen proposals are successful, the road to Coon Bay, as the locals call

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it, will be open save for the last large lot.

David Ages, running for office as a trustee, pays tribute to the 'calm, thoughtful leadership' of both Louise Decario and Sandy Pottle, his running mate. 'What's really important is that we've been able to find local solutions to our local issues, and that forest-lot owners themselves have discovered what we've been saying for a long time, that it is possible to find solutions to land-use issues on forest lands within our current bylaws,' says Ages. 'And there's a very positive feeling on-island, with the Tapovan Peace Park, the library, museum, food program, and the Galiano Conservancy's learning centre—it's all a positive perfect storm.'

