



ISLANDS TRUST FUND

# News Release

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## TIME RUNNING OUT FOR RARE WETLAND ON BOWEN ISLAND

VICTORIA — Mud boggers and ATV drivers are jeopardizing the future of a Bowen Island nature reserve that only three years ago was one of the least disturbed and ecologically rare fens in southern BC. Fairy Fen Nature Reserve was formerly Crown Land, transferred by the province to the Islands Trust Fund to protect its remarkable biodiversity. Today, the fen faces an immediate threat of being destroyed despite its protected status.

Mud bogging leaves visible scars of ruts, erosion, and dead plants and can cause irreversible damage to fish and wildlife habitat. The Islands Trust Fund and Bowen Island Conservancy encircled the nature reserve with signs designating it vehicle-free, but this year, off-road activity has worsened, digging deeper into the heart of the protected area. Conservationists fear when the off-roaders break through the last barrier of forest surrounding the wet and boggy soil of the fen, it will be a matter of days before the entire wetland is destroyed.

"It has taken nearly twelve thousand years to create the peat layer that now stands three meters over the lake that once stood here at Fairy Fen. A single footprint in the peat can take months to disappear," said Jennifer Eliason of the Islands Trust Fund. "Spinning tires could destroy this special place forever."

Mud bogging on public land like Fairy Fen Nature Reserve is illegal in B.C. Violation tickets for mud bogging are \$575, and other penalties may include towing or impoundment of vehicles, jail time and expenses related to habitat restoration. The *Wildlife Act*, the *Motor Vehicle Act*, *Forest and Range Practices Act*, and the federal *Fisheries Act* can all be used to prosecute offenders who cause environment damage to public land. The Islands Trust Fund and the Bowen Island Conservancy have not yet been able to identify the ATV users trespassing the nature reserve, seeing only the tire tracks after the damage is done. They are asking for the public's help identifying those trespassing in the nature reserve with motorized vehicles.

"Many people from this community worked very hard for a number of years to see the fen protected," said Owen Plowman, President of the Conservancy. "But now, a very small number of people are undoing all that work. The loss of Fairy Fen, especially after it was secured as a nature reserve, will be heartbreaking for this community."

The public are encouraged to report suspicious motorized vehicle activity near Fairy Fen Nature Reserve (or other protected areas) to the province's toll-free, 24 hour Report All Polluters line at 1-877-952-7277 (or from a cell phone \*7277). The Islands Trust Fund also hopes to connect with ATV clubs or users from Bowen Island interested in becoming advocates for responsible ATV use on the island. If you are interested, please contact the Islands Trust Fund at 250-405-5186 (Victoria) or toll free through Enquiry BC at 1-800-663-7867 (or 604-660-2421 in Vancouver), or visit them online at <http://www.islandstrustfund.bc.ca/>

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Bowen, Denman, Hornby, Gabriola, Galiano, Gambier, Lasqueti, Mayne, N. Pender, Salt Spring, Saturna, S. Pender, Thetis