

Trustee Notebook *By Laura Busheikin*

Questions About the Islands Trust Mandate

“To preserve and protect the trust area and its unique amenities and environment for the benefit of residents of the trust area and of the province generally, in cooperation with municipalities, regional districts, improvement districts, other persons and organizations and the Government of British Columbia.”

This is the Islands Trust’s mandate, sometimes called the object. It is, without a doubt, worthy and important. But it’s also, to many people, ambiguous. For instance, what exactly is an amenity? Is it a golf course? A parking lot? A viewscape? An aquifer? Different answers would lead to different land use regulations, which could radically change what happens on the islands.

This ambiguity can spur deep thinking and rousing debate. This may be just what the Provincial government was hoping for when they created the mandate in 1974.

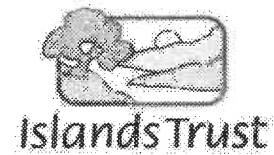
At the Trust’s most recent regional meeting, the 26 trustees from across the Trust Area (known as Trust Council) had an in-depth conversation about the mandate. I’ll report below on some of the conundrums, musings, and conclusions from that discussion, but first, let’s have a look at **the main tool for interpreting the mandate: the Islands Trust Policy Statement.**

I wrote about the Policy Statement last month. To recap: it’s like a vision statement for the whole Trust Area, but with teeth. It sets out aspirations, goals and directives that all islands in the Trust Area need to adhere to. It provides philosophy, and also firm boundaries (for instance, no fin fish farming, no bridges). All our local land use regulations on Denman must be in alignment with the Policy Statement. The Policy Statement expands on the mandate by articulating three main goals:

- Foster the preservation and protection of the Trust Area’s ecosystems
- Ensure that human activity and the scale, rate and type of development in the Trust Area are compatible with maintenance of the integrity of Trust Area ecosystems
- Sustain island character and healthy communities

As an elected local trustee, I often turn to these three principles when I’m wrestling with a tough decision. They, and other parts of the Policy Statement (in particular, the guiding principles), provide invaluable guidance.

The Policy Statement is currently being reviewed, for the first time in 25 years. Perhaps because of this, trustees are doing some deep thinking about the Trust mandate.



Here’s some of what stood out for me in the most recent Trust Council discussion:

What does *preserve* mean? To some people, this means keep something in its original state, although dictionary definitions don’t fully support that. Still, this word raises the question, “Is the Trust’s role to resist change? To what extent?”

What does *amenities* mean? This question has befuddled trustees for years. So much so that in 2010 a Trust Council Task Force provided some analysis. The conclusion?

“The phrase “unique amenity”...has never been spelled out explicitly. However, a sense of its meaning can be inferred...as being a variety of qualities and features (natural amenities)—such as outstanding scenery and recreational resources—combined with community character (or unique character). This picture is reinforced with what is learned from court judgements. The context does not seem to suggest that “developed” amenities, except where these might contribute to “community character,” are being referred to.”

Not all trustees are on board with this interpretation. Some suggest the environment is the *only* meaning of amenity, and that this total focus on environment is what makes the Trust unique. Other trustees point out that since humans live on the islands, and the Trust’s main power is to regulate human use, trustees should consider the needs of community.

What would an Indigenous perspective say? At the conclusion of Trust Council’s discussion, we asked Lisa Wilcox, the Trust’s advisor on relations with First Nations, for her thoughts. “Listening to your conversation, I am struck with the way humans are considered as something apart from environment. An Indigenous world view doesn’t see this separation. It sees humans as part of nature,” she said (paraphrased).

Is the mandate out-of-date? Trust Council says yes, because in the long list of possible partners for cooperation, there is no mention of First Nations. Council has formally requested the Province of BC to add this to the mandate.

To learn more about the Policy Statement, and to be part of the discussion about updating it, go to the Islands Trust website (islandstrust.ca—click on the box in the bottom right hand corner that says Islands 2050).