

First a reminder: the Stewardship Awards nomination deadline is April 26. These awards recognize individuals and groups or actions on your island that have made a significant contribution towards the objects of the Islands Trust. For more information visit the Islands Trust website, check out the notices posted in all the usual places around the island or ask one of your Trustees.

We went to Thetis Island for Trust Council on March 5, 6 & 7th which was interesting for me as I hadn't been there before and because they are one of the few Islands in the Trust with a population similar to ours. The others are South Pender, Lasqueti and Gambier.

Trust Council is becoming more fun as I grow to know the other Trustees – we spend a lot of time together at Trust Council, and it's not just meeting time, all of our meals are communal too. Of course, I enjoy seeing some of them more than others, but all in all, they are very hard working individuals and I admire their dedication, even if I don't always agree with their politics.

Some of those politics show up in hotly debated agenda items and which agenda items those are can take me totally by surprise. This meeting it was a request by the Salt Spring Trustees, which I thought would pass uncontested. Salt Spring trustees were asking if Trust Council would consider crafting a draft bylaw for discussion purposes, which would allow the Council to transfer its powers to “coordinate” with other agencies to the Salt Spring local trust committee. If such a draft bylaw was eventually approved, it would allow Salt Spring trustees the ability to coordinate with other specific agencies solely to deal with water issues. Boy, was I wrong!

Even though Salt Spring has over 40% of the Trust's population, and even though they were just asking for a draft bylaw to be written for further discussion, and even though decades of multi-agency water jurisdiction had failed to halt the decline in water health, significant opposition was mounted. Little wonder there was a call for a governance review on Salt Spring.

I am happy to say it did eventually pass, but after taking about four times as allotted on the agenda. (If you are curious for more info, go to the Islands Trust web page, and highlight Trust Council with its drop down menu, choose Administration and then Council Agendas, pick Session 5- Decisions and Information and chose item 3.5.)

Probably the most important thing we did at Trust council was pass the 2013/2014 budget, which will raise property taxes by 1.3%, or about \$77,000. This is pretty good given the over 75% increase in the Trust's budget in the last decade. However, we're also transferring over \$300,000 from our surplus (gathered from prior year taxes), which will cover stuff like additional staffing and the 4% BC government employee union increase. If you want more information on the budget, ask Trustee Brent as he is on the finance committee.

One of the more interesting presentations for me was Working with the Islands Trust Fund (ITF), probably due to my naturalist background. There was information about private land stewardship, land protection options – did you know you could get a tax exemption for land you put into a conservation covenant? And information about plans for eel grass mapping and other areas deemed “sensitive ecosystems”.

But the thing I found the most interesting was the ITF Regional Conservation Plan for 2011 – 2015. It is 162 pages of maps and data that identifies itself as “a tool to help the ITF focus its efforts on protecting the best of the remaining natural ecosystems in the Trust Area...used by the IT decision-makers to support ecologically-responsible land use planning.” As well as a wealth of information about the entire Trust Area, there are data profiles for each island. Things like the size, population, protected area distribution, species at risk and much more.

Here are a few for Saturna: Number of Dwellings (2006) **426**; Number of Dwellings Occupied by Residents (2006) **192**; Average Cost per Hectare of Land (2009) **\$102,050**; Percentage of Land in Private Ownership (August 2010) **50.1%**; Percentage of Private land Owned by Non-resident Property Owners (2009) **23.9%**; **Parcels** (of land) less than .5 hectares **357**; Total protected areas (2012) **1,548.1 hectares**; Total area of Saturna **3,570.8 hectares**. Total Modified Ecosystems i.e. all things not natural including fields, roads, driveways, buildings and the reservoir (2010) **311.3 hectares**. Something to think about as we venture into our density discussions next month...Pam