Friends of the Gulf Islands Society Achievements for the 2025-2026 year

We have been working hard for you and for our environment!

This has been an extremely busy and productive year for Friends of the Gulf Islands as we have worked to hold the Islands Trust Council accountable to their legislated mandate to "preserve and protect the unique amenities and environment" of the Islands Trust area. Here are some highlights:

Members, Subscribers and Board of Directors – We have a steady membership of 100 and we continue to publish a monthly newsletter emailed to almost 400 recipients across the islands of the Trust area. This year, we introduced a 3-year membership. Our Board of Directors meets weekly in order to keep up with the many Trust committee meetings, to discuss concerns and our responses.

Draft Trust Policy Statement Critique – Along with other voices, we were successful in preventing the approval this past term of a very contentious and problematic draft Trust Policy Statement. (TPS). This is the governing document of the Islands Trust with which all bylaws and Official Community Plans must be consistent. We submitted a petition of over 2000 signatures, wrote letters and spoke at Trust Council meetings. Among other deficiencies, this draft at one point, contained a definition of 'environment" that included everything, built and natural. The draft currently contains NO definition of environment to which we have continued to object, as well as little attention to climate change and an emphasis on "managing "growth rather than limiting it. We will be continuing to follow, inform our membership and comment on any further work on the TPS.

Trust Meetings – We listen to or attend in-person Quarterly Trust Council meetings, monthly Executive Committee meetings as well as other Trust committee meetings and take action as needed through letters and delegations.

Biologist State of the Islands/Species-at-Risk Report - We asked the Trust Council to heed a biologist report (prepared by a consultant hired for only one year) that identified a serious lack of information about native species on the Trust islands. During the first 6 months of 2026, a board member spoke to two Trust committees and Trust Council about the need to have a biologist on staff. This salary was not included in the 2026-2027 budget in favour of other staff positions, but steps were taken that hopefully will lead to funding for an on-call consultant for this information. We will continue to urge that the Trust have this expertise on staff. This is important because Trustees often have to rule on requests for development permits, rezonings and variances from protective bylaws. The staff reports they receive rarely address how the land use requests might or might not harm the natural environment.

Trust Strategic Priorities Survey – We worked hard to publicize this survey, the results of which were intended to inform the Islands Trust Council's strategic planning and budgeting process. The survey was announced as an alternate means pf public engagement from the usual pre-

budget/draft budget public process. 1,244 responses were received, more than three times as many as were received for the 2025 pre-budget survey. A majority of respondents (74%) indicated that their top priority is for the Islands Trust to protect the natural environment and 60% want to see growth on the islands managed in a sustainable way. This supports previous Trust public engagement, specifically a 2019 State of the Islands Indicator Project where 79% of all respondents agreed that the Islands Trust Area requires a high level of environmental protection.

Groundwater Information - We have continued to closely monitor the Trust's information gathering about groundwater on Gabriola and a few other islands. We have urged that this information be understandable to the public and in a form that Local Trust Committees can use when making development decisions. Over time, the usefulness of this information has improved. We will continue to urge that money be targeted to creating information that is useful and understandable to Trustees and the public.

Island Buildout Numbers - During 2025, we made several delegations to Trust Council about the need for all islands to determine their estimated population if all properties were developed according to current zoning. This was done on Gabriola and on North Pender. The North Pender Advisory Committee was surprised to learn that their zoning allowed for an additional approximately 1,000 residents. We will continue to urge that all islands provide this information to Trustees and the public.

Informative Webinars - In August, we held a webinar on election issues for potential trustee candidates and the public. In contrast to a similar webinar held by the Islands Trust, participants could ask questions and receive answers live without our screening or rephrasing the questions. The webinar encouraged some good candidates to run. We hope to present more informative webinars in the coming year.

Trustee Election – We sent a questionnaire of 10 questions to all trustee candidates in the Trust area and posted their responses on our website, publicizing this through social media. Results are posted on our website. We feel very positive about the election results on some islands – Salt Spring, North and South Pender in particular where incumbent trustees were defeated in favour of those more committed to the Trust mandate. On Bowen Island, the only municipality in the Trust area, the Mayor Andrew Leonard was re-elected and also elected as a trustee. We were impressed with his previous contacts with the Trust Council. We look forward to meeting with new trustees at the upcoming Trust Council Meeting to be held in Victoria on November 13, and 14th.

Provincial Election – We invited Emily Lowan, the leader of the provincial Green Party and a candidate in the North Saanich and the Islands electoral district, to meet with our Board. We have had very positive support from our previous Green Party MLAs, Adam Olsen and Rob Botterell. Our invitation was accepted and we were pleased to note that Emily is aware of and very supportive of the mandate of the Islands Trust.

Members' Support – We sometimes receive requests for help with specific island land use issues. While we do not have the resources to get deeply involved in individual island matters, we always offer support and advice where we can. We invite members to a monthly Board meeting with time specifically devoted to their questions and comments. And with your support, we can do so much more!