



Denman Conservancy Association

PO BOX 60, Denman Island, BC V0R 1T0

October 4, 2023

Denman Island Local Trust Committee:
Sam Borthwick, David Graham. David Maude
Islands Trust Northern Office
northinfo@islandstrust.bc.ca

Re: Proposed Bylaws Nos. 228 & 229

Dear Trustees:

This letter is in reply to Trustee Graham's reply (August 31) to DCA's letter of March 27, 2023. Included in Trustee Graham's reply was an email from Marlis McCargar, Island Planner.

Introduction

As noted in DCA's initial letter, our overriding imperative is to ensure the preservation and protection of fresh water on Denman Island in the face of the current and predicted implications of Climate Change to the natural environment. Since writing in March, circumstances have worsened. We have never experienced a summer like 2023 in recorded history. The litany is almost too painful to recount -- ocean heat at hot tub temperature; deadly, scorching land temperatures for days on end; unprecedented wildfires and choking smoke; and, sea ice melting at a rate beyond what science thought possible. "Earth's life support systems have been so damaged that the planet is 'well outside the safe operating space for humanity', scientists have warned. Their assessment found that six out of nine "planetary boundaries" had been broken because of human-caused pollution and destruction of the natural world. The planetary boundaries are the limits of key global systems – such as climate, water and wildlife diversity – beyond which their ability to maintain a healthy planet is in danger of failing." (Guardian, September 13, 2023)

The critical importance of wetlands, water courses, lakes and ground water cannot be underestimated. They both prevent and mitigate the effects of Climate Change. We note that, Denman has significant and abundant surface water, whose value is becoming increasingly important. Most of this water retention is due to the actions of beaver, ecosystem engineers,

damming shallow wetlands or to humans building weirs to replace original beaver dams. All these wetlands are important for human and biodiversity well-being.

Seasonally Flooded - Definition

From Planner McCargar's 8/31 letter "There are DPA exemptions for agricultural activities within ALR land:

b) agricultural activities within a seasonally flooded agricultural field that is in the Agricultural Land Reserve as long as it can be determined by site inspection and/or by current orthophoto interpretation that it has been previously modified for agriculture. If it is not possible to make the determination by these means, other historical evidence that agricultural activities have occurred in the subject area within the last 50 years from the date of the application may be acceptable; "

We need to recognize that what was deemed good agricultural practice by arriving colonials in the late 1800's is not appropriate resource management in 2023. Now, it is important to recognize that these are significant and important wetlands, that they are part of major salmon spawning streams and that though they were once dammed for log-transport then blown up with cordite, ditched and used to grow low protein Reed Canary grass (which subsequently spread as a serious invasive species), this action may have been useful at the time, it was not responsible stream and water management. This practice provided early colonial settlers with easy pasture and cattle fodder until the uplands were logged and de-stumped. The notion of what might be defined as "agriculturally modified" 50 years ago ignores the importance of natural and active restoration in reclaiming wetlands that were massively changed because of old resource practices when there were no guidelines in place. It is incumbent on us to employ scientific rigour to establish these guidelines, but that approach is not evident in Islands Trust efforts to protect this critical resource.

Mapping

Overall, the current Islands Trust wetlands map for Denman is incomplete and has significant inaccuracies. The current designation of the seasonally flooded fields does not reflect comparative criteria among the wetlands. Denman water has been mapped piece meal by the Islands Trust over the decades, but was most accurately done, pre-digital, by DFO in the early 1980's. As mapping of water resources is a prerequisite to responsible management it behooves managers to obtain accurate mapping prior to careful classification.

Summary:

We are struck by the fact that the Denman Farm Plan does not even include a consideration of WATER. The Trustees comments at the time were that it was overlooked, and they hoped to maybe get to that later. Our goal at the time and now is to urge the Trust to recognize that all wetlands (even in ALR) should be protected as wetlands and not be subjected to draining, plowing, or any alterations for agriculture use except as sustainably managed for irrigation purposes that would not damage their value and existence as wetlands. Water is just too important.

And as stated at the outset, “Water and climate change are inextricably linked. Climate change affects the world’s water in complex ways. From unpredictable rainfall patterns to shrinking ice sheets, rising sea levels, floods and droughts – most impacts of climate change come down to water.” (United Nations – Climate Action) “Wetlands are some of the planet’s most vital ecosystems. They are an important habitat for wildlife, they filter pollution and provide flood protection. Wetlands also store large amounts of carbon. But they are one of the Earth’s most threatened ecosystem types. Once abundant throughout Canada, wetlands are now increasingly scarce in populated areas. Approximately 70 percent of wetlands have been lost in southern areas of Canada...”(Environment and Natural Resources CANADA)

DCA Request:

A serious science-based review of the current biophysical nature and water-management value of all Denman Island’s wetlands must be undertaken as part of a due diligence approach to managing our water resources. This information is essential to understand how Climate Change will continue to impact our water resources needed both for human residential and agricultural use, as well as for maintaining species biodiversity.

We look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,



Luise Hermanutz
Co-Chairperson