



# News Release

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## Islands Trust Fund Board Secures First Free Crown Grant

VICTORIA — The Trust Fund Board has accepted the offer to transfer a 64 hectare forest on Gabriola Island from the province for a new nature reserve.

The offer resulted from the Board's January application to Land and Water BC to transfer the old-growth forest property under the Free Crown Grant program. Local trustees have been trying to protect this land since 1989. The current Local Trust Committee met with MLA Mike Hunter in July 2003 to ask again to have the land protected. After the Province's Free Crown Grant program was revised in 2004, the Trust Fund Board was successful in their request to the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services for sponsorship of the transfer, and then applied to Land and Water BC.

The Trust Fund Board and Trust Council selected the property for the Islands Trust Fund's first application to the province's revised Free Crown Grant program. The province will transfer the property to the Islands Trust Fund once final survey work and other administrative details are complete.

"For more than 15 years the community on Gabriola Island has tried to have this old-growth forest land permanently protected and thanks to their efforts it is now protected for future generations," said Louise Bell, Chairperson of the Trust Fund Board. "The Trust Fund Board appreciates the support of the past and current Gabriola Island local trustees, Nanaimo MLA Mike Hunter, the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services, the Gabriola Land Conservancy, the Gabriola Land and Trails Trust, the Regional District of Nanaimo, and many residents of Gabriola Island."

"The Gabriola Local Trust area had the least amount of protected area in the Islands Trust area with only 2% protected," said Sheila Malcolmson, Trustee for Gabriola Island. "Protecting this property brings our protected area to 3.1% and almost doubles the public walking trail infrastructure of Gabriola Island while protecting important biodiversity values."

The property is located at the south end of the tunnel on North Road and is locally known as the UREP property. UREP is an old and out-of-date land designation and acronym for "Use, Recreation and Enjoyment by the Public".

"The Trust Fund Board is going to involve local schoolchildren in renaming the property," said Gisele Rudischer, Trustee for Gabriola Island. "There are many special values and features on this land and we look forward to seeing their suggestions."

"This is a real win for the residents of Gabriola Island," says Nanaimo MLA Mike Hunter. "It is very satisfying to be able to bring to fruition a project which has been a priority for so long"

Due to internal accounting systems of the Free Crown Grant program, the province has retained the timber rights to the nature reserve. The province has explained that although it will continue to own the timber, the

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Bowen, Denman, Hornby, Gabriola, Galiano, Gambier, Lasqueti, Mayne, N. Pender, Salt Spring, Saturna, S. Pender, Thetis

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area will be held in fee simple as a nature reserve of the Islands Trust Fund thereby effectively eliminating the prospect of timber cutting.

Over the next year, the Islands Trust Fund will develop a management plan for the property in consultation with the community. The plan will provide short and long-term guidance for the management of the values and features of the property, including signage, trail construction and maintenance, and invasive species removal.

The Islands Trust Fund will be looking for a local volunteer group to manage the property and help implement the management plan. The Islands Trust Fund will monitor the property annually to ensure that the values on the property continue to be protected.

In May 2005, the Trust Fund Board will begin a consultation process to select the next piece of crown land in the Islands Trust area that the Board will apply for under the Free Crown Grant process.

The Islands Trust Fund acts as a regional land trust for the Islands Trust area and currently protects important natural and cultural values on 53 properties with a combined value of more than \$13 million.

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