

# 2011-2017 Regional Conservation Plan Update

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April 30, 2015

## Introduction

In November 2010, the Trust Fund Board approved its five-year, 2011-2015 Regional Conservation Plan (RCP). The plan identified seven goals and proposed thirty, five-year objectives to guide the work of the Islands Trust Fund over the course of the plan. The following is a brief summary of the successes to date and some of the challenges to achieving the objectives of the plan. An adaptive management approach has been employed and where objectives have been found to be impractical or un-reachable, they have been modified to suit the scope of the plan. Additionally, to help the Trust Fund Board achieve some of the more time consuming actions, the Trust Fund Board, at its January 2015 meeting, voted to extend the time period of the plan until the end of 2017.

## **GOAL 1. Secure conservation areas that effectively conserve biodiversity priorities within the Islands.**

### **Accomplishments:**

- approved criteria for prioritizing lands for conservation and prioritized areas for conservation within the Islands Trust area;
- developed relationship with Thetis Island Nature Conservancy (ThINC), identified an appropriate acquisition project on Thetis Island, initiated an acquisition campaign on Thetis in collaboration with ThINC for 16 ha of land;
- Improved policies for assessing conservation proposals;
- Acquired database for information storage;
- Protected 133.73 ha of land including 117.45 ha of priority lands; and,
- Assisted in conservation of an additional 234.26 ha of land, including 205.11 ha of priority lands.

### **Outstanding Action Items:**

- Conserve 500 ha of priority lands (117.45 ha conserved by ITF to date);
- Secure 20 ha of conservation land on Thetis (current campaign to secure 16 ha. is set to complete in June 2017);
- Research identified conservation lands and work with landowners to develop strategies for land securement; and,
- Seek appropriate funding to carry out strategies for land securement.

### **Looking Forward:**

- The Trust Fund Board has recognized that protecting 500 ha of priority lands within the scope of the Regional Conservation Plan is unlikely, but hopes to work towards protection of between 150 and 200 ha while working with partners to conserve an additional 300 ha;
- In 2012, the Coastal Douglas-fir and Associated Ecosystems Conservation Partnership was formed and the Trust Fund Board became a signatory. The Trust Fund Board will work to incorporate the results of the CDFCP Conservation Strategy into its conservation planning for the remainder of the 2011-2017 Regional Conservation Plan;
- The Trust Fund Board is working with the Thetis Island Nature Conservancy (ThINC) to secure land on Thetis Island and hopes to accomplish its objectives for Thetis Island by 2017; and

- The Trust Fund Board is working towards approval of strategy and funding plan for ongoing land securement by the end of 2017.

**GOAL 2. Investigate the protection of biodiversity priorities on lands outside of core conservation areas, including working landscapes.**

**Accomplishments:**

- Mapped “working landscape” of Islands Trust area using tax class data and Agricultural Land Reserve data;
- Identified areas for landowner contact and initiated a pilot landowner contact program on Lasqueti Island in collaboration with the Lasqueti Island Nature Conservancy (LINC);

**Outstanding action items:**

- Evaluation of pilot landowner contact program;
- Research current resources for conservation of working landscapes and develop a report to the Board identifying resource needs to address conservation needs on working landscapes (Fall 2015); and
- Update resources for land trusts on the Islands Trust Fund website to include information on conservation of working landscapes.

**Looking Forward:**

- The Trust Fund Board is currently wrapping up a landowner contact program on Lasqueti Island and plans to do a program evaluation in the summer of 2015.
- The Trust Fund Board has engaged a masters’ student to analyze potential for conservation programs on working landscapes and will assess the report and identify next steps in the fall of 2015. Web resources will be updated by the end of 2015.

**GOAL 3. Work with partner organizations to conserve marine ecosystems and habitats.**

**Accomplishments:**

- Completed eelgrass mapping for entire Islands Trust region (December 2014);
- Completed forage fish habitat assessments for North and South Pender, Thetis, Denman and Hornby islands and assisted with forage fish habitat assessments for Bowen and Gambier islands;
- Shared available mapping with conservation partners working on marine conservation; and,
- Coordinated a communication mechanism with Trust Area Services and Local Planning Services regarding marine conservation issues; and,
- Provided final eelgrass mapping to local trust committees and Trust Council.

**Outstanding action items:**

- Incorporate marine mapping into conservation model; and,
- Continue to work to complete forage fish and kelp bed mapping.

**Looking Forward:**

- The Trust Fund Board will work to incorporate eelgrass mapping into its conservation mapping by the end of 2016; and,
- The Trust Fund Board will continue Forage Fish mapping on major islands in 2015-2016 and research methods for kelp bed mapping.

**GOAL 4. Work with the Islands Trust Council, local trust committees and island municipalities to implement and accentuate Regional Conservation Plan goals and objectives within official community plans and land use bylaws.**

**Accomplishments:**

- Finalized Sensitive Ecosystem Mapping and assisted two local trust committees in creating sensitive ecosystem development permit areas;
- Provided training to staff and trustees regarding sensitive ecosystem mapping and shoreline ecosystem mapping (eelgrass and forage fish);
- Finalized tools for creating protected area networks for local trust committees (unused at this time); and,
- Incorporated RCP goals and objectives in Islands Trust Strategic Plan and the Islands Trust Fund Board 5-year plan.

**Outstanding action items:**

- Creation of an Islands Trust Fund/Islands Trust working group to develop OCP/bylaw templates for sensitive ecosystem and shoreline conservation; and,
- Create a plan for ecosystem mapping updates.

**Looking Forward:**

- The Trust Fund Board will continue to provide ecosystem information for OCPs and bylaws as requested; and,
- The Trust Fund Board will work with partners to update ecosystem mapping in 2015-2016.

**GOAL 5. Promote community participation in conservation within the Islands Trust Area through effective stewardship and management of private lands, information sharing and support of conservation education initiatives for private landowners.**

**Accomplishments:**

- Produced and issued 6 issues of the Heron;
- Initiated regular Trust Fund Board updates to local trust committees;
- Created materials for landowner contact and piloted a landowner contact program on Lasqueti Island; and
- Issued 24 news releases and 1 article about conservation issues.

**Outstanding action items:**

- Continue to issue news releases, local trust committee updates and the Heron on an ongoing basis; and,
- Complete and evaluate Lasqueti Island landowner contact program.

**Looking Forward:**

- The Trust Fund Board will continue to provide communications materials on an ongoing basis; and,
- The Trust Fund Board will evaluate the Lasqueti Island landowner contact program in the summer of 2015.

**GOAL 6. Support and enhance the work of conservation partners working in the Islands Trust Area.****Accomplishments:**

- Sponsored island conservancies to attend five networking and training events;
- Staff participated in 17 conservation networking and training events with island groups;
- Staff presented Islands Trust Fund work at 16 events, including 6 NAPTEP presentations and 4 shoreline mapping presentations;
- Provided ecosystem mapping (shoreline and terrestrial) to over 10 organizations;
- Opportunity Fund income of approximately 20 % of opening balance each year through individual donations and calendar sales; and,
- Distributed \$34,765 in grants to island conservancies through 11 Opportunity Fund grants for land conservation initiatives.

**Outstanding action items (all ongoing):**

- Continue to grow the Opportunity Fund and distribute grants;
- Continue to support partners in training and networking events; and,
- Continue to offer Trust Fund Board staff and mapping resources to partners.

**Looking Forward:**

- The Trust Fund Board will continue to support the work of its partners on an ongoing basis.

**GOAL 7. Monitor and manage existing conservation areas to maintain and enhance existing biodiversity and cultural features, with the understanding that ecosystems are continuously in a state of change.****Accomplishments:**

- Three ecological monitoring sites identified: Mt. Trematon (homestead/logging impact restoration project), Sidney Island Covenants (deer exclosures), Long Bay Wetland (gravel pit restoration); and,
- Continued work to control invasive species and manage human use on Trust Fund Board Nature Reserves.

**Outstanding action items:**

- Create a Property Management Strategy and associated budget that incorporates consideration of species at risk monitoring and stewardship, invasive species monitoring and control and identification of important areas for ongoing ecosystem monitoring and management of ecological integrity.

**Looking Forward:**

- The Trust Fund Board will focus on completion of its Property Management Strategy in 2015-2016.