

2011-2017 Regional Conservation Plan Accomplishments

February 21, 2017

Introduction

In November 2010, the Trust Fund Board approved its five-year, 2011-2015 Regional Conservation Plan (RCP). The Trust Fund Board, at its January 2015 meeting, voted to extend the time period of the plan until the end of 2017 to allow it to complete some of the RCP's more time consuming objectives. The RCP 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 RCP successes and lessons learned.

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

Accomplishments:

- Protected 170.45 ha of land including 140.12 ha of priority lands;
- Assisted in conservation of an additional 339.27 ha of land, including 310.12 ha of priority lands;
- 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 appropriate acquisition projects on Thetis Island, completed one acquisition project (21.04 ha) and scheduled to close on a second (~16 ha) in the summer of 2017 in collaboration with ThINC ;
- Improved policies for assessing conservation proposals, and acquiring land/covenants;
- Acquired database for information storage; and
- Finalized a securement strategy for the next 10 yrs.

Lessons learned:

- Due primarily to funding limitations, the TFB did not meet its 500 ha objective for priority lands conservation; however, it was able to either secure through its own tenure, or through assisting partner agencies, 448.6 ha of priority lands, indicating that strong partnerships are important to land conservation in the islands.
- Although the TFB had many conservation successes, obtaining funding for land securement is difficult and the TFB either needs to be more modest in its goals or identify/develop new funding sources.

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

Accomplishments:

- Collaborated with a Masters student in the School for Public Administration at the University of Victoria to evaluate the effectiveness, feasibility and potential tools for conservation of natural components of the working landscape (e.g. forestry and farm lands);
- Mapped "working landscape" of Islands Trust area using tax class, zoning and Agricultural Land Reserve data;

- Identified areas for landowner contact and conducted and evaluated a pilot landowner contact program on Lasqueti Island in collaboration with the Lasqueti Island Nature Conservancy (LINC);

Lessons Learned:

- Landowner contact programs can be effective ways to reach potential land donors but need to be tailored to each island and each audience; and
- There are tools available for conservation on working lands; the TFB will consider these and determine if it wishes to pursue them further.

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

Accomplishments:

- Completed eelgrass mapping for entire Islands Trust region in partnership with the Seagrass Conservation Working Group, SeaChange Marine Conservation Society and the Mayne Island Conservancy Society (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, Keats and Gambier islands;
- Shared available mapping with a broad range of partners working in the Islands Trust area; and,
- Coordinated a communication mechanism with Trust Area Services and Local Planning Services regarding marine conservation issues.

Lessons Learned:

- Shoreline mapping information has been very popular with a variety of other agencies and the Islands Trust has shared data with First Nations, Industry, Government and non-profits for the following uses:
 - Oil spill planning
 - Evaluation of shoreline structures (i.e. docks, breakwaters, seawalls, etc.)
 - Marine protected area planning
 - Community education
 - Fish habitat information
 - Environmental Assessments for industrial uses of the shoreline
 - University research
- Shoreline mapping has been useful to the Local Planning Services on islands where shoreline Environmental Development Permit Areas are present and to the Bowen Island Municipality in considering docks and other shoreline applications and initiatives. It has also been useful in evaluating conservation proposals for the Trust Fund Board.

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 Eelgrass Mapping and assisted two local trust committees in creating development permit areas for these habitats;
- Initiated Terrestrial Ecosystem Mapping updates (due to complete in August 2017);

- Provided ongoing 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 or island municipalities (ready for a pilot project with a willing local trust committee or the Bowen Island Municipality);
- Collaborated with Local Planning Services on marine and shoreline stewardship workshops on several islands and via webinar; and,
- Incorporated RCP goals and objectives in Islands Trust Strategic Plan and the Islands Trust Fund Board 5-year plan.

Lessons Learned:

- Working with local trust committees and island municipalities requires time and willingness of planning staff and elected officials (trustees & municipal councilors). These are autonomous and independent agencies and the Trust Fund Board will explore further ways of partnering more effectively in the next conservation plan.

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 eight issues of the Heron;
- Initiated regular Trust Fund Board updates to local trust committees and the Bowen Island Municipality;
- Created materials for landowner contact and piloted and evaluated a landowner contact program on Lasqueti Island;
- Collaborated with Islands Trust to launch NAPTEP in the Lasqueti Island Local Trust Area and within the Bowen Island Municipality;
- Developed 'Planned Giving' resource package for donors; and
- Issued 27 news releases about conservation issues.

Lessons Learned:

- There are opportunities for outreach to island communities; however, time availability can be a limiting factor. Opportunities for outreach that arise and originate from island communities can be the most time efficient means of disseminating information. Conversely, if the Trust Fund Board wishes to reach a particular audience, it may need to do its own outreach and this can be time consuming as the needs of each audience and island community are different.

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

Accomplishments:

- Sponsored island conservancies to attend six networking and training events;
- Staff participated in 26 conservation networking and training events with island groups;
- Staff presented Islands Trust Fund work at 22 events, including 6 NAPTEP presentations and 4 shoreline mapping presentations;
- Provided ecosystem mapping (shoreline and terrestrial) to over 20 organizations;

- Opportunity Fund increased between 7 % and 23 % of opening balance each year through individual donations and calendar sales; and,
- Distributed \$33,079 in grants to island conservancies through 10 Opportunity Fund grants for land conservation initiatives.

Lessons Learned

- The Trust Fund Board continues to be a strong supporter of conservation partners through information dissemination (i.e. mapping data), the Opportunity Fund and through participation in conferences and community events.

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);
- Continued work to control invasive species and manage human use on Trust Fund Board Nature Reserves; and,
- Completed a draft Property Management Strategy as a means to more strategically use available budgets and resources.

Lessons Learned

- As the Trust Fund Board continues to acquire land and conservation covenants, it must consider management needs and associated costs. Properties with greater recreational access and higher levels of damage require more money to manage. These are key factors that the Trust Fund Board considers when taking on a property.
- The Islands Trust area has a high level of rare species, some of which are found on Trust Fund Board lands. The Trust Fund Board has an increasing level of responsibility to ensure that these species survive and thrive on its lands.