

**Delegation Presentation by Friends of the Gulf Islands  
to Islands Trust Council Quarterly Meeting  
December 2, 2025**

**Executive Summary: Growth Limits Assessment for the Islands Trust Area  
The Missing Foundation of Trust Policy**

The Gulf Islands are experiencing rapid and unprecedented growth that is placing substantial pressure on fragile ecosystems, limited freshwater resources, and essential community services. Between 2016 and 2021, the Islands Trust Area grew by 27%—the fastest rate in its history and nearly four times the provincial rate. Many islands are already exceeding safe ecological thresholds, particularly regarding ecosystem conversion, forest fragmentation, and groundwater stress.

The Islands Trust was created to preserve and protect the natural environment, rural character, and unique amenities of these islands. Achieving this mandate requires a clear understanding of how much growth the islands can sustain. A comprehensive Growth Limits Assessment is therefore essential to guide responsible planning and to prevent long-term ecological and community decline.

**Key risks include:**

- Increasing reliance on trucked water on multiple islands—an indicator that demand may already exceed natural supply
- Additional forest clearing, habitat fragmentation, and the loss of wildlife corridors
- Declining groundwater recharge due to land conversion and climate impacts
- Septic contamination risks to both groundwater and nearshore marine environments
- Increasing pressure on ferries, health care, emergency services, housing, and schools

**A sustainable future requires answers to three central questions:**

1. How many residents and visitors can each island realistically support?
2. What level of development is compatible with ecosystem health and climate resilience?
3. What level of growth preserves long-term livability for existing and future communities?

**To address these questions, each island needs an integrated assessment examining:**

- Ecosystem health: forest cover, biodiversity, invasive species, habitat integrity
- Freshwater availability: groundwater recharge, aquifer capacity, seasonal variability
- Waste absorption capacity: septic loading, risks to drinking water and marine environments
- Infrastructure and service capacity: ferries, transportation, housing, schools, health services

A critical missing piece is “**Build-out Analysis**”—the full population and development potential permitted under current zoning. Without this information, planning decisions lack the necessary foundation. Proposed policy tools such as Floor Area Ratio (FAR) in the draft Trust Policy Statement could enable additional density and multiple dwellings per lot, but these decisions must not proceed without understanding each island’s existing development capacity.

Applying the precautionary principle is essential. Even with imperfect information, proactive measures are needed to preserve ecological integrity, community resilience, and long-term affordability. Waiting for complete certainty risks irreversible harm.

A **Growth Limits Assessment** will provide the data and framework required to uphold the Islands Trust mandate and ensure that growth does not undermine the very values the Trust exists to protect. Now is the time for leadership, clarity, and action on behalf of current residents and future generations.