

Caring for your Conservation Covenant

A newsletter for Islands Trust Conservancy Covenant Landowners • Spring 2020



Introducing ITC's new Covenant Management and Outreach Specialist

2020 marks Islands Trust Conservancy's 30th anniversary. Over the past three decades, ITC has grown to protect 76 conservation covenants across 14 islands — and counting. To keep pace with the number of protected areas in our care, we welcome the addition of a Covenant Management & Outreach Specialist to the Islands Trust Conservancy team. This increase in capacity will enable ITC to bring our annual monitoring work in house, better support covenant landowners like you to achieve your conservation goals, and be proactive with outreach to prospective covenant donors.

We are pleased that Jemma Green, who was hired in 2019 to pilot the position, will be staying on in this role. Jemma's background is in wildlife conservation and habitat restoration. She holds a BSc in Natural Resources Conservation (UBC) and an MSc in Environmental Studies (UVic). Jemma looks forward to being your point of contact for future covenant monitoring activities and ecosystem conservation projects.

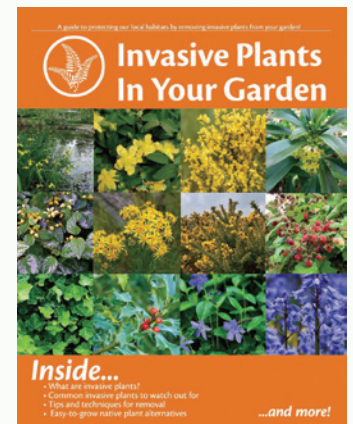


Jemma Green, Islands Trust Conservancy's new Covenant Management & Outreach Specialist

How can we support you better? Please complete our short online [Communications and Engagement Questionnaire](#) to let us know your preferred frequency and mode of contact, as well as whether you are interested in increasing your engagement with Islands Trust Conservancy.

New covenant stewardship resources

Habitat Acquisition Trust's (HAT) [Gardening With Native Plants](#) is an excellent guide to ecologically friendly landscaping that is tailored to our Salish Sea bioregion. HAT's latest publication for private landowners is a similarly helpful resource: [Invasive Plants in Your Garden](#) provides tips for identifying and removing 19 of the most common invasive plants in our region.



This guide also suggests aesthetically similar native plants to substitute (for example, substitute Spanish bluebells with one of the camas species, English hawthorn with black hawthorn, or periwinkle with woodland strawberry) and resources to consult for further information and support. By swapping invasive plants with native ones, we hope you'll find that your landscaping is easier to maintain, more drought tolerant, and attractive to hummingbirds, butterflies and other pollinators.

Here at Islands Trust Conservancy, we're hard at work developing online resources for covenant landholders and their neighbours. Those of you looking for guidance on protecting and maintaining the rare and highly endangered Coastal Douglas-fir (CDF) forests on your land can look out for a Coastal Douglas-fir Forest Information sheet for your Local Trust Area, which will be published on our website and available for download later this spring. We are also excited to announce a new and improved Islands Trust Conservancy website, due for completion this fall.

Fire preparedness and forest stewardship



PHOTO: BC WILDFIRE SERVICE

Regular, low-severity fires are a natural and important part of healthy forest ecosystems in our region; however, the risk of fire has greatly increased in recent years due to climate change, fire suppression, and landscape development. With fire season just around the corner, you may be looking to reduce fire risk by following a program like FireSmart. Our goal is to help you protect your home and community without compromising your commitment to protecting ecosystem values. We hope the following information helps to put FireSmart guidelines into a local context so that you feel empowered to take actions to prepare for fire that are compatible with your Covenant Agreement.

Before undertaking any FireSmart measures, review your covenant area boundaries and restricted activities to ensure that the actions you take are in compliance with the conservation covenant. For example, cutting, trimming or limbing dead or living trees/vegetation and removing fallen trees or branches are actions that are not permitted in most covenants without approval from the covenant holder(s). Contact Jemma Green at jgreen@islandstrust.bc.ca or 250-405-5192 if you are planning work in your covenant area.

Protect old-growth forests, nature's fire break

One important characteristic of coastal forests that is not considered in the FireSmart program is the ability of old-growth forests to act as a natural fire break on the landscape. In many coastal old-growth forests, the shade created by large trees helps maintain a cool, moist microclimate that resists fire. And although second-growth forests may be more vulnerable to fire today, they have the potential to become the old-growth forests of the future. So, think of fire preparedness as another reason to advocate for forest protection in your community!

Prepare your home

According to FireSmart Canada, the fire preparedness measures you take within 10 metres of your home will have the greatest impact on reducing risk of wildfire damage. There are changes you can make right away towards fire-proofing your home, such as moving your firewood pile further away from your home, clearing debris build-up from your roof and under your deck or stairs, and ensuring that exterior doors are properly fitted. For bigger changes, consider upgrading to non-combustible materials as you repair and replace elements of your home over time.

Create a 10-metre fire-resistant buffer

There are many actions you can take to create a 10 m fire-resistant buffer zone around your home without negatively impacting the surrounding ecosystem:

- Regularly clear out dead vegetation and fallen branches from this 10 m zone.
- Remove garbage like broken glass and old fuel canisters, which can ignite and fuel fires.
- Remove flammable invasive species like Scotch broom and tall grasses.
- Consider removing coniferous (evergreen) trees like fir, spruce, pine, and cedar (which are highly flammable) from this 10 m zone.*
- Plant a low density of native plants with fire-resistant characteristics. Some fire-resistant plants recommended for our area include red alder, bigleaf maple, cottonwood and dogwood trees; shrubs like evergreen huckleberry, false box and Oregon grape; and ferns and mosses. Live salal and arbutus are also considered fire resistant.

Manage fire risk between 10–100 metres from your home

Another set of FireSmart guidelines exist for the area between 10–100 metres from your home. The goal for this outer zone is to create a non-combustible landscape. There are many actions that you can take to reduce fire risk in this zone that have a low ecological footprint:

- Remove garbage and combustible invasive species like Scotch broom and holly from the understory.
- Prune any branches within 3 m of the ground to help prevent surface fires from climbing trees.*
- Reduce fuel loads by removing small woody debris (under 6" diameter) like fallen branches. Larger woody debris is important to leave in place for nutrient cycling and wildlife habitat. To reduce fire risk, ensure that large woody debris has good contact with the forest floor, where it will soak up moisture as it decomposes, becoming a small fire break.

***Remember to get permission from the covenant holder(s) before beginning any work in a covenant area.**



Plant a low density of fire-resistant plants, like ferns and bigleaf maple.

Cut broom in bloom

Scotch broom is a highly invasive (and flammable) shrub found throughout our region. The “cut broom in bloom” rhyme reminds us that Scotch broom removal efforts will have the greatest impact when the plant is using all its energy to produce flowers, making it less able to recover from being cut. Waiting until after flowering to remove broom plants is not advised because plants will have gone to seed and the disturbance from cutting or pulling could aid seed dispersal, promoting further invasion.



PHOTO: J. LEEKIE

How to cut broom in bloom:

- Wait until late April, May, or early June, when broom plants should be in full flower.
- Target small isolated infestations first and then move into bigger patches, working from the outside in.
- Find the “trunk” and use loppers or a small saw to cut the broom down at **ground level**. Cutting at ground level ensures that you have not missed any small branches or buds that could help the broom resprout. Pat down any disturbed soil and leave the stump and roots in the ground to die in the drought and heat of summer.
- You can safely dispose of small amounts of broom by piling it in a damp, shady spot to decompose. Large amounts of broom or any broom plants with seeds should be chipped on site before being piled in a damp, shady spot.
- A small percentage of broom may return the following year. If the broom you cut stages a comeback, cut again at ground level next time it flowers.

Mature patches of broom usually leave a seed bank that could be viable for many years. Keep an eye on the area you treated to monitor for young broom plants. The best way to remove small broom plants is by hand-pulling in the late fall or winter when the ground is wet and soft. Be sure to disturb the soil as little as possible, as broom thrives in disturbed soil: press the ground at the base of the plant with one hand and gently pull upwards with the other. To discourage reinfestation over the long term, plant native trees or a dense ground cover to shade out young sun-loving broom plants.

Annual monitoring update

The Islands Trust Conservancy cares for 76 conservation covenants, which protect over 634 hectares of land. Each of these conservation covenants is monitored annually to ensure that the ecological features of the land remain protected.

Last year we bid a fond farewell to our monitors of 20 years, Chris Ferris and Doug Hopwood, who are now enjoying their retirement. Chris and Doug did an excellent job of helping Islands Trust Conservancy transition our monitoring program in house in 2019 by sharing their wealth of knowledge with Jemma Green, our new Covenant Management & Outreach Specialist.

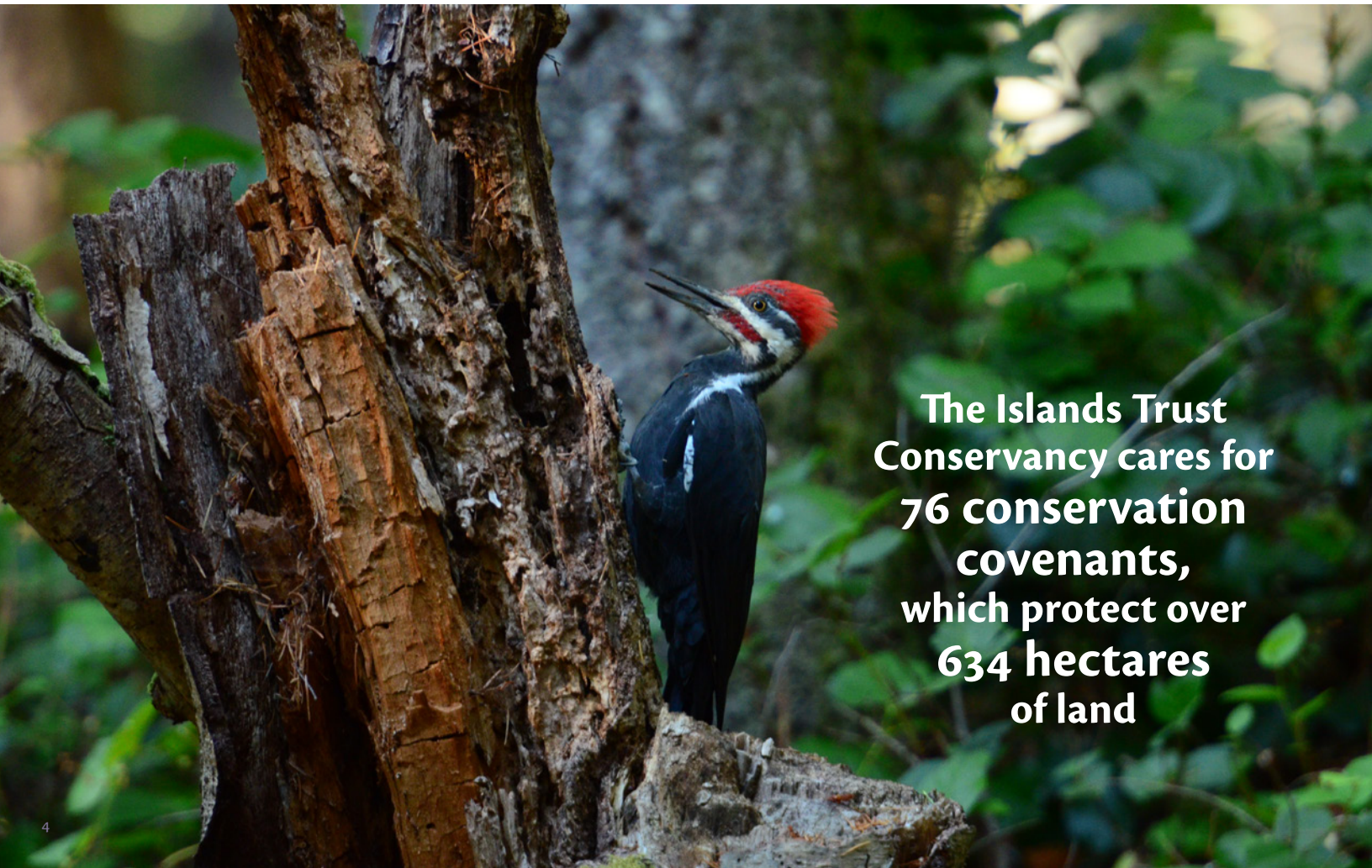
Monitoring is typically conducted from April to August. As always, we will notify you at least two weeks in advance of a site visit so you have an opportunity to meet with us on the land, if desired. If you have any questions about our next monitoring visit, or special access or safety information to share, please contact Jemma Green at 250-405-5182 or by email at jgreen@islandstrust.bc.ca.

The monitoring season is currently on hold in accordance with COVID-19 containment measures, but will resume as soon as islands are ready to welcome visitors back to their communities.



Chris and Doug with their daughter, enjoying their first winter in retirement.

Pileated Woodpecker. PHOTO: KRISTINE MAYES



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