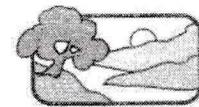


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Trustee Notebook *By Laura Busheikin*



Islands Trust

What Makes Denman Worth Protecting?

Those of us who live on Denman know that this place is special. We don't need convincing. But it is interesting, and instructive, to learn how our feelings are well supported by science. Here are some facts to affirm what our hearts know: that Denman Island's natural environment deserves extraordinary care.

This information comes to us courtesy of the Islands Trust Fund, the Islands Trust conservation initiative. Since 1990, the Trust Fund has protected over 100 properties, totalling over 1000 hectares, in the Trust Area, and worked with many local organizations and individuals to support stewardship and conservation.

Most of what follows is from the Trust Fund's new Regional Conservation Plan 2018 – 2027, which you can find on-line at <http://www.islandstrustfund.bc.ca/media/84636/draft-rcp.pdf>.

- 23.7 % of Denman Island is classified as a sensitive ecosystem. This means these areas are ecologically fragile. They are often the remnants of the natural ecosystems that once occupied a much larger area and are valuable for biodiversity and conservation. The presence of sensitive ecosystems points to a need to take extra care in how humans live on the land. More info on sensitive ecosystems, including maps, at www.islandstrustfund.bc.ca (enter "sensitive ecosystems" in the search bar) or <http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/sei/>.
- Denman island provides critical habitat for two federally-designated species at risk, the Dun Skipper and Sand Verbena Moth.
- The B. C. Conservation Data Centre has records of many other species at risk on the island, including the Great Blue Heron, Edith's Checkerspot Butterfly, the Red-legged Frog, Coastal Wood Fern, and Western Screech Owl. These species are present because Denman offers appropriate habitat.
- Denman falls within a rare and special type of forest: the Coastal Douglas-fir Biogeoclimatic Zone (CDF). This is the smallest of BC's forest zones, and one of the most threatened. The CDF is valuable not just for its namesake Douglas-firs, but also for many other trees, plants and animals, some endangered or rare, that live here, from the mycorrhizal fungi below us, to the eagles and bats above. The CDF comprises only 1% of BC's land base, and less than 1% of it has been left intact as old growth forest. Denman Island, via the Local Trust Committee, is a member of the CDF Conservation Partnership, a partner group working to protect this unique forest

area. For more info on CDF ecosystems, see www.env.gov.bc.ca/wld/documents/douglasfir.pdf

- Although Denman doesn't have any old forest left, it has 529 hectares (9.5% of the island) of mature forest (80 – 250 years old) and 1670 hectares (29.4% of the island) of young forest (40 – 80 years old).
- Denman's marine ecosystem is a habitat powerhouse: the island has some of the largest amounts of forage fish and eelgrass habitat in the Islands Trust area: 33% of the foreshore has eelgrass beds growing, and 59.7 of the shoreline is suitable spawning for forage fish (Pacific Sand Lance and/or Surf Smelt). Why is this notable? Forage fish are the main diet of salmon and herring, which in turn feed orcas and sea lions and bald eagles. Any decrease in forage fish magnifies up the food web. It's similar with eelgrass, which provides food, shelter and nursery habitat for fish and invertebrates, and also plays an essential role in removing carbon, recycling nutrients, stabilizing shorelines and stopping erosion.
- 567 hectares of Denman's marine area are in a Rockfish Conservation Area. This federal designation protects the habitat of these fish, which have been declining in population for years. Rockfish play an important role in the coastal food chain, both as predators and food for others, and they serve as indicators of the overall health of the system.
- 1260 hectares, equalling 22.7% of the island, have been modified by human use. To avoid an increasing negative impact on species, this should not rise significantly.
- 24% of the island is protected via parks, nature reserves or with a conservation covenant. This is one of the highest percentages in the Trust Area.

We all protect and care for the island in myriad ways, in our choices of how to develop our land and use resources such as firewood and water; how we garden; interact with wildlife; dispose of our waste; get around the island; and more. Hopefully this article has provided some further motivation and information for Islanders as we live and love here on Denman Island.