

From: John Ronsley [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, December 5, 2024 9:06 PM
To: Islands2050
Cc: John Ronsley
Subject: Draft Trust Policy Statement
Attachments: As a resident of British Columbia.docx

Please add the following letter of concern to the islands2050 web page and bring to the attention of members of the Trust Executive Council.

Thank-you.

Sincerely,

J. Ronsley
Galiano
[REDACTED]

To Whom It May Concern:

Conservation of the Islands' Natural Ecology is no longer Prioritized by the Islands Trust

As a resident of British Columbia's Southern Gulf Islands (I live on Galiano Island), I came here knowing that this is a special place and that it is different from most if not all other rural communities in the province. This fact is well known and was enshrined by provincial legislation in 1974 when the government created the Islands Trust which is a unique legislative body perhaps in the whole world.

Over the years, the Islands Trust has embraced a Conservation mandate to protect the natural ecosystems under its jurisdiction from the destructive impact of urban development. This protection is no small accomplishment and it remains a continuing challenge. The pressure to develop from the nearby urban centres of Victoria and Vancouver is huge and has been made much worse by astronomical increases to property values in those two cities.

Conservation of the natural and unique ecosystems of the Trust area was front of mind to the framers of the Islands Trust Act (the Act). The Act is the provincial legislation that first created the Trust and gave it its governing structure.

Under the Act, one of the important responsibilities of the Islands Trust Executive Council is to approve a periodically updated Trust Policy Statement (TPS). In the past, review of the TPS has been an opportunity for the Trust Executive Council to clearly articulate the Trust's conservation mandate through its interpretation of the Trust Object. The Trust Object is at the heart of the Act and is as follows:

“The object of the Trust is to preserve and protect the Trust Area and its unique amenities and environment for the benefit of the residents of the Trust Area and of British Columbia generally, in cooperation with municipalities, regional districts, improvement districts, other persons and organizations and the government of British Columbia.”

The Islands Trust Executive Council started to update the TPS in 2021. The initial draft included an interpretation of the Trust Object that clearly spelled out the Conservation mandate of the Trust by its interpretation of “unique amenities and environment” to be in part the following:

“Located within the Coastal Douglas-fir and Coastal Western Hemlock biogeoclimatic Zones, the Trust Area is home to an exceptionally high biodiversity of rare and culturally significant species, including over 100 federally-listed and over 300 provincially-listed species at risk. These ecosystems are classified as ‘sensitive’ because of their rarity and vulnerability to disturbances such as human impacts and climate change. The Trust Area also plays an important role in provincial and national efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by capturing and storing carbon in natural areas such as forests, soils, mycelium networks, wetlands and eelgrass meadows.

Islands are places of last refuge and first (local) extinction. Existing at the interface of land and sea, they provide transition habitats that support high terrestrial and marine biodiversity. At the same time, islands need extra care due to a number of unique vulnerabilities they hold as small, closed systems, surrounded by water. Unlike larger islands or the mainland, islands in the Trust Area have significant water supply constraints, due to small watersheds, shallow soils, a heavy reliance on groundwater and a high vulnerability to the impacts of changing climate, such as drought and salt water intrusion. Species habitat and migration corridors on these islands are also constrained by the natural boundaries of shorelines and are impacted by the proportion and configuration of land converted for human use. In addition, coastal and marine ecosystems, resident communities, and First Nations’ archaeological sites and shoreline harvesting are all highly vulnerable to the climate change impacts associated with sea level rise and ocean acidification.”

The Islands Trust Executive Council clearly understood the importance and relevance of preserving the natural ecology of the Trust Area to the Trust Object when they started to re-write the TPS. What is far less clear is why they then all but abandoned this important mission to prioritize the natural ecology of the islands.

The current draft of the new TPS offers no interpretation of the Trust Object and with it no clear commitment to Conservation of the natural ecology of the Trust Area. The above statement from the early draft is gone in the most recent draft. The newest version of the TPS is mostly a hodgepodge of loosely connected “objectives and directives” with no prioritization attached to any of them except one: Indigenous Cultural Heritage Protection.

Any critical reading of this latest draft will find that Environmental Protection does not mean the Conservation of natural ecosystems as a priority over any other of the wide ranging objectives of the TPS. Yet it is naïve to assume that it won't come into conflict with those other Objectives at different times when the Trust writes new bylaws and in the course of future initiatives.

Instead of adopting a definition of the Environment that is specific to preserving natural ecosystems, the current draft opts for a definition that comes directly from the Impact Agency of Canada. That definition focuses on anything that could impact indigenous people, health, social and economic conditions. While it is a good definition in its proper context, it is a far cry from making the protection and preservation of natural ecosystems a priority.

Unlike the original framers of the Act, the current Executive Council appears to be ready and willing to downgrade the importance of preserving and protecting the natural ecology of the Southern Gulf Islands under its jurisdiction.

It is a sad day for conservation that comes at a very bad time. Climate change and other human factors make the preserve and protect mandate of these natural ecosystems as important today if not more so than ever before.

What is at stake is what the Southern Gulf Islands will become for future generations and for the province as a whole.

J. Ronsley
Galiano