

First Nations Reconciliation on Denman Island

“Reconciliation” is a hard-working word in Canada these days. These six syllables are asked to hold the weight of a complex and deeply painful history, while also signalling our profound intention to make things right. Reconciliation is about listening, learning, and through that, transforming our awareness and attitudes, both personally and collectively. Reconciliation also points to the need to fundamentally change Canadian legal, political, economic, educational, and cultural systems. That’s *a lot* of meaning for one word.

Just what would reconciliation look like on Denman Island? Our local government doesn’t negotiate treaties, disperse monies, grant fishing rights, or make decisions on weighty matters such as land claims. So what can we do?

This is the question being explored by the Denman Island Local Trust Committee (LTC) with the launch of its new initiative, A Shared Narrative of Place, which will be unfolding over the next year or so.

This initiative is partly modelled on successful relationship-building between local government and Indigenous people in Australia, and is similar to other projects taking place throughout the Islands Trust Area.

As the name suggests, A Shared Narrative of Place is about understanding history and learning how to let that history inform how we live now and in the future on Denman Island. The goal is to increase understanding and respect for Indigenous connections to the island, and to have our land use regulations reflect the deep history of the K’omoks First Nation in this area.

To achieve these goals, we’re planning a series of events for the public aimed at providing education and discussion. The first of these, entitled **First Nations and the Islands: Understanding History, Interests, and Relationships** will be held **Sunday, June 4, 7 p.m. at the Back Hall**, and will begin with a presentation by Islands Trust staff member Fiona XETXÁTTEN MacRaild summarizing 5,000 years of Indigenous history up to the present moment, including an overview of landmark court cases which are changing the Canadian landscape. This will be followed by a question-and-answer session and a community discussion about what reconciliation could look like here, and how we all can participate.

Planning for further events, including guest speakers from the K’omoks Band, is underway. This project will unfold in tandem with a similar initiative on Hornby Island and may include opportunity for inter-island co-operation and perhaps celebration.

As well, the LTC is opening up its Official Community Plan, the “vision” document that provides overarching guidance for our land use regulations, to include a First Nations “deep history” narrative and perspective, as well as references to Indigenous place names on the island and in the surrounding waters. These changes will be drafted in close co-operation with

the K'omoks Band and, as with any OCP amendment, will come before the community for comment.

This will provide a foundation that can lead to further initiatives, such as the use of Indigenous place names, and acknowledgement of First Nations on signage and in other communications. The LTC is interested in potential projects such as a shoreline protection review in co-ordination with local First Nations; consideration of how we can better protect significant Aboriginal historical places; and a look at ways First Nations could be more involved in land use decisions.

Every individual and community group on Denman can be involved in reconciliation. The LTC can take care of the land use regulations, craft respectful government-to-government protocols, and take on a certain level of co-ordination, but this is just one piece of a bigger picture. There are many opportunities for local individuals and groups to be part of re-creating our shared narrative of place. We will have a chance to discuss this at the June event. Reconciliation, that very big word, needs to happen at all levels – regulatory and personal, legal and cultural, nationwide and grassroots.

In the meantime, if you are interested in learning more, here are some links:

Islands Trust First Nations info: www.islandstrust.bc.ca/trust-council/first-nations-relations/

K'omoks First Nation: www.komoks.ca/

See also past Trustee Notebooks from May 2016, June 2016, and Feb 2017, at www.islandstrust.bc.ca/islands/local-trust-areas/denman/local-trustee-corner/

First Nations and the Islands:

Understanding History, Interests, and Relationships

Presentation and community discussion

Sunday, June 4, 7:00 pm – 9:00 pm

Back Hall

Free admission

