



Islands Trust Strategic Priorities Survey Report

August 8, 2026

Table of Contents

Overview	2
Demographics of Respondents	3
Priority Areas for Islands Trust.....	5
Actions Needed to Respond to Priority Areas	8
Other Matters of Importance to Respondents	10
Conclusion.....	13
Appendix: 2026 Strategic Priorities Survey	14

Introduction

Between June 1 and July 16, 2026, the public was invited to complete a survey designed to gauge the priorities of Islands Trust Area residents ahead of Islands Trust’s annual budgeting process.

The anonymous, voluntary survey was open to any resident, property owner, or interested member of the public. As a result, the findings reflect the views of those who chose to participate and should be understood as a rich source of community input, rather than a statistically representative measure of opinion across the entire Islands Trust Area.

The survey was completed by 1,244 members of the public and had a completion rate of 99.5%. It asked respondents to comment on the priorities that matter most to them when it comes to Islands Trust’s work, and what actions they would like to see the organization take to achieve these priorities.

The survey was promoted via subscriber notices, social media posts, the Islands Trust website, posters on islands in the Islands Trust Area, and printed ads in local newspapers. Paper copies of the survey were available at Islands Trust offices in Victoria, Gabriola Island, and Salt Spring Island, as well as at the Gabriola and Salt Spring Island public libraries.

This report provides a summary of public feedback received through the survey, including key themes to inform future strategic planning activities. The appendix includes a copy of the full survey.

Protection of natural environment, sustainable growth management, and affordability top strategic priorities reported by Islands Trust Area residents.

Overview

Respondents consistently emphasized that **Islands Trust should remain focused on its legislated mandate to preserve and protect the Islands Trust Area’s unique natural environment and rural character.**¹ Environmental protection, limiting growth, and ensuring that development remains within the ecological carrying capacity of the islands—particularly with respect to water resources, infrastructure, and biodiversity—were the most frequently raised themes. Many respondents (60%) also stressed that affordable housing should only be supported where it is compatible with environmental protection and existing servicing capacity.

A second dominant theme was the desire for **improved governance, organizational focus, and accountability.**² Respondents called for Islands Trust to concentrate on its core responsibilities under the *Islands Trust Act*, strengthen enforcement of existing bylaws and policies rather than introducing new regulations, improve transparency and decision-making, and respond more effectively to public input.

¹ 74% of respondents selected ‘protecting the natural environment’ as a priority area for Islands Trust.

² 33% of respondents selected ‘ensuring affordability and responsible spending’ as a priority area, and 78 comments mentioned tightening the scope of Islands Trust’s work, governance structure, and bureaucracy.

Many comments also advocated for reducing administrative costs, streamlining operations, lowering taxes, and minimizing regulatory burdens on residents and small businesses.

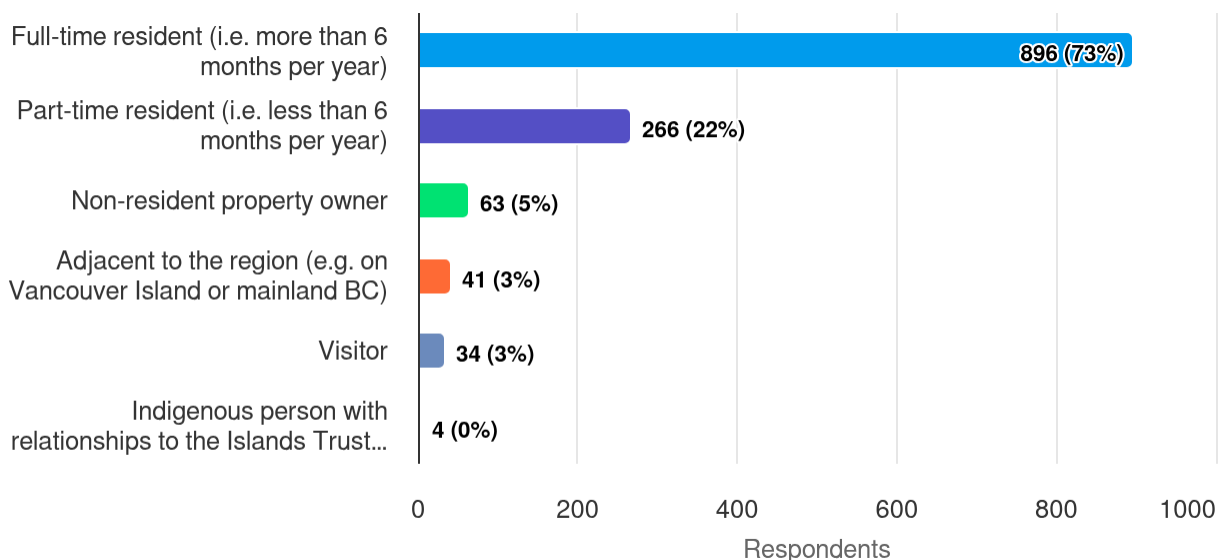
Other recurring themes included: **protecting water resources through stronger conservation measures; improving permitting and regulatory processes; supporting local businesses and affordable housing in appropriate locations, and strengthening compliance with building, zoning, and environmental regulations.** Smaller but notable themes included: improving local infrastructure; supporting Indigenous stewardship and land return initiatives; ensuring all island communities in the Islands Trust Area are represented in Islands Trust communications; and addressing specific local concerns such as fencing, animal control, and transportation.³

Overall, the survey results, including respondents' open-ended comments, demonstrate broad agreement that Islands Trust should prioritize **environmental stewardship, careful growth management, effective governance, and fiscal responsibility** while focusing its resources on delivering its legislated mandate to preserve and protect.

Demographics of Respondents

A total of 1,244 responses to the survey were received. The majority of responses (73%) came from individuals who identified as full-time residents of the Islands Trust Area and 22% were from part-time residents. The bar graph below displays how respondents identified their relationship to the Islands Trust Area.

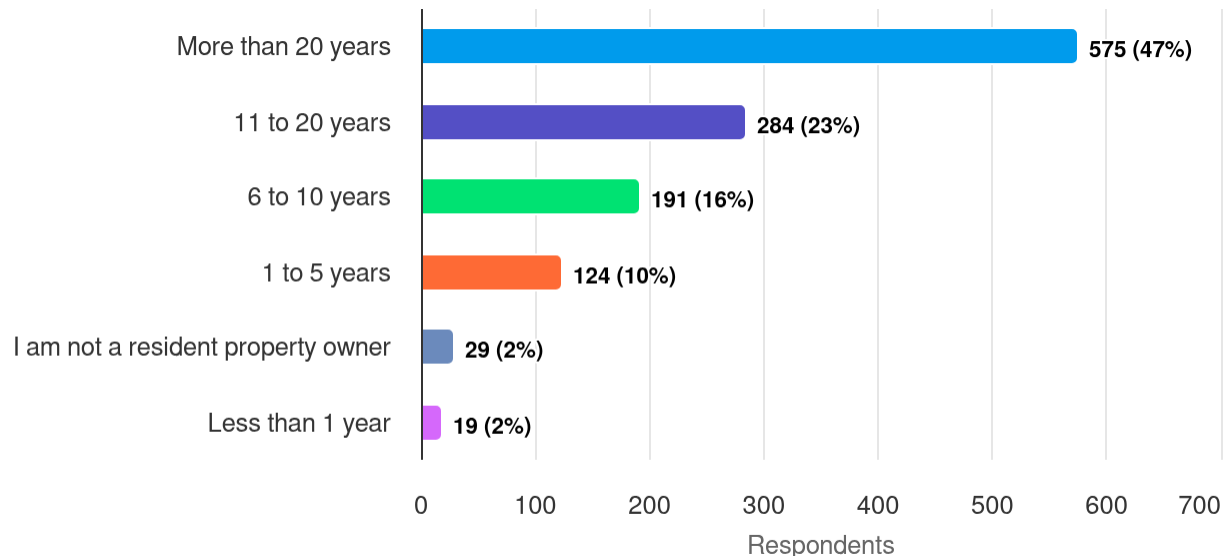
Respondent Relationship to the Islands Trust Area



³ It should be noted that regulations and services relating to animal control and transportation fall outside of Islands Trust's jurisdiction.

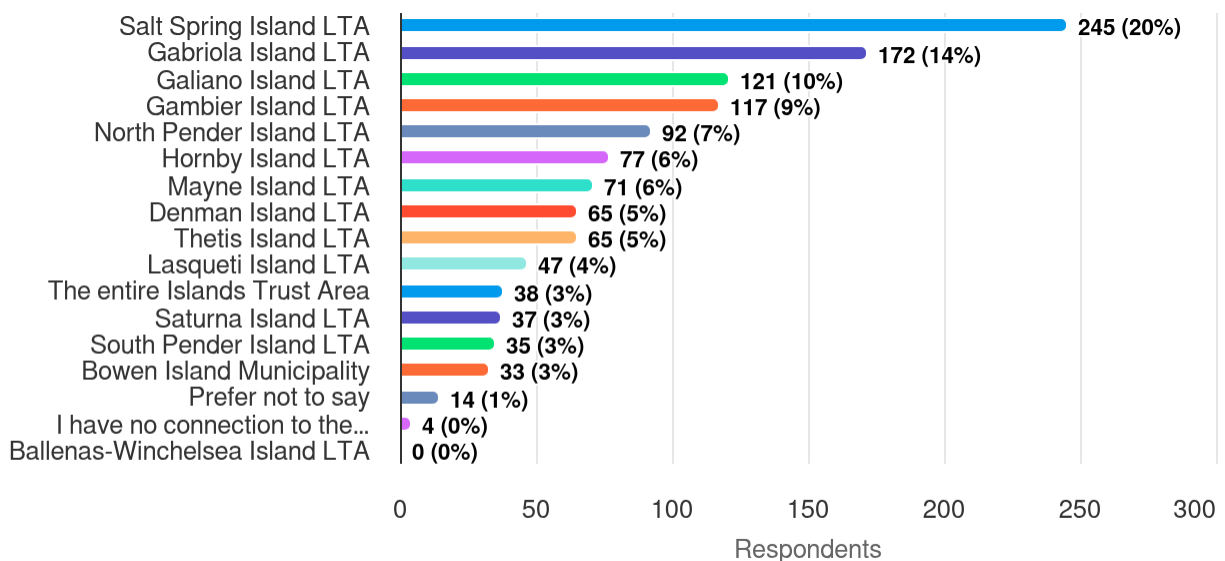
Just under half of respondents (47%) reported that they have lived or owned property in the Islands Trust Area for more than twenty years. Respondents were also asked which of the thirteen Local Trust Areas they feel most connected with.

Length of Time as a Resident or Property Owner



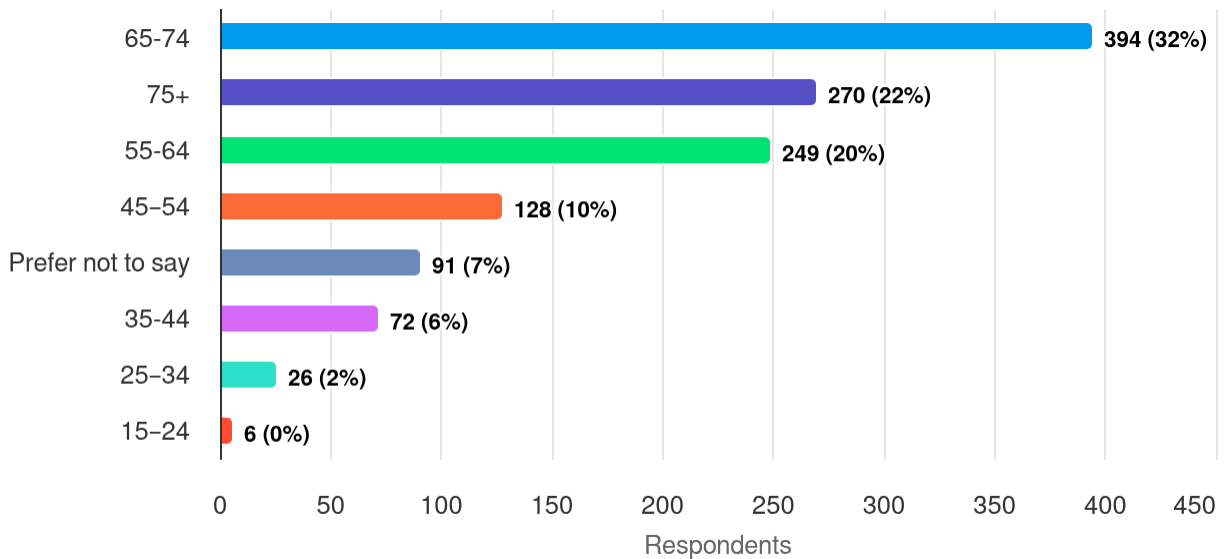
The bar graph below displays a breakdown of the geographic region respondents indicated they had connections to.

Respondents by Local Trust Area



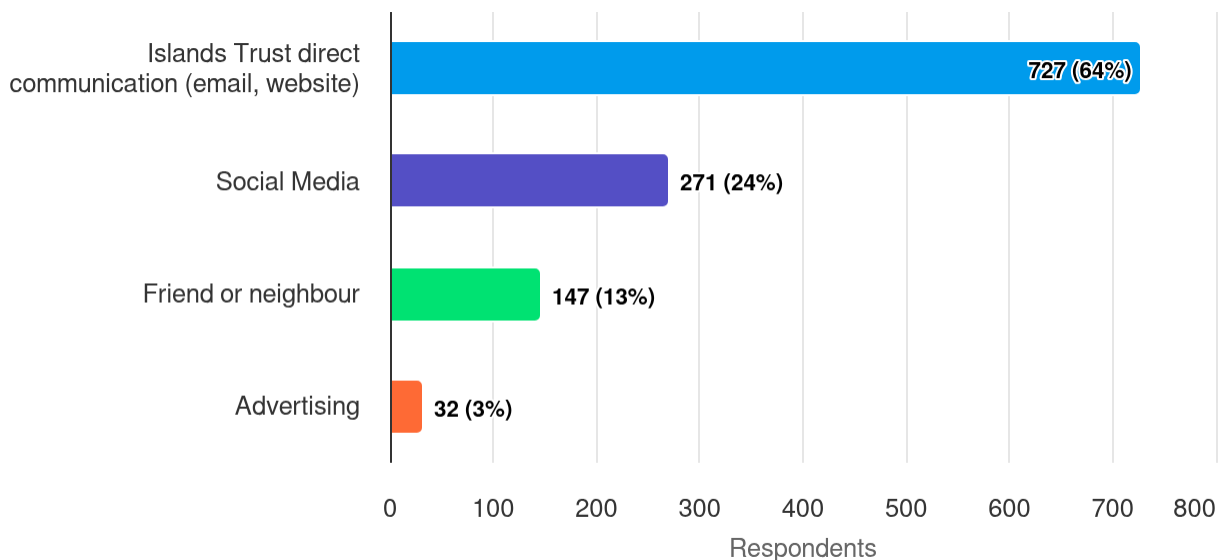
More than half of respondents were aged 65 or older (54%), with only six respondents identifying as under the age of 25. Seven people selected “prefer not to say” when asked about their age.

Age of Respondents



When asked how they heard about the survey, the majority of respondents (64%) indicated it was through direct communications from Islands Trust, which included e-mailed subscriber notices and the Islands Trust website. 271 respondents indicated they heard about the survey through social media.

How Respondents Heard About the Survey

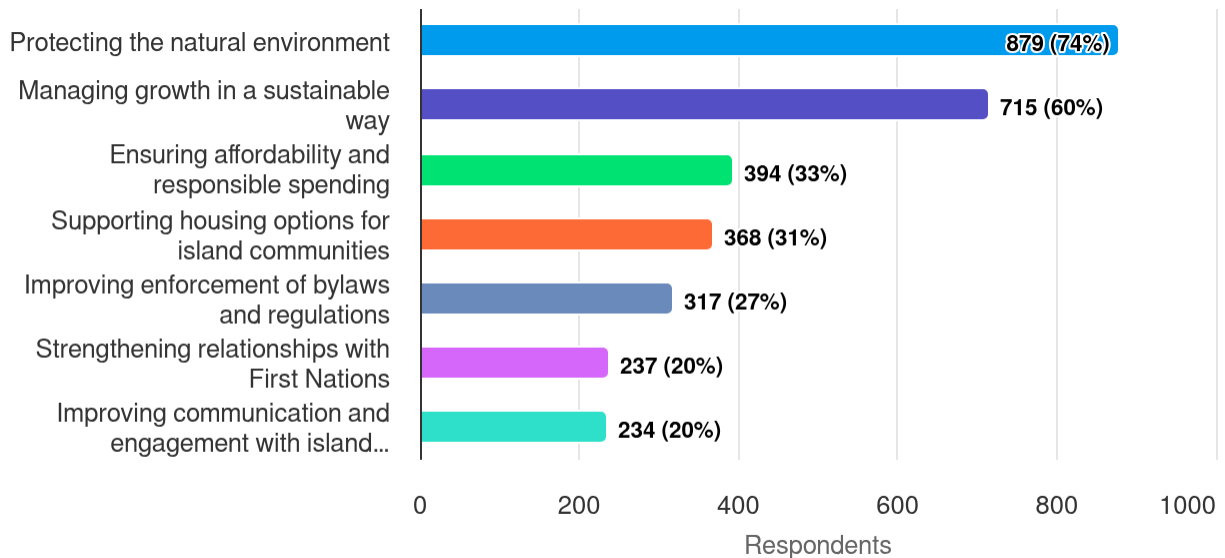


Priority Areas for Islands Trust

Respondents were asked to select up to three priority areas that matter most to them when it comes to priorities for Islands Trust from a list provided. Respondents could choose from seven options, and were able to provide a comment.

Protection of the natural environment, sustainable growth management, and affordability made the top of the list, with support for increased housing options coming in just behind ‘affordability and responsible spending.’ Next in line was ‘improving enforcement bylaws and regulations,’ followed by ‘strengthening relationships with First Nations’ and ‘improving communications and engagement with island communities,’ which received equal ranking.

Priority Areas that Matter Most to Respondents



Respondents made use of the ‘Other’ open comment field to elaborate on, as well as suggest other, priorities. A total of 468 open comments were received to this question. The following table summarizes these comments by theme, ranked in order of the number of times the theme was mentioned.

Table 1: Priority Areas for Islands Trust

Rank	Theme	Mentions	Summary of Comments Relating to the Theme
1	Limit/restrict growth and development	94	Strong concern about growth, development capacity, build-out, density and subdivision. Seven people specifically objected to the phrase “managing growth” and wanted growth limited rather than managed.
2	Environmental protection and conservation	86	Protecting the natural environment, ecosystems, forests, trees, habitat, shorelines, and biodiversity was the dominant concern. Sixteen respondents explicitly emphasized that environmental protection should be Islands Trust's central mandate.
3	Water, freshwater, and septic capacity	45	Concern about having enough water for future residents, freshwater protection, wells/aquifers, septic systems, and the capacity of water/sewer infrastructure as development increases.
4	Reduce Islands Trust budget, staff, and bureaucracy	43	Calls to reduce spending, staffing, administrative costs and bureaucracy, and to keep Islands Trust focused on

Table 1: Priority Areas for Islands Trust

Rank	Theme	Mentions	Summary of Comments Relating to the Theme
			its core responsibilities. Five respondents specifically criticized rising costs relative to results.
5	Infrastructure and essential services	40	Roads, transportation/ferries, waste/garbage, emergency preparedness, utilities, and maintaining essential services came up repeatedly. ⁴
6	Housing and affordability	36	Affordable housing, housing options, workforce/special-needs housing, and the relationship between housing needs and the islands' environmental/development capacity.
7	Governance, mandate, and jurisdiction	35	A recurring desire for Islands Trust to “stay in its lane,” focus on its legislated mandate, avoid duplicating other governments, and reconsider the scope of Islands Trust governance.
8	Regulations, bylaws, and enforcement	23	Nine respondents explicitly called for less regulation/restrictions, seven called for stronger bylaws or enforcement, and seven raised regulatory/bylaw issues without clearly taking either position.
9	Communications, engagement, and responsiveness	15	Requests for better communication, more direct engagement with individual islands, and greater responsiveness to community input. One suggestion was for trustees/staff to visit islands and ask residents directly how they can help.
10	Parks, recreation, and trails	15	Improved trails, parks, recreational areas, boating/paddling access, and recreation facilities.
11	First Nations relationships/reconciliation	14	Comments were mixed with half of respondents calling for maintaining and strengthening relationships with First Nations and the other half questioning how much this should fall within Islands Trust's mandate.
12	Rural/island character	10	Protecting the rural character and distinctive nature of the islands from urban-style development.
13	Agriculture and food security	8	Protection of farmland, farming viability, invasive weeds, and local food security.
14	Fire/wildfire resilience	4	FireSmart practices, wildfire preparedness, and making fire resilience a higher priority.

⁴ It should be noted that roads, transportation/ferries, waste/garbage, emergency preparedness, utilities, and essential services all fall outside of Islands Trust’s jurisdiction.

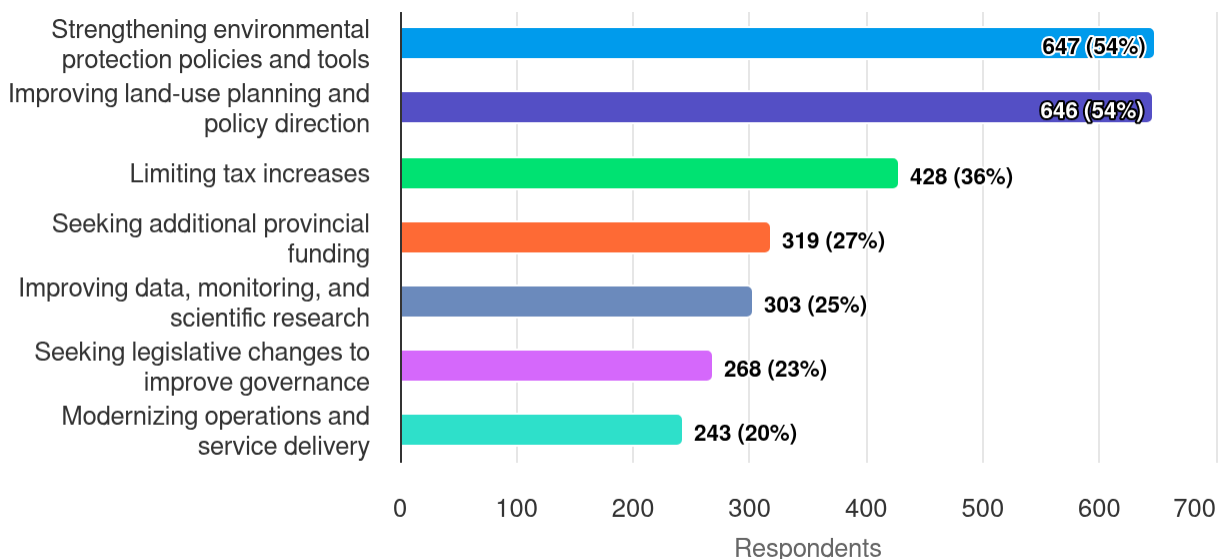
Actions Needed to Respond to Priority Areas

Having identified priority areas for Islands Trust’s work, respondents were then asked to identify actions they thought would be most effective in achieving these priorities. Respondents could choose from seven options, or articulate a different option through the comment section.

More than half of respondents (54%) selected ‘strengthening environmental protection policies and tools’ and ‘improving land-use planning and policy direction’ as the most effective actions Islands Trust could take.

Nearly 36% of respondents selected ‘limiting tax increases’ as a priority action. Close to a quarter of respondents (25%) would like to see Islands Trust ‘seek additional funding from the Province’; ‘improve data, monitoring, and scientific research’, and ‘seek legislative changes to improve its governance,’ while 20% of respondents would like to see the organization ‘modernize its operations and service delivery.’

Actions Needed to Achieve Respondents' Priorities



Respondents once again used the ‘Other’ comment field to elaborate on their selections or offer alternative actions Islands Trust could take. The table below summarizes the 289 comments received and lists them thematically based on the number of times the theme was mentioned. It should be noted that some comments contained more than one theme.

Table 2: Respondent Comments Regarding Actions Islands Trust Could Take to Respond to Respondents’ Priorities

Rank	Theme	Mentions	Summary of Comments Relating to the Theme
1	Governance, mandate, and role of Islands Trust	59	Many respondents want Islands Trust to return to, or focus narrowly on, its legislated “preserve and protect” mandate. Comments called for less mandate creep, less duplication with other levels of government, and clearer division of responsibilities. Five respondents questioned whether the current Islands Trust model should continue at all.

Table 2: Respondent Comments Regarding Actions Islands Trust Could Take to Respond to Respondents' Priorities

Rank	Theme	Mentions	Summary of Comments Relating to the Theme
2	Reduce budget, staffing, taxation, and bureaucracy	59	Respondents described Islands Trust as too expensive or bureaucratic and want fewer programs, less duplication, and greater fiscal discipline. Three comments linked a smaller mandate directly to a smaller and less costly organization.
3	Environmental protection and conservation	48	Respondents emphasized protecting ecosystems, forests, trees, wildlife, biodiversity, shorelines, and natural areas. A recurring message was that environmental protection should be Islands Trust's highest priority and that the "preserve and protect" mandate should guide planning decisions.
4	Regulations, bylaws, and enforcement	45	Comments were divided, but leaned toward stronger regulation and enforcement: 28 respondents called for stronger bylaws, restrictions or enforcement, while 17 called for less regulation, simpler bylaws, less red tape, or fewer restrictions.
5	Growth and development	41	41 comments addressed growth and development. Of these, approximately 18 explicitly called for limiting or restricting growth, density, subdivision, or residential development. At least eight linked growth limits to environmental, infrastructure, or resource capacity, particularly water and ecological carrying capacity.
6	Community engagement, transparency, and democracy	38	Respondents want better communication, meaningful consultation, greater transparency, and stronger local representation. Six respondents stated that decisions are made without adequately reflecting individual island communities and want trustees/staff to listen more directly to residents.
7	Infrastructure and essential services	33	Comments focused on practical island needs such as roads, ferries, docks, transportation, waste disposal, water/sewer infrastructure, emergency services, and other essential services. ⁵
8	Property rights and landowner concerns	24	Respondents raised concerns about private-property rights and restrictions on landowners, including what people can build, how they can use their property, and the degree of control exercised through planning and regulation.
9	Water, groundwater, and water conservation	20	Strong concern about freshwater availability, groundwater, wells and aquifers. Comments emphasized that development should be constrained by water availability and that water resources need greater protection and monitoring.
10	First Nations / Indigenous relationships	18	Comments addressed reconciliation, relationships with First Nations, Indigenous rights, and UNDRIP. Fourteen comments called on support for stronger relationships, while four questioned whether this falls within the Islands Trust's mandate.

⁵ As noted earlier, these services fall outside of Islands Trust's jurisdiction.

Table 2: Respondent Comments Regarding Actions Islands Trust Could Take to Respond to Respondents' Priorities

Rank	Theme	Mentions	Summary of Comments Relating to the Theme
11	Business and economic development	10	Three called for fewer regulatory barriers or greater flexibility for businesses, while four emphasized that economic development should remain compatible with environmental protection, growth limits or island character. The remaining three comments raised business/economic issues without clearly fitting into either of those two positions.
12	Parks, recreation, trails, and active transportation	9	Comments called for better trails, parks, walking and cycling routes, recreation opportunities, and outdoor facilities, including maintaining access to natural areas for residents and visitors.
13	Climate change and resilience	4	Respondents want climate risks more explicitly incorporated into planning and priorities, including climate adaptation, wildfire preparedness and resilience.
14	Agriculture and food security	3	Comments supported protecting agricultural land, supporting local farming, and improving food security, including maintaining the ability to grow food locally.
15	Rural character / island character	3	Comments specifically emphasized maintaining the rural, low-density, and distinctive character of the islands, and avoiding development patterns that make the islands more urban.

Other Matters of Importance to Respondents

In the final survey question, respondents were asked, “Is there anything we didn’t ask that’s important to you?” 530 respondents chose to leave comments, which largely echoed sentiments expressed in the comments to earlier questions, and can be categorized into three central themes:

1. Protect the islands⁶
2. Refocus Islands Trust ⁷
3. Improve how Islands Trust relates to residents⁸

A particularly strong recurring argument was that growth should be limited according to environmental and water capacity, rather than simply “managed.” Additional ideas not already mentioned are listed in Table 3 below.

⁶ 99 comments addressed environmental protection; 56 on water/carrying capacity, and 63 about growth and development.

⁷ 67 comments relating to governance/mandate; 77 to budget, taxes, and/or bureaucracy, and 36 to regulations/enforcement.

⁸ 75 comments on community engagement/transparency; 61 on infrastructure/services, and 23 property owner concerns.

Table 3: Additional Ideas Provided by Respondents

Additional idea	Mentions	What respondents were suggesting
Ferry and dock modernization	12	More reliable/frequent ferry service, improved docks, additional access to islands without ferry service and modernization of transportation infrastructure.
Trustee/electoral accountability	10	Reconsider trustee representation and elections, accountability, qualifications, conflicts of interest, and the role of unelected or non-local representation.
Island-specific governance and decision-making	8	Treat islands according to their individual circumstances rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach; give individual islands greater say over local matters.
Development tied to infrastructure/service plans	7	Require adequate water, septic, roads, emergency services, and other infrastructure before approving additional development.
Short-term rental management	6	Concerns about the effects of short-term rentals on housing, water, waste and services, alongside differing views about whether and how they should be regulated.
Environmental education and outreach	5	Educate residents, visitors, and new landowners about environmental protection, water scarcity, and island stewardship.
Marine and harbour management	4	Better management of harbours, anchorages, and marine areas, including concerns about large vessels, noise, lighting, wildlife, and marine habitat.
Alternative water and energy systems	3	Reduce barriers to alternative water supplies, water makers/desalination, and alternative energy systems.
Data-driven and consistent decision-making	3	Use measurable goals, evidence/science, monitoring, and consistent application of policies and bylaws.
Fairer taxation based on land use	3	Consider whether property taxation should better reflect actual land use and address perceived inequities.
Fibre/internet connectivity	3	Improve broadband/fibre and reliable internet access as an important island service.

Table 3: Additional Ideas Provided by Respondents

Additional idea	Mentions	What respondents were suggesting
Education, incentives, and voluntary cooperation	3	Use education, collaboration, incentives, and practical/voluntary approaches alongside or instead of regulation.
Working-age and younger residents in consultation	2	Make consultation more accessible to working people and younger residents who may be unable to participate in traditional daytime meetings.
Modernize planning tools and use more expertise	2	Update planning, conservation and sustainability tools, and make greater use of specialized expertise.
Dark-sky / light-pollution controls	2	Regulate light pollution and preserve dark skies as part of environmental protection.
Invasive species management	2	Coordinate efforts to control or eradicate invasive plants/species.
Sensitive species and habitat protection	2	Give specific attention to species at risk, marine species, and essential habitat rather than treating environmental protection only as a broad concept.
Greywater reuse / water-conservation technology	1	Encourage or require greywater systems so water can be reused for toilets and irrigation.
Proactive environmental enforcement	1	Move beyond complaint-based enforcement toward proactive monitoring and enforcement of environmental bylaws.
Governance education for residents	1	Provide webinars, orientation for new landowners/residents and other education about how Islands Trust governance works.

Conclusion

Overall, the dominant themes raised through the survey echo those of other recent surveys conducted by Islands Trust. Members of the public are calling on a reinvigorated focus on environmental protection to protect the islands from excessive growth and development, a careful approach to housing solutions which ensures the islands have sufficient water and infrastructure capacity, and for Islands Trust to operate as a fiscally responsible, modern, focused, effective, and accessible organization.

These calls to action mirror the results of recent internal evaluations of Islands Trust and align with work already underway through the guidance of the CAO Operational Review Report, Strategic Plan, Housing Strategic Action Plan, Freshwater Sustainability Strategy, Reconciliation Action Plan, Bylaw Enforcement Review Project, and the organizational commitment to increasing staff capacity for public engagement and communications.

Appendix:

Islands Trust Strategic Priorities Survey

About Islands Trust & the Strategic Priorities Survey



Islands Trust

About Islands Trust

Islands Trust is a special-purpose government mandated to preserve and protect over 450 islands and surrounding waters in the Salish Sea. The Islands Trust works to preserve and protect the Islands Trust Area through land use planning, land conservation through the Islands Trust Conservancy, and programs in cooperation with municipalities, regional districts, improvement districts, First Nations, other persons, organizations, the government of British Columbia, and you.

Islands Trust is governed by a 26-member Islands Trust Council, which is comprised of two elected trustees from each local trust area (except the Ballenas-Winchelsea Local Trust Area) and two trustees from Bowen Island Municipality. Local land-use planning decisions are made by local trust committees with the exception of Bowen Island, which voted to become an island municipality. Local trust committees are comprised of two locally elected trustees and an appointed chair. All decisions made must be consistent with the Islands Trust's legislated mandate to preserve and protect the Islands Trust Area and its unique amenities and environment for the benefit of the residents of the Trust Area and British Columbia generally.

The Islands Trust Council supports the preserve and protect mandate through region-wide programs such as public education sessions; stewardship education resources; advocacy about decisions and initiatives that affect the islands; ecosystem mapping; and cooperating with other governments, including First Nations, to benefit the Islands Trust Area.

Islands Trust provides land use planning, which contributes to preserving and protecting the environment, cultural heritage, and communities through the maintenance of 20 unique official community plans, hosting community information meetings to help islanders understand land use planning, rezoning, and application processing. Islands Trust also develops and delivers longer-term projects to support strategic goals.

Islands Trust Conservancy is governed by a board made up of provincial appointees and Islands Trust trustees. Its mission is to protect special places in the Islands Trust Area by encouraging and assisting voluntary conservation initiatives. To date, 1,385+ hectares of land across 115 conservation properties have been protected, including 81 conservation covenants and 34 nature reserves.

About this survey

The Islands Trust pre-budget survey intends to gauge the priorities and values of residents in the Islands Trust Area to support the strategic planning process of Islands Trust trustees. The input gathered from the public is valuable, and your participation is appreciated.

Where does your input go?

Islands Trust trustees will receive the survey data and post-survey reports and will consider this feedback in the strategic planning process.

Survey closes: July 16, 2026

Survey logistics: The estimated time to read and complete the survey is approximately 10-15 minutes.

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and Correspondence Policy

When you complete the survey, you are anonymous.

Survey results may be shared publicly at Islands Trust meetings, on our website, through social media, or in our publications or documents.

Any personal information gathered through this survey is subject to the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. Direct enquiries about the collection or use of information in this survey to the Islands Trust's Director of Legislative Services at foi@islandstrust.bc.ca. Please be aware that SimpleSurvey collects IP addresses.

As you complete the survey, please keep in mind that your comments are most useful if they are related to this survey.

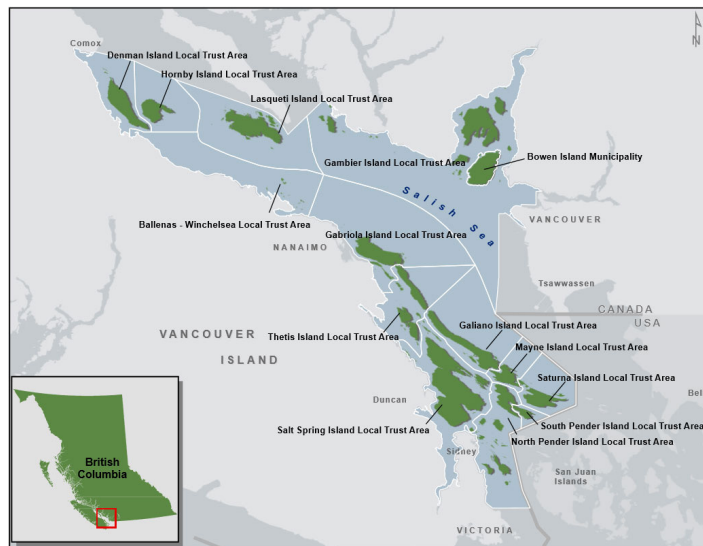
Survey responses containing anti-Indigenous racism, racism, derogatory, defamatory, profane, or otherwise inappropriate content will be redacted, as Islands Trust does not perpetuate harmful commentary and removes any material that violates the BC Human Rights Code or is unsuitable for general circulation.

Islands Trust acknowledges that the Islands Trust Area is located in the treaties lands and territories of Coast Salish Peoples.

Islands Trust is committed to Reconciliation and to working together to preserve and protect this ecologically, culturally, and spiritually significant region in the Salish Sea.

1) The Islands Trust Area is made up of 13 local trust areas (LTA) and Bowen Island Municipality. Which area do you feel most connected with?

- ☐ Ballenas-Winchelsea Island LTA
 ☐ I have no connection to the Islands Trust Area
 ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Gabriola Island LTA
- ☐ Bowen Island Municipality
- ☐ Galiano Island LTA
- ☐ Gambier Island LTA
- ☐ Denman Island LTA
- ☐ Hornby Island LTA
- ☐ Lasqueti Island LTA
- ☐ Mayne Island LTA
- ☐ North Pender Island LTA
- ☐ Salt Spring Island LTA
- ☐ Saturna Island LTA
- ☐ South Pender Island LTA



2) The Islands Trust Area occupies almost 5,200 square kilometers within the Salish Sea. How are you connected to the area? Check all that apply:

- ☐ Part-time resident (ie. less than 6 months/year)
 ☐ Non-resident property owner
 ☐ Indigenous person with relationships to the Islands Trust Area
- ☐ Full-time resident (ie. +6 months/year)
 ☐ Adjacent to the region (e.g. Vancouver Island or mainland BC)
 ☐ Visitor

3) If you are a resident or property owner, how long have you lived in or owned a property in the Islands Trust Area?

- ☐ Less than 1 year
 ☐ 11-20 years
 ☐ I am not a resident or property owner
- ☐ 1-5 years
 ☐ +20 years
- ☐ 6-10 years

4) What is your age:

- ☐ 15-24
 ☐ 35-44
 ☐ 65-74
- ☐ 25-34
 ☐ 45-54
 ☐ 75+
- ☐ 35-44
 ☐ 55-64
 ☐ Prefer not to say

5) Islands Trust is developing its strategic priorities. Based on what matters most to you, please select up to three priority areas from the list below. Label your top three by writing 1, 2, or 3 in the box.

- ☐ Ensuring affordability and responsible spending
- ☐ Improving communication and engagement with island communities
- ☐ Improving enforcement of bylaws and regulations
- ☐ Managing growth in a sustainable way
- ☐ Protecting the natural environment
- ☐ Strengthening relationships with First Nations
- ☐ Supporting housing options for island communities
- ☐ Other (please specify):

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6) Which of the following actions do you think would be most effective in achieving the priorities you selected?

- ☐ Improving data, monitoring, and scientific research
- ☐ Improving land-use planning and policy direction
- ☐ Limiting tax increases
- ☐ Modernizing operations and service delivery
- ☐ Seeking additional provincial funding
- ☐ Seeking legislative changes to improve governance
- ☐ Strengthening environmental protection policies and tools
- ☐ Other (please specify):

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7) Is there anything we didn't ask that's important to you? Please provide any additional thoughts.

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8) How did you hear about this survey?

- | | |
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| ☐ Islands Trust direct communication (email, website) | ☐ Friend or neighbour |
| ☐ Social media | ☐ Poster |
| ☐ Advertising | |
| ☐ Other, please specify: | |
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Thank you for responding to this survey. Your input is valuable!

Please return this survey to the survey box, or an Islands Trust office in Victoria, Gabriola Island, or Salt Spring Island, or email communications@islandstrust.bc.ca or call 250.405.5197.

Survey deadline: July 16, 2026

