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## *The Islands Trust Story: Act VI - Peter Lamb*

The story so far...

The permanent population in the Trust area has tripled since 1974; it reached over 25,000 in 2006. Property values have also risen dramatically. It is now 2002, and the curtain rises on my final Act with a new Liberal government in power.

### **ACT 6: Scene 1: Municipal Incorporation**

The Ministry provides planning grants to Salt Spring and Gabriola islands for the restructure studies needed to assess the pros and cons, including the costs, of incorporation. After heated debates on both islands, subsequent incorporation referenda are defeated. In 2002, on Salt Spring 70% oppose, and in 2004 on Gabriola, 87% oppose municipal incorporation.

In September 2003, trustees renew discussion of Trust Governance, targeting four ideas for improving its effectiveness:

- Transfer of additional land use authorities to the Trust;
- Improved coordination of Trust and Regional District services;
- Resolution of disputes involving provincial programs and the Trust mandate; and
- A differentiated property tax among the islands.

There is some progress made on these ideas within the Islands Trust but still no success in achieving additional authority to carry out its provincial mandate.

A 2005 public opinion survey confirms widespread and popular, province-wide support (over 85%) for protection of the Gulf Islands. In the same year, Trust Council holds an Islands Forum which identifies the primary hope to 'recapture the original vision of the Islands Trust with increased legislative tools' and the primary concern as 'scale, type, amount, location and speed of development.'

In 2006, trustees establish a Governance Task Force 'to

improve governance and the services provided by the Islands Trust.' Its first priority, which would require legislative change, is political representation. After a consultant's study and public meetings held on all the islands, Trust Council proposes a change in legislation to allow an increase in the number of Salt Spring trustees from two to four to increase representation and spread the considerable workload (not the first time this proposal had been made). With a strong lobby from those in favour of incorporation, a November 2008 referendum for the proposal is defeated with 57% opposing.

Two extended but successful court actions by the Trust in 2009, on Salt Spring and Denman Islands, confirm the authority of the Trust to enforce its zoning bylaws and development permit guidelines.

### **Scene 2: Transitions**

All levels of government are overtaken by global events with priority attention shifting to the potential impacts of climate change and decreasing oil supplies. More scientific studies confirm global warming trends and the urgent need to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases (GHG) into the atmosphere. It is generally accepted that this is the most serious issue facing humanity and all governments are challenged to take action.

In response, the BC government establishes a Climate Action Team, promotes a Climate Action Charter (to which the Islands Trust is a signatory) and introduces new



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Island Tides, Box 55, Pender Island, BC, Canada. Phone: 250-629-3660. Fax: 250-629-3838.  
Email: [islandtides@islandtides.com](mailto:islandtides@islandtides.com). Website: <http://www.islandtides.com>

legislation to address GHG emissions, included is *Bill 27*, which requires all local governments to set GHG emission reduction targets in their official community plans by May 31, 2010. In September 2009, trustees agree to this being the top priority for all local trust committees.

### Scene 3: Final Reflections

The need for the Islands Trust is as relevant today as it was in 1974—even more so, given the extent of real estate development and speculation that prompted its formation. Surrounded by large and expanding urban centres in Vancouver, Victoria, Nanaimo and Seattle, the Gulf Islands are now at greater risk of disturbance and damage to its natural environment from land development and over-use.

Why is the Islands Trust area considered worthy of such protection?

A comprehensive, science-based assessment of the province's natural environment, prepared in 2008 by Biodiversity BC (a partnership of government and non-government organizations), confirmed the importance and fragility of the Trust area.

The Coastal Douglas Fir zone, where our islands are located, is designated 'impaired.' It is among the rarest (0.25% in area) of all biogeoclimatic zones in BC, contains the highest density of species of global and provincial conservation concern and has the highest percentage (97%) of ecological communities of provincial conservation concern. The Trust area alone is the home of at least 36 endangered ecosystems and 218 at-risk plant and animal species.

Thirty-five years ago, the threat to the islands and of their provincial and national significance was recognized and acted upon by the BC Government. Since then, the

Trust has repeatedly sought the planning tools and authority needed for it to properly accomplish the mandate it was given by the province. At the same time, provincial funding of the Trust has steadily decreased from its initial 100% to less than 3% today.

The *Islands Trust Act*, and the institution which it established, represents a promise made by the provincial government to Islanders, and to the people of British Columbia generally, that the islands would be protected for all time from over-development and inappropriate development.

The initiative was astonishing for its courage, imagination and foresight. There are no other local or regional decision-making bodies like it elsewhere in Canada or, it appears, in North America.

Whatever its flaws, it remains alone in our country as a government charged with the stewardship of a fragile environment and the preservation of a special, rural quality of life.

In the view of many, it is doing a remarkable job. With continued support and stronger authority, it can become a model for preserving and protecting the health and well-being of the earth on which we all depend.

The end (for now) and the curtain falls.

*The print version of 'The Islands Trust Story' is available 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.*

