

A little inspiration as the longest night approaches Susan Yates, Trustee, Gabriola Local Trust Area

As the winter solstice greets us in the Salish Sea I'm reflecting on several inspiring accomplishments and ongoing projects that bolster my commitment to the protection of the land and waters of the Gabriola Local Trust Area.

The Budget discussions at the Islands Trust December quarterly Council meeting left me feeling pretty positive; despite a new Council still getting to know each other, and the limitations of zoom meetings, there was budget support for projects and planning that are essential for environmental stewardship across the Trust Area.

The extraordinary donation of Link Island (linking Mudge and Decourcy Islands by land at low tide) to the Islands Trust Conservancy (ITC) represents a conservation legacy that began when the Swift family came together to discuss donating the 21.45 ha island to ITC in 2019. A conservation covenant was placed on the island as a first step to future long-lasting protection. Before Betty Smith died in 2021 she left instructions that the island be transferred to the ITC, and Gabriola Lands & Trails Trust (GaLTT) was invited to hold the new covenant going forward. This was in the works just as I was being elected to the ITC Board, and news of the final covenant was almost overwhelmingly joyful.

On Gabriola, the ongoing Climate 12-12-12 project, sponsored by Sustainable Gabriola, deserves support as it invites all of us to tackle the climate crisis with thoughtful, practical, resourceful solutions. Despite the seriousness of the problems, I find myself looking forward to each of the 'local impacts – local solutions' meetings.

Also on Gabriola we have more individuals and families joining the GaLTT Nature Stewards Program (NSP), supported by the Islands Trust Conservancy, as each season turns. It's a relatively small step that results in big ecological returns with networks of protected areas across the islands. Thetis Island Nature Conservancy has followed the Gabriola NSP model, helping land holders to be active environmental stewards through habitat restoration and natural area preservation.

One more solstice reflection: thank you to our Regional District staff and Directors (esp. Vanessa Craig) for supporting short and long-term environmental projects like the biodiesel project spearheaded by Island Futures: waste vegetable oil might never be the same, and that's a very good thing for 2023!

As I sometimes do at school and other gatherings, I offer a favourite poem for this time of year. The title is *December*, and it was written by Marie Harris:

*If, in the season's long night,
We imagined ourselves itinerant
star gazers, shepherds
in a grazed over land,
we might offer each other*

*no gift
but a watchful eye
an ear to the earth's heart.*