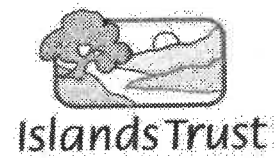


Trustee Notebook *By Laura Busheikin*



Farming Regulations Review Moving Ahead

Good news! Denman Island will have an opportunity to update its agricultural regulations, thanks to a grant from the Investment Agriculture Foundation.

This initiative has some history to it. Here's a summary: about 12 years ago the Local Trust Committee (LTC) gathered a group of volunteers to oversee the creation of a Farm Plan—a document packed with information and data about farming on Denman, and a list of recommendations to support agriculture in a sustainable way. About five years ago, the Local Trust Committee set out to implement the specific recommendations that focussed on land use regulations. This project was called the Farm Plan Implementation Project.

However, work on this project has been stalled, mainly because planning staff have been focussing on affordable housing applications. The grant will fund a contract planner to re-start and re-invigorate the process, without diverting staff away from ongoing work.

This amendment project is now titled the Farming Regulations Review, to reflect the reality that much has changed since the Farm Plan was created, and that the focus is on land use regulations specifically. While the Farm Plan remains a key resource, the relaunched project will begin with an update of the key data, such as inventory of ALR land and its uses.

As well, **the review will include discussion of recent changes in provincial agricultural regulations.** One of those that may be of particular interest on Denman Island is the new Agricultural Land Reserve rules for secondary dwellings (what most of us call cabins or cottages). As of January 1st, 2022, these rules will become more permissive. Unlike in the past, secondary dwellings will be permitted without an ALR permit, regardless of whether or not they are used for family members or farm help, and regardless of whether the property has official farm status.

The Denman Farming Regulation Review will consider how to handle this option. Current regulations will allow secondary dwellings, as per the new ALR options, with the proviso that property owners would need to apply for and receive a Temporary Use Permit. What are the pros and cons of this set-up, versus different approaches? As well, the ALR has introduced maximum size restrictions on housing. How does this fit in on Denman? The LTC, with feedback from the community, will consider these and other relevant questions.

This is in line with the Farm Plan recommendation to “undertake a review of additional housing on farmland.” The focus will be on farmland housing. A more comprehensive review of housing regulations on Denman is planned to begin in 2022, dependent on budget decisions.

The review will continue with work that was already well underway. Draft bylaws have been created; there was a community information meeting and a facilitated community workshop; and both the Denman Island Growers and Producers Association and the Advisory Planning Commission (a group of appointed volunteers who give feedback on Local Trust Committee work) have provided lots of good feedback.

Key proposals in the work done so far are clarification of key definitions (such as “feedlot” and “intensive agriculture”) to support a sustainable scale of agriculture, modification of setbacks, and permitting a modest level of commercial camping on farms as a way to supplement income. **The goal right now is to build on this past work, while being responsive to ways the worlds of agriculture, and agriculture regulations, have changed.**

We'll keep you posted about steps being taken and opportunities for input via the usual channels as this initiative progresses.

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A NOTE ON TRUSTEE OFFICE HOURS: It feels like aeons ago that the local trustees held monthly drop-in office hours. These have been suspended due to COVID. However, if anyone wants to meet with us, write to us, or talk on the phone, we are still here!

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