

# Island <sup>Reprint</sup> Tides

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## Diverse panel opens ROOTS forum ~ Mike Logan

September's inter-Island ROOTS forum (Renewing the Origins Of the Trust Study) kicked-off with a panel discussion. In the main hall of the Gulf Islands Secondary School, often the venue for Salt Spring Island public hearings, a crowd of about 200 people gathered to listen.

The meeting featured five panelists: David Essig, chair of the Islands Trust; Mike Larmour, one of the first elected trustees; Robert Morales, Hul'qumi'num chief negotiator; Briony Penn, geographer and writer; and Dr Kathy Dunster, well-known for her 'Slow Islands' movement.

ROOTS organizer Nora Layard who hosted the evening, introduce the discussion by saying, 'We've asked people to come together to discuss this important question, 'What can we do as citizens and Islanders to strengthen and reinvigorate the Islands Trust ability to fulfill its 'preserve and protect' mandate?

Layard began her series of preset questions by asked what had happened in 1974 to bring about the creation of the Islands Trust. 'The development of North Pender's [12 hundred lot] Magic Lake Estates happened,' David Essig said, 'there was this awareness that this...community of communities...would be lost permanently. That [threat] of potential loss brought about the Islands Trust.'

When asked what we're trying to preserve and protect, Penn answered for the panel. 'It doesn't translate very well, I don't know how to say it in a short sentence,' she said. However capturing the Islands' essence well, Penn answered, 'the way you can be walking through the pouring rain on a beautiful winter day, surrounded by Douglas fir, and then you can emerge into a Garry Oak meadow, and the sun comes out, and there's a friend waiting with a cup of tea.'

Commenting on the role of a trustee, Essig said it is arguably more complex now, since there are 30 years of precedence to draw upon. He urged communities to be more supportive, and noted that a 'majority of the trustees are in favour of the preserve and protect mandate.' In fact it is part of an oath they take to uphold it. He added that the Trust is trying to change its 'internal culture.'

Kathy Dunster offered another perspective, noting that during her 6-year tenure as an appointed member of the Islands Trust Fund Board, she and her colleagues realized they represented the provincial interests of protecting and

preserving the Trust Area for all British Columbians. 'We used [the Mandate] to fight things much harder,' she said.

She added that the same issues listed in the report of the original general meeting in 1974 were the 'same things we're saying today. There hasn't been a lot of movement,' she said.

Larmour agreed, saying, 'we need trustees with a very strong environmental ethic. The [victories] we've accomplished were pushed by community. I'd like to see the Trust review itself, and where its priorities lay.' He addressed the growing concern of Salt Spring's water supply, noting that wells are running dry because of nearby commercial developments. 'There is a great urgency to take steps, and an urgent need for much better knowledge,' he said, 'in the meantime, let's not increase land pressures.'

Robert Morales focused on the First Nations perspective, with an obvious deference to ancestral lands. 'We are so accustomed to thinking of land as a commodity,' he said, 'we need to get away from that.' He highlighted Brasscan's ownership of Valdez Island's traditional First Nation lands as a major issue, noting that the logging corporation has a 'highest and best use' plan that means heavy logging. 'Valdez Island is a unique place...where is the preserve and protect mandate there?'

First Nations issues proved highly contentious, forcing Trust Chair Essig on the defensive. 'First Nations relations are one of the top three priorities in the Islands Trust,' he said, 'over 700 archaeological sites have been identified in the Trust Area.' Dunster shot back, asking 'what happened at Poet's Cove [unauthorized disturbance of First Nations burial site on Pender], what happened on Walker Hook [fish farm effluent pumped into traditional burial grounds on Salt Spring]?' Morales agreed. 'We wouldn't take an excavator and run it through the pyramids in Egypt,' he said, 'these lands are not just a resource, they're part of the people.' Essig responded that the Trust had stepped in when duly informed of the violations.

Layard closed by asking what needed to happen to strengthen the Islands Trust. Dunster used the opportunity to urge Islanders to 'shift from the development mindset,' adding 'planners don't talk about conservation...everything we do has to be about conservation.' The crowd responded by clapping enthusiastically.

David Essig indicated a need to make the public more aware

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of the Trust's successes. 'How many applicants went away without filing because of applications contrary to Islanders wishes? 930 last year alone,' he said. Essig also said that the most frustrating part of his job was trying to get more authority for the Islands Trust. He ended by encouraging communities to

'encourage more citizens to run for office' (such as Ken Rouleau, see article above).

*See also related article on Roots Forum - 'All Islands Gather on Salt Spring...'* 

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