



Islands Trust Tax Exemption Program Helps Landowners Preserve Habitat

By: Christine Rikley, Islands Trust Fund
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Residential properties with large areas of natural habitat provide many benefits to island communities - filtering air and water, providing green space, and storing carbon - but they are still valued and taxed based on the development potential of the land. The Islands Trust offers an alternative. Through its natural area tax exemption program, landowners can reduce the property taxes they pay on undeveloped portions of their property by up to 65%. Waterfront lots with proportionally higher values and taxes stand to save the most from the program.

"Many of us bought land on the islands because we were drawn to the spectacular natural beauty and tranquil life. We looked forward to enjoying our own special place, exploring and discovering the trees, plants and creatures on our land. We may have thought of leaving our properties to our children, so they could continue to love the land as we do," said Peter Luckham, Thetis Island Trustee and resident. "But as property values increase, property taxes can be a barrier to retaining properties within families."

The Gulf Islands play a special role in providing sanctuary to some of the province's most endangered species and ecosystems. Recognizing this, the Islands Trust developed a tax exemption program much like the Agricultural Land Reserve tax exemption that instead rewards landowners who practice permanent conservation. The program makes it more affordable for property owners to maintain forests, natural shorelines and native habitat on large properties.

The Natural Area Protection Tax Exemption Program (NAPTEP) provides landowners who protect natural areas on their land with an annual 65% exemption in property taxes on the portion of their land protected with a conservation covenant. The covenant is a written agreement between the landowner and the Islands Trust Fund where the landowner commits themselves and future property owners to leaving the natural features on a property alone. With a covenant, a landowner continues to own the land and retains the ability to pass it on or sell. The covenant is registered on the land title, binding future landowners, meaning you can protect the natural habitat on your property forever.

"NAPTEP seems to me to be a win-win solution for both island property owners and the community," said Luckham. "Property owners and their heirs keep money in their pockets through the tax relief, know the land they've cared for will remain natural after they've moved on, and get the satisfaction of making a lasting commitment to the community and the future of their island. The tax exemption might even add to the resale value of the property. Through this kind of agreement the community receives assurance that the green space will remain private and intact, never to be developed or damaged. Though the 65% tax exemption is shifted among the rest of the region's property owners, the implication for other owners on the islands is mere pennies each year - a small price to pay for permanent land protection."

As Islands Trust area property owners receive their tax notices this year, they may be wondering how their island life can be more affordable for themselves, or their heirs. Visit the Islands Trust Fund at <http://www.islandstrustfund.bc.ca/naptep> to learn more about NAPTEP and the tax savings it generates. To speak with someone about NAPTEP, call the Islands Trust Fund toll free through Enquiry BC at 1-800-663-7867 (or 604-660-2421 in Vancouver).