

Letters relating to P4 protection of Coats Marsh, Gabriola Island, BC.

1. Gabriola Sounder, April 28, 2021, p.2 (pictures were not published for lack of space)

Wildflowers

Dear Editor



Wildflowers make spring a delightful time of year, and in the forests on Gabriola, the white fawn lilies (*Erythronium oregonum*) and fairy slippers, or calypso orchids as some call them, (*Calypso bulbosa*), do their bit. Yet both are threatened by human activities. The former by the invasive plant, daphne laurel (*Daphne laureola*), which is, in part, being spread by off-island harvesters who sell cuttings to florists and clip them in a way that encourages the plants to flourish, and the latter by trampling over the mossy understory where they grow. Opening up side trails where calypso orchids grow to bicycles as was recently done by RDN park management in Coats Marsh RP in a move to reduce natural area protection there down to 707 CP standards is not always such a good idea.



~ Nick Doe

2. Gabriola Sounder, May 19, 2021, p.4

P4 zone

Dear Editor

Those interested in the preservation of wildlife habitat on Gabriola will have been disappointed by the decision of the Local Islands Trust Committee (LTC) to drop development of a P4 Land-Use Zone from its high-priority work list (Sounder Feb.3,2021, p.2).P4 would have been a park zone that unlike the three existing park zones would rank preserving wildlife habitat higher than creating opportunities for human recreation, the Coats Marsh Regional Park (RP) being among the three candidates on the island for such a new zoning.

In the view of the RDN park managers of the Coats Marsh RP; the Nature Trust (TNT) of BC; and GaLTT, which likes to think of itself as a conservation organization, Coats RP and its riparian areas and wetlands to the east should make more space available for walking off-leash dogs, bikers, horse-riders, and for adding to the existing cobweb of trails, and this in spite of a Park Management Plan that unmistakably sets aside Coats as a nature reserve ideally suited for P4 protection.

The east shore of the “lake” in Coats Marsh RP has meanwhile become part of the 707 CP; the trails have become multi-use; the RP is becoming no longer a place of solitude, no longer undisturbed habitat for a dozen species of waterfowl, some of which nest in tree cavities away from the water, and instead becoming just another suburban-style public park.All within a framework of a management plan that the RDN feels free not to observe and yet, they maintain, is not in need of revision or public input.

That the LTC with a “preserve and protect” mandate does not have a P4 zoning tool to apply to Coats is for me a depressing anomaly.Recreational trails yes, but not absolutely everywhere.

Sincerely ~ *Nick Doe*

2R. Gabriola Sounder, May 26, 2021, p.2

Letters to the Editor

Gabriola Land and Trails Trust (GaLTT) greatly admires Nick Doe's vast knowledge about Coats Marsh Regional Park (CMRP) and his passion for protecting its ecological integrity. However, we take issue with several inaccurate statements in his letter in the May 19th edition of the Sounder about GaLTT's position on needed conservation measures for CMRP and on ecological protection (EP) zoning in general.

GaLTT takes its conservation mandate seriously and is very supportive of the Local Trust Committee's desire to create new EP zoning for lands such as S'ul-hween X'pey (Elder Cedar) Nature Reserve and Burren's Acres Nature Reserve, where protection of sensitive ecosystems is given clear priority over recreational use throughout each property.

GaLTT also recognizes the importance of protecting sensitive ecosystems within CMRP but is inclined to agree with the co-owners (Regional District of Nanaimo and The Nature Trust of BC) that EP zoning may not be the most appropriate tool for doing so given its adjacency with the 707 CP and the interconnectivity of the existing trail systems within the two parks. Also, potential EP zoning for CMRP is complicated by the fact that part of the marsh is located within the adjacent 707 Community Park.

GaLTT has strongly recommended to the RDN that existing access points to the marsh proper be closed and that new signage be installed to explain and educate about the need for restricting public access and dogs to protect the marsh ecosystem, including the wildlife that it supports. Other sensitive ecosystems within CMRP (e.g., the NW section) currently have no trails and GaLTT supports continued restricted public access to these areas. All these actions can, and should, be taken within the context of the existing CMRP Management Plan. GaLTT has articulated its position in a 2019 letter to the LTC and in a subsequent Town Hall statement. We hope to continue working with all parties to find effective ways to protect the ecological integrity of CMRP.

Contrary to Mr. Doe's statements, GaLTT does not wish to "make more space available for walking off-leash dogs, bikers, and horse riders." In fact (and likely surprising to many readers), the current Management Plan does not permit any of these activities within CMRP. GaLTT has urged the RDN to clearly post these special restrictions at all entry points to CMRP, including at locations where trails cross the boundary with the 707 CP. Also, GaLTT has not proposed "adding to the cobweb of existing trails" in CMRP. In fact, GaLTT strongly opposed a RDN initiative several years ago to construct a trail around the perimeter of Coats Marsh due to the disruption it would likely cause to the marsh habitat and inhabitants.

A key reason GaLTT advocated for, and contributed to, the recent purchase of a 9-acre property close to the eastern end of Coats Marsh was to protect the marsh from potential damage caused by private development of the property. The land has now been added to the 707 CP and will help protect the integrity of the Coats Marsh ecosystem.

In summary, Mr. Doe and GaLTT are both keen on finding ways to better protect the sensitive ecosystems in Coats Marsh Regional Park. However, we apparently disagree on the best ways to achieve that important goal.

~ Rob Brockley, President, Gabriola Land and Trails Trust

Letter to the LTC on the P4 topic by Susan Yates

By e-mail, January 22, 2021

Dear Trustees, Ms. Kaur (Regional Planning Manager) and Mr. Cox (Planner)
cc. Gabriola Sounder

Although I very much appreciate the time and thoughtful discussions you all contributed in today's LTC meeting [January 21], I must express my disappointment at the decision to not go ahead with the Ecological Protection Zone Project, something that has been a priority for several years, and which the Planner has put so much work into.

I am sorry that this Zone, which could be a 'holding place' not just for the 3 properties currently considered (Elder Cedar, Burren's Acres, Coats Marsh) but also for any sensitive ecological areas that may become available for protection in the future.

I understand why you might want to remove the Coats Marsh area due to conflicting opinions and support from the RDN, GaLTT and The Nature Trust. However, even without Coats Marsh, the Ecological Protection Zone could still be one of the most important conservation aspects of the Gabriola LUB, considering that Zoning is a reliable way to ensure environmental protection.

With all of the work that has gone into this project to date, and with the recommendations from Staff that allow for various ways to move ahead on this Zone, I urge you to reconsider the decision to not continue with this progressive amendment to Gabriola's Land Use Bylaw.

It seems to me that all three of Planner Cox's recommendations (including removing Coats Marsh Regional Park at this time) are exactly what should be done in order to strengthen the Gabriola LUB and OCP without creating undue added work to the current Projects list.

I do not think that creating an Ecological Protection Zone is in conflict with or redundant to the Coastal Douglas Fir Protection work that is being done; it could be an added level of protection, along with continued CDF mapping and Development Permit Areas.

I particularly do not want all of the work done to date on this project to be put aside for an OCP Review. Whenever that happens, even if it is tackled by subject and not in its entirety, this Ecological Protection Zone will certainly not be at the forefront of an OCP amendment.

With sincere regards,

Susan Yates