

BC land trusts: Making Conservation Happen

In light of the renewed coverage of the ongoing troubles of The Land Conservancy (TLC), it seems important to step forward to say that despite the dire situation of one land trust the conservation movement in British Columbia is thriving.

TLC has done an impressive job of protecting beloved natural and cultural spaces in this province, as well as popularizing the work of land trusts to protect private land by purchase, donation or placing covenants to restrict development. Their current financial straits does not eliminate the good they have contributed. You would be forgiven for wondering, as some recently have, if TLC were gone, “Which angel will fly in to take the place of TLC?” (See Jack Knox’s October 9th column.)

Which indeed! There are currently 33 land trusts at work in British Columbia. Collectively these groups have conserved more than 1,200 properties totally over 1.4 million acres of land and water across the Province. These organizations range from small volunteer groups that focus on their own community to broad provincial and national charities that work at large scale in many regions at once.

But don’t expect one of these groups will be the angel that replaces TLC.

Rather, the community of land trusts as a whole will continue to work in partnership and in their communities to protect important lands and landmarks for all British Columbians. It takes coordinated efforts from the grassroots up to the highest levels of government and industry to make meaningful conservation happen.

Large organizations like the Nature Conservancy of Canada, The Nature Trust of British Columbia, and Ducks Unlimited Canada bring the ability to leverage large investments from governments, foundations and corporations, and to support the scientific expertise that guides the best conservation efforts. At the same time, local organizations such as the Salt Spring Island Conservancy, Cowichan Land Trust and the Nanaimo & Area Land Trust build strong community-level support and are experts at understanding the local context.

In fact right now in Victoria just such a collaboration of groups is working to complete Brooks Point Regional Park. The Pender Island Conservancy picked up a project to complete the purchase of the last parcel needed to complete Brooks Point Regional Park, a project which TLC had started, but needed to let go last year. This small volunteer group has partnered with two other land trusts – the Victoria-based Habitat Acquisition Trust and the Islands Trust Fund - and the CRD. Today, the Pender Island Conservancy and its partners have raised over two-thirds of their commitment to the CRD for the purchase.

Also right now, the Salt Spring Island Conservancy has raised nearly \$1 million to purchase an important parcel around Blackburn Lake on their Island. The Nature Trust of BC and Cowichan Land Trust recently signed an agreement with Timberwest that will see old growth forest protected in the Cowichan Valley. And earlier this year, the Central Okanagan Land Trust received one of the largest land donations in BC history creating the 800-acre Johns Family Nature Conservancy Regional Park.

Collaborations go beyond land acquisitions. Conservation organizations, community groups, governments and individuals work together to care for green spaces and steward habitat for native plants and animals. The Nature Conservancy of Canada has teamed up with the Garry Oak Ecosystems Recovery Team, Cowichan Valley Naturalists and the Provincial Government on the wildly successful Bring Back the Bluebirds project, which is reintroducing western bluebirds to Southern Vancouver Island.

The same story is repeated across BC. The issues facing one land trust today does not mean the end of land conservation in British Columbia. There are 32 land trusts continuing to undertake conservation projects in the province and 49 conservation projects underway. With the commitment of volunteers, the help of our partners, and the support of donors and British Columbians, we will be successful.

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