



2235 North Road, Gabriola Island, BC V0R 1X7

June 29, 2009

Regional District of Nanaimo
6300 Hammond Bay Road
Nanaimo, BC

Attn: Gisele Rudischer, Director

Subject: 707 Acre Park Management Plan

Dear Gisele,

On behalf of the board of directors and membership of the Gabriola Land and Trails Trust (GaLTT), I am pleased to provide input into the management planning process for the 707-Acre park. As you know, GaLTT is a registered non-profit society whose purpose is to secure, develop and sustain a network of parkland and trails on Gabriola Island for the benefit of the public, and to preserve sites of environmental, historical, and social importance. We have a membership of approximately 170 which represents well over 250 individuals. Our membership was canvassed in the development of this response: we received 14 responses and generally strong support for the positions we have put forth below. This submission does not represent the views of all of our membership and we are encouraging members to provide input directly into the park management process.

Appropriate uses

We believe the park should accommodate a broad array of non-motorized users, for example, hikers, cyclists, horse riders, etc. Where potential for conflict among different user groups may occur in the future, we support looking at ways to reduce conflict without unnecessarily restricting access. As sensitive areas are identified, trails are rationalized and use of the park increased over time, it may become necessary to limit use by some users (e.g. horses and bikes) in some areas in the wet season and/or consider building board walks etc. to protect wetted areas from damage. There should be at least one point of access for persons with limited mobility (e.g. the elderly, persons with disabilities, families with young children) so that they can enjoy some part of the park.

We understand that you have received a submission suggesting that a dedicated area be set aside for BMX riders (non-motorized dirt bikes). We support this concept insofar as it occurs in an area that does not have sensitive ecosystems and is limited to a relatively small area (e.g. 10 acres).

Access

GaLTT encourages the RDN to develop access to the park in a way that connects neighbourhoods and builds on the presence of adjacent trails and open spaces, such as the Coats Marsh Regional Park. It

would be wise to identify now a prioritized list of places where small additional acquisitions of land or trail easements would enhance the recreational and conservation values of the 707 Acre Park.

GaLTT's ultimate goal is to create a network of interconnecting trails and parks from Drumbeg Park to Descanso Bay Regional Park. The access points created in the 707 Acre Park could have a profound positive impact on that objective. For example, we are aware that a private landowner, with property adjacent to the 707 Acre Park, has offered to allow access through his property and to provide for off road parking. GaLTT would strongly encourage the RDN to pursue this opportunity as it would provide access on the western edge of the park where there is currently none. This access would have the additional benefit of connecting a large residential neighbourhood to the 707 Acre Park without residents needing to use a car.

We also endorse ensuring that park access does not have unintended negative consequences for adjacent property owners. Issues such as volume of vehicle traffic, after hour's access, etc will need to be considered. Parking at the north end on the shoulders of Jeanette and Ricki Avenues is already an issue for the neighbours, and at the south end, the areas of the two small adjacent community parks off Coats Road may be well-suited to make a small parking area. Existing trails and the 'Centre Road' main line require planning and project work to redirect access to remain within the park boundaries, where now they run on to private land. All entrances to the park need security measures put in place to prevent unauthorized vehicle access while allowing access by emergency vehicles at key places. Mapping of the trail system within the park will promote responsible use and help reduce trespass for adjacent land owners.

Ecosystem Protection

We believe the park should be developed in a way that protects and stewards ecosystems and landforms. This should minimally include three elements: a database of relevant information; a managed sustainable forestry plan; and, an invasive plant management plan.

A GIS database should be developed immediately. It should include detailed topographic data, historical and current air photo coverage, silviculture information, invasive and endangered species mapping, critical bird nesting areas, trails, extent of wetlands, etc. The 707 also has significant potential to support ground water recharge; we believe this should be explored further. Excellent topographic data, soil mapping, and fracture mapping are critical information to understand the ground water systems in the area.

A sustainable forest management plan could encompass the entire 707 acres and could serve as a demonstration project on the best practices in sustainable forest management. A managed forest plan has additional benefits: it provides habitat for native flora and fauna, it reduces the risk of wildfires, it

creates an environment that supports healthy watersheds; and, a series of trails and park spaces can exist within it. Recognizing that the park's 707 acres envelops many microclimates, we endorse a plan which will restore the native plants typically found in such micro climates.

Until sustainable forest management practices are fully in place, this will require vigilance in dealing with non-native invasive plants to ensure they do not get a foothold in the park. Invasive non-native plants are a major problem on Gabriola. In the 707 Acre Park, we are unaware of any major infestations other than some patches of broom that are now getting established near the Centre Road main line. By developing a plan for managing and/or eliminating invasive species early on, this problem can be easily contained.

Ongoing Management

There has been considerable discussion as to whether the park should simply be left alone. We believe management of the park should be conducted with a 'light touch' for the purpose of protecting native ecosystems, simple trail grooming to allow non-motorized access, and management to reduce the risk of fire which is a significant concern for all Gabriolans, whether or not they live near to the park. The other significant safety consideration is ensuring that people have enough information to not get lost in the park: simple trail marking and mapping of public trails could assist with this. GaLTT currently produces a map of public trails on the island which includes a small portion of the 707 trail network; this map could be further developed to give more specific directions to broader area of the park.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide input into park planning. It is important to do this right and that will require thoughtful planning, phased implementation of proposed uses, and ongoing evaluation of progress. To this end, we recommend setting up a standing Park Management Advisory Committee to provide a forum for local users to continue to have input into the management of the park. Further, there should be a scheduled review of the Park Management Plan in, say 10 years, as our perspective of the potential of the 707 Acre Park will change dramatically as the trees grow back and the use of the park increases.

We appreciate the RDN's willingness to engage the whole community on the development of this park and encourage the RDN to continue to connect with the community as the plan is developed and implementation begins.



2235 North Road, Gabriola Island, BC V0R 1X7

Sincerely,

Dyan Dunsmoor-Farley
President

cc. <http://www.707cp.ca>

cc. GaLTT membership