

Trustee Notebook

By Laura Busheikin



Islands Trust

Water Water Everywhere, Nor any Drop to Drink! (Samuel Taylor Coleridge, The Rime of the Ancient Mariner)

I'm writing this in the middle of a heat wave. My facebook feed tells me yesterday's weather set a record at 30 degrees. It's hot, and it's dry. I like the heat, and I worry about the dryness. This reminds me of a funny conversation I had a woman who was moving off of Denman after about three years of living here. She was heading back down to New Mexico, where she'd come from.

"I just don't get you people," she told me, exasperated. "It rains and rains...and rains...all winter, and then come May when it doesn't rain for ten days, everyone's complaining and talking about drought. Where I come from, it might not rain for six months! Then you can talk about drought."

She pretty much summed up our water paradox. There is no shortage of water on our Island. But it disappears quickly. A spell of dry weather hits, and we see the forest and its inhabitants suffer, our precious wetlands become compromised. Our wells run dry, or get perilously low. We fear fire.

So groundwater protection has to be a big focus for local government. It is especially so for the Islands Trust, which has a special mandate to "preserve and protect" this region's unique amenities.

The most basic way the Trust protects water is by restrictive regulations, such as requiring development permits for streams, lakes and wetland areas, and controlling density. But the Trust has also has produced a wealth of information to educate and motivate us to protect water. Here are some excerpts, plus links to find out more:

Some facts you perhaps did not know:

- *On the Gulf Islands, up to 80% of rainwater is lost in run-off to the ocean;
- *Climate modelling predicts warmer, wetter winters and hotter, dryer summers;
- *An average Island house can capture 91,000 – 105,000 gallons of water a year with an average annual rainfall;
- *Many of the water districts in the Gulf Islands report use levels of 50–60 gallons per person/day;
- *Rainwater-dependent users consider 35–40 gallons per person/day a maximum, and some are as low as 25–30 gallons per person/day;
- *The average household in Canada uses 71 gallons of water per person/day;
- *26% of household water use comes from toilets, 21% from laundry, and 13.7% from leaks;

*In the summer, outdoor usage accounts for up to 50% of water use.

In January, The Islands Trust published Gulf Islands Groundwater Protection: A Regulatory Toolkit. This mostly talks about ways our land use regulations can support water protection, but it also has lots of useful and even interesting info for residents. It gives a clear picture of a water-smart home:

- *A modestly-sized home with no surrounding paving minimizes impervious surfaces, allowing rainwater to absorb into the ground and make its way to deep storage;
- *The home is sited at a healthy distance from wetlands, streams, lakes and watercourses, leaving these important resources undisturbed;
- *No toxic pesticides, herbicides or fertilizers are used;
- *The garden has mostly drought-resistant and native plants;
- *Plants and forest are left intact, providing a "sponge" for water;
- *Water-efficient fixtures include low-flow showers, faucets and toilets, and water-smart washing machines;
- *Rainwater is captured in ponds and cisterns;
- *An appropriate septic system is properly installed and maintained;
- *Household water is re-used for irrigation (it can simply be collected in a basin and used that evening in the garden);
- *Inhabitants practice thrifty water use, turning off the tap while brushing teeth or soaping up hands, keeping showers short, bathing only as a luxury, only running the dishwasher when full, etc.

I hope this short article inspires you initiate and/or continue with water-saving initiatives and practices. I'm off to the lake!

For more info:

Gulf Islands Groundwater Protection: A Regulatory Toolkit

<http://www.islandstrust.bc.ca/media/259555/groundwater-toolkit.pdf>

Islands Trust Water Conservation page –

<http://www.islandstrust.bc.ca/trust-council/projects/water-resource-information-for-islanders/water-conservation.aspx>

Islands Trust Water Resource Information Page – directs you to a wealth of info such as a list of Island water organizations, drinking water regulations, water conservation suggestions and more

Ruby Alton nature Reserve (Islands Trust rainwater harvesting demonstration project on Salt Spring Island): http://www.islandstrustfund.bc.ca/media/39069/ranr_harvesting_system_manual.pdf

Rainwater Harvesting in the Gulf Islands --

<http://www.islandstrustfund.bc.ca/initiatives/privateconservation/land-stewardship/rainwater-harvesting.aspx>