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Sent: Wednesday, January 7, 2026 1:51 PM
To: Islands2050
Subject: Trust Policy Statement

Dear Colleagues and Trustees,

I wish you well in 2026. I write today to share my thoughts regarding the ongoing Trust Policy Statement (TPS) discussions and pending decisions.

As a climate impact and adaptation practitioner, I want to begin by emphasizing the critical importance of considering the long-term during this unprecedented period of geopolitical and climate/environmental uncertainty. To achieve this, care and consideration are required to ensure the accuracy and clarity in government actions - notably, the use of precise and intentional language in the TPS process underway.

This is particularly a concern with respect to the use of the term "Environment" in the TPS and associated discourse. Since a lack of clarity or precision may have significant detrimental outcomes for the community and natural environment, it is critical that the language used in the TPS be as explicit and unambiguous as possible with regard to the term 'environment' and the protection of the natural environment - notably the unique and essential services they provide and their role in securing resiliency to future weather anomalies. Such clarity is more important now than ever, as we will be increasingly reliant on our local natural systems and associated ecological processes to buffer and protect our communities from heat, storm surge, water cycling/filtration and flash flooding.

I would like to illustrate this concern regarding the importance of clarity and precision with language with two examples. First, in the 1980s, the term "ecology" was widely adopted by sewage and so-called "environmental cleanup" companies. This resulted in significant public confusion and, over time, narrowed the perceived meaning of ecology to waste disposal and remediation activities, including the understanding of elected officials and public servants on what this term meant. This persists and has in fact become ubiquitous over time. The second example is in the term "biodiversity." In scientific contexts, biodiversity is a generic noun that requires qualification—such as species biodiversity, genetic biodiversity, or ecosystem biodiversity. Without these clarifying terms, biodiversity has no actual meaning, and the outcome has been that in both public and scientific realms the term 'biodiversity' has lost the scope of its meaning, with the consequence of the term now being synonymous with only the species aspect. With the loss of the larger meaning and concepts of biodiversity from society, the term has now been reduced to a reference to the number of species,

sometimes with conflicting outcomes.

Since language and communication is subjective and shifts with cultural uses, it is critical that government policy documents and legislation or regulations be clear and precise in intent and language. I do not believe it is the intention of the TPS revisions to reduce the specificity of the term "Environment." However, I am concerned that its current, generalized use by the Island Trust risks doing exactly that. Given the legislated responsibilities of the Island Trust, the definition of environment is clear and must remain clear - even if you wish to expand it. As such, all use of 'environment' in the TCP and by Trust staff must be clearly qualified—much like the case with the term biodiversity—to reflect the many ways in which the Trust understands, intends and protects it. Without this specificity, there is a real risk of diminishing the clarity and purpose of safeguarding natural and ecological systems.

Simply and clear direction on the scope of what constitutes parts or features of our regional Coastal Douglas-fir Ecosystems (BEC CDFmm) - and what makes this region worth protecting, due to its' globally unique nature - come from the geological origins of the Salish Sea islands and marine seas. These features, weather and community biodiversity are the unique outcome of the intimate interconnections between marine, coastal, and inland terrestrial ecosystems. An excellent and accessible overview of the features that led to the protection of the islands/Salish Sea under the Island Trust Act can be found in Dr. Briony Penn's synopsis: *The Story of Coastal Douglas-fir Forests: Stewarding the Small Things*.

As someone actively leading scientific and resilience-focused programs on Salt Spring and other Gulf Islands, I am particularly concerned about the current lack of clarity and strength in policies intended to support the protection of these unique ecosystems and the unique communities and cultures who make up the population of the Trust Area.

The issue of sustaining the unique natural and community features from current and future risks is only possible through long-term and precautionary approaches to dealing with climate change and the emerging uncertainties and risks. In other words, since we cannot anticipate the future, and as science and observational realities indicate that we do not have until 2100, but are already being impacted by accelerating rates of change in storm surge, rapid increases in sea-level (within the next few decades), and seeing severe rainfall and drought that is affecting infrastructure, water and food security through erosion, water shortages and fire, it there is no question that care is needed to stave off the loss of natural plants and animals, including both fresh and marine systems, forested and meadow/wetland landscapes, as well as fish and wildlife populations (and habitat).

Effective protection requires setting targets, protecting through precautionary principles for the future, and greater emphasis on prevention through clearly defined goals, restrictions in the types and locations for development and active restoration and care of natural systems so they will be there to support communities in the future. Such decisions must be science- and data-based and consider scientifically established risks to both built infrastructure and natural systems.

As such, allowing non-scientific Executive Committees to ignore or override science-based constraints through undefined allowances or variances—under the vague standard of “adequate justification”—is unacceptable as it introduces risk by enabling long-term and holistic protective policies and community goals to be overridden through short-term and subjective opinions. Such 'executive' discretion opens the door to short-term political considerations, untested or indefensible assumptions, and inadequately researched opinions taking priority over larger picture and longer term objectives. No undefined mechanism should be able to override mandated, science-based decisions, particularly in the context of the Island Trust's broader legislated responsibilities.

Given the growing environmental pressures and existential risks facing rural communities, and the rate at which things are changing, it is essential that the Island Trust adopt a precautionary approach to the TPS and everything it does. **This means reducing the potential for unintended harm to both communities and natural environments. At this moment, greater clarity—not less—is required to guide land-use approvals, protection measures, and review processes in the face of increasing climatic extremes.**

In a time of geopolitical instability and accelerating climate change, protecting the integrity of the Island Trust area demands explicit, detailed processes, clear direction, and long-term consideration. This means removing vaguely worded commitments and imprecise language. Clarity is needed throughout. What is meant by the term 'environment' or "managing development"? Details and specificity of terms, requirements and intentions are needed to inform the process of making decisions and set limits or conditions. What is the process by which these goals and management activities will be determined? How can you ensure that the TPS reflects the longer-term and collective goals (responsibilities) to the natural environment and local communities? How can limits, binding commitments and the precautionary principles be adopted in ways that ensure the future ecological resilience of our natural areas while ensuring that new development approvals will actually meet the affordable housing needs that exist.

A long-term vision requires care, clarity of intention and that it be communicated for posterity precisely. Clarity is needed for the Island Trust goals and policies. Current discussions lack process, consideration of long-term goals, uncertainties or the binding commitments around how to ensure the policies are properly applied in the future (eg., that housing developments will meet sustainability, water-protection/conservation, while maintaining the long-term sustainability of natural ecosystems).

Thank you for your consideration of these concerns.

Ruth Waldick