

A PLACE IN THE ISLANDS

HOW PRIVATE LAND OWNERS SHAPE THE FUTURE
OF THE SAN JUAN AND GULF ISLANDS

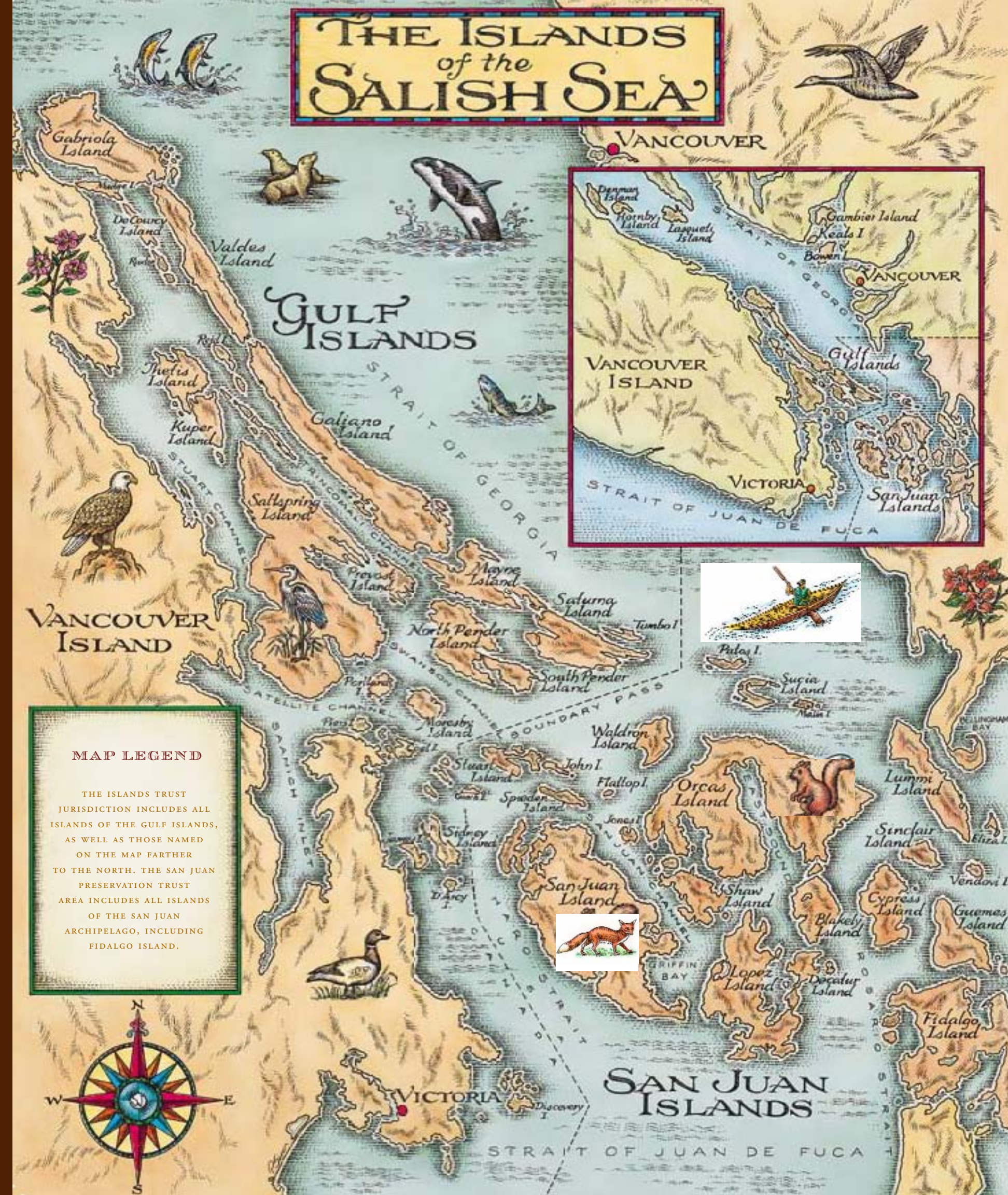


A PLACE IN THE ISLANDS

was originally published in 1995 by the San Juan Preservation Trust.

Because the American San Juan and Canadian Gulf Islands are both part of a larger ecoregion, islanders on both sides of the border share the special opportunities and obligations of island living.

In this neighborly spirit (neighbourly, if you are north of the border), the 2nd edition of "A Place in the Islands" was conceived. This new edition is a joint project of the Islands Trust and the Islands Trust Fund of British Columbia, Canada and the San Juan Preservation Trust of Washington State, United States of America.





A PLACE IN THE ISLANDS

IF YOU OWN A PLACE IN THE ISLANDS — OR IF YOU ARE LOOKING FOR ONE —
THIS BOOK IS MEANT FOR YOU

Life in the Salish Sea islands has its charms and special challenges, and the more you know before you start to make your dream come true, the happier you will be with the results of your efforts.

As an island landowner, you will make many decisions about how you use, enjoy, and care for your property. You will make important long-range decisions about building or remodeling your home, and about other major alterations to your property such as adding outbuildings, putting in a new driveway, or digging a pond.

You will make many smaller decisions as you manage your land. Should the meadow be mowed? How about putting in some rhododendrons? Should we take down that old snag tree on the shoreline...?

As you and your neighbors carry out your plans, the look of the landscape will change. Between 1976 and 2001 the population of the Puget Sound-Georgia Basin region has more than doubled and it is forecast to double again by 2016. This rate of population growth puts tremendous pressure on the natural world that surrounds us. Since most of the land in the islands is privately owned, you and other owners will be the ones to shape the future of your community. The cumulative changes made by island landowners will affect a wide network: other islanders, the wildlife that lives here, and generations of islanders to come. Because island environments are small, isolated and fragile, the effects of changes to the landscape can be greatly magnified.

This book offers some ways of looking at your land to see how it contributes in its particular way to the integrity of the islands as a whole. It will identify important natural, historic, and scenic features to keep in mind as you make your plans, and will offer some approaches to building homes and other structures that are especially suited to an island setting.

Information in these pages comes from local citizen committees, studies of island wildlife, non-profit organizations, regional experts, and most importantly, from the practical experience of others who have lived and built here.

The islands are famous for their tranquil, beautiful scenery, abundant wildlife, and a sense of the past. Conserving these qualities on your property can not only give you pleasure, but will protect the value of your investment and bring you closer to your land and community.



TAKE A LOOK FROM AFAR

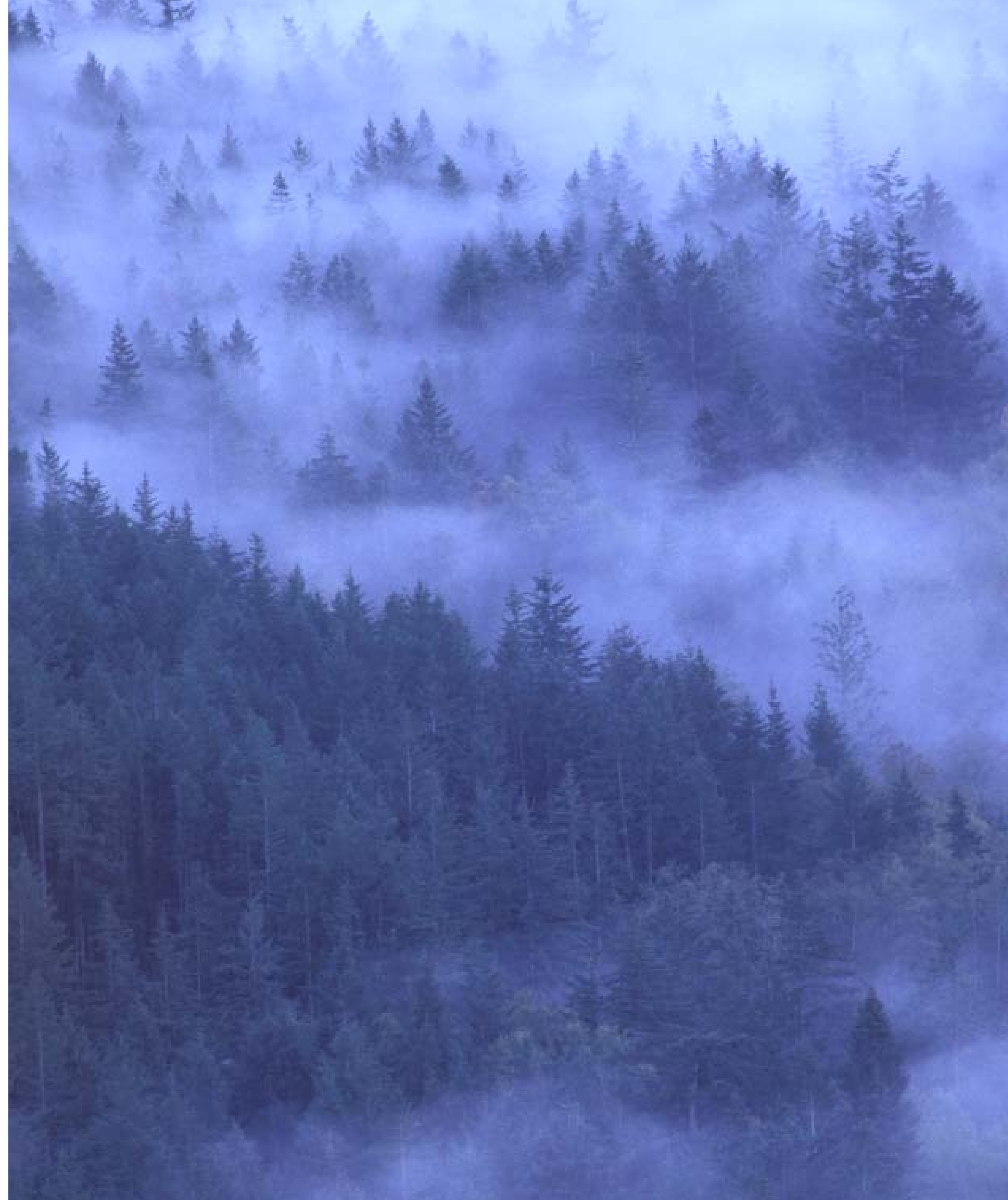
A DISTANT LOOK CAN HELP YOU SEE YOUR PLACE
AS OTHERS WILL SEE IT

Before you build, take some time to get acquainted with your land. One of the best ways to get a helpful perspective is to take a look from afar ... to see how your land appears from nearby roads, ferry routes and other viewpoints and to see how your place fits into the island landscape. Enjoy the view and let your eyes follow the outlines of tree-fringed ridgelines against the sky, the channels between islands, and the outline of distant mountains. These distinctive lines draw the eye and define the landscape. Their very shapes tell you that you are in the Salish Sea islands and nowhere else.

Shoreline and ridgeline owners have an important part to play in the future look of the islands. When these lines in the landscape are interrupted or blocked by houses, clearcuts, docks or seawalls, the impression of natural beauty is changed. Along ferry lanes especially, only a few long stretches of natural and uninterrupted shorelines and ridgelines remain.

If your land is at the top of a ridge, you might be tempted to take out some ridgetop trees and put your house high up where the view seems best. But if you want to emphasize the natural beauty of your property from farther away, consider siting slightly below the ridge, leaving the fringed ridgeline undisturbed.

*Looking at your home
from the water will
let you see how your
property appears
to passing boaters.*





*Mt Baker (left)
provides a stunning
backdrop to
undeveloped shoreline
in the San Juans.*

There are also some practical reasons to avoid building at the top of the ridge. A notch in the trees on a ridgeline can funnel wind and increase its speed around your house, making decks less usable and damaging trees and shrubs. Siting down the slope can give your house protection you will later appreciate, especially during one of the islands' famous and occasionally destructive windstorms.

If your land is on the shoreline, you are part-owner of a world-famous scenic and natural treasure. Because shoreline areas are especially sensitive, regulations may require that you set your house back from the water, retain some trees and shrubs for screening, and obtain permits for other types of shoreline structures.

Docks, ramps, stairways, seawalls, boathouses, satellite dishes, tent platforms, and other shoreline structures are regulated. You may be required to share your dock, reduce the size of your project or even change your plans to protect the shorelines of the islands.

Siting your house away from the shoreline and screening it with vegetation can also make it more attractive

and liveable. A bit of shrubbery or a few trees can effectively soften the outline of a building, and darker siding and roofing in natural colors can help to blend a structure into the landscape. Distance and screening will reduce glare from the water, and your water view can be beautifully framed with greenery. Careful siting and screening will protect a west-facing house especially from becoming so hot and bright you will have to close the drapes and shut out the view you love.

While shorelines and ridgelines are the most important and dramatic lines in the island landscape, less dramatic lines formed by forest edges and other changes in ground cover or terrain also affect the look and feel of your place. Seeing and appreciating the patterns in the landscape where forests meet field, field meets rocky hillside, or hillside meets sky will give you a better understanding of why the islands – and your own land – look so beautiful. Attention to all the lines in the landscape when planning buildings and other alterations will ensure that your land, and the islands as a whole, continue to work their scenic magic.



*Lines in the
landscape: forests,
fields, distant water
and ridgelines give
island views a special
tranquility.*

ISLAND LIVING

ISLANDS ARE SPECIAL PLACES ... THEY DESERVE EXTRA CARE

A move to the islands can change your life in ways that are hard to predict. Early decisions about the size and siting of your house, its water and energy systems, and its landscaping will determine how you will be spending your time and money later. Here are some ideas to help you ease into island life so you can avoid saying, "...if only I'd known!"

Making your plans As much as you can, spend time on your property during all four seasons and take your time deciding where to build. Consider camping on your property first to get a feel for the place and for life in the islands. Many owners regret choosing the most beautiful place on their property as a house site because the structure can alter the landscape more than expected. Choosing a nearby site instead can preserve that beautiful spot and it can even become the view from your window.

Existing knolls, rock outcroppings, native shrubbery and trees provide the perfect setting for an island home. They also provide cover and food for wildlife and may even hold a botanical treasure or two. The islands have a wide variety of native plants and wildflowers (some that are rare or endangered) ranging from tiny orchids to prickly pear cactus.

Planning for conservation of energy and water in and around your home is an excellent strategy for adapting to the practical realities of island living. Islanders can use more energy than urban dwellers. We are dependent on ferries; there is little, if any, public ground transportation available; we require most of our goods to be shipped in via truck. Homes tend to be less energy efficient because of our mild climate, with less insulation and many windows to take advantage of the views.

When designing your home or choosing a building site, keeping these green building practices in mind can help save you money and time in addition to preserving the beauty of our islands. See resource page in back for a guide to access more information.

SITING AND LANDSCAPING: Let your land dictate the design and siting of your home, driveway, outbuildings, and landscaping. Becoming familiar with your property first, before designing your home, results in a home that works with, and not against, the landscape.

DESIGN: Aim for simple design. Complex building forms use more material and are generally more difficult to heat and maintain.

SIZE: Small is beautiful! Use of rooms for multi-functional purposes and reducing your footprint saves money, time, and ecological resources.

UPGRADED THERMAL ENVELOPE: Invest in insulation above current code requirements (blown-in insulation is best for energy savings). The better-insulated the house, the smaller and simpler the heating system should have to be.

PASSIVE SOLAR: South-facing window glass with overhangs for summer shading take advantage of natural lighting and eliminate the need for extensive heating and lighting systems.

EFFICIENT MECHANICAL SYSTEMS: Low-emissions wood heaters, high-efficiency heating and hot water systems, with heat-recovery ventilators (HRV) provide optimum efficiency. Good ventilation is an essential component of an energy-efficient home.

EFFICIENT LIGHTING AND APPLIANCES: Use compact fluorescent and LED lighting and Energy Star appliances. Look for front-loading clothes washers, and use solar dryers (a.k.a. clothes lines).

RENEWABLE ENERGY SYSTEMS: Solar hot water, PV (solar electric), wind, and microhydro are all options, depending on site conditions. Of course, the best

way to save energy is to simply reduce your consumption.

REDUCED EMBODIED ENERGY: Embodied energy is the energy used to extract, refine, grow and harvest, process, manufacture, transport and install building materials. Local materials, recycled materials, salvaged materials--all reduce embodied energy.

IMPROVING LONGEVITY/ MAINTENANCE: Features which provide improved longevity and reduced maintenance such as rammed earth, steel metal roofs, good moisture protection (rainscreen walls, big overhangs, drainage swales, etc.) reduce the long-term environmental burden of a building.



If you feel the urge to “clean up” your property by clearing out the native shrubbery, groundcover, or windfall, resist it long enough to see if you can incorporate the original terrain and vegetation into your landscaping plans. The natural beauty that drew you to your land may become one of the biggest advantages of life in the islands: most of the landscaping has already been done for you in a beautiful, low-maintenance, natural style.

Landscaping, island style The more you incorporate natural features into your landscaping, the more time you can spend enjoying your land instead of watering, weeding, and maintaining lawns or gardens filled with non-native species that are not adapted to our dry climate. Planting or maintaining native plants will also reduce the risk of unintentional “introduction” of invasive or noxious plant species that can naturalize and choke out native vegetation that provides important food and cover for wildlife. Local weed control boards provide lists of noxious weeds that should (in some cases, by law) be avoided or eradicated.

The natural ground cover in the islands – ferns, mosses, salal, and grasses – provides important protection from runoff by absorbing and holding significant amounts of water. Heavy runoff in wintertime may cause problems

on your own land or on your neighbors’. To get an idea of the drainage patterns, walk your land in winter looking for natural ditches, boggy spots, and runoff areas. In general, it is best to retain existing drainage areas and avoid having to restore them later.

Topsoil in these rocky islands is a precious commodity (it takes nearly 600 years to form just one inch). Wherever you must disturb your property, store any topsoil from excavated sites to reuse later, and do your best to prevent soil contamination from motor oil or pesticides. Restore ground cover as soon as possible with native grass seed or other drought-tolerant plantings because disturbed ground is an invitation to invasive plants such as Scotch broom. It is difficult to get rid of these tenacious and destructive invaders.

Existing undisturbed soils on your land may be an important asset in another way. Houses in most areas of the islands have individual septic systems instead of sewer connections, and you can save money if you are able to locate your system in naturally suitable soils.

Be sure to determine the best area for your septic system before you bring in heavy equipment to build a driveway, excavate, or change the terrain around your house site.

Careful landscape design will help you strike the balance between wildfire safety and a peaceful island setting.



During the planning stage of remodeling or building your home, incorporate low impact development practices into your design. Clustering buildings and other structures, and reducing the size and/or footprint of your home helps to minimize the impact on land, soil, and viewscapes.

Clearing trees or branches for more light or a better view is best done after construction. When you are inside your new home looking out you can see exactly what is needed. Proceed cautiously, removing just a few limbs or one tree at a time, or you may accidentally expose a view you do not want.



English ivy is a common invasive species in the islands.

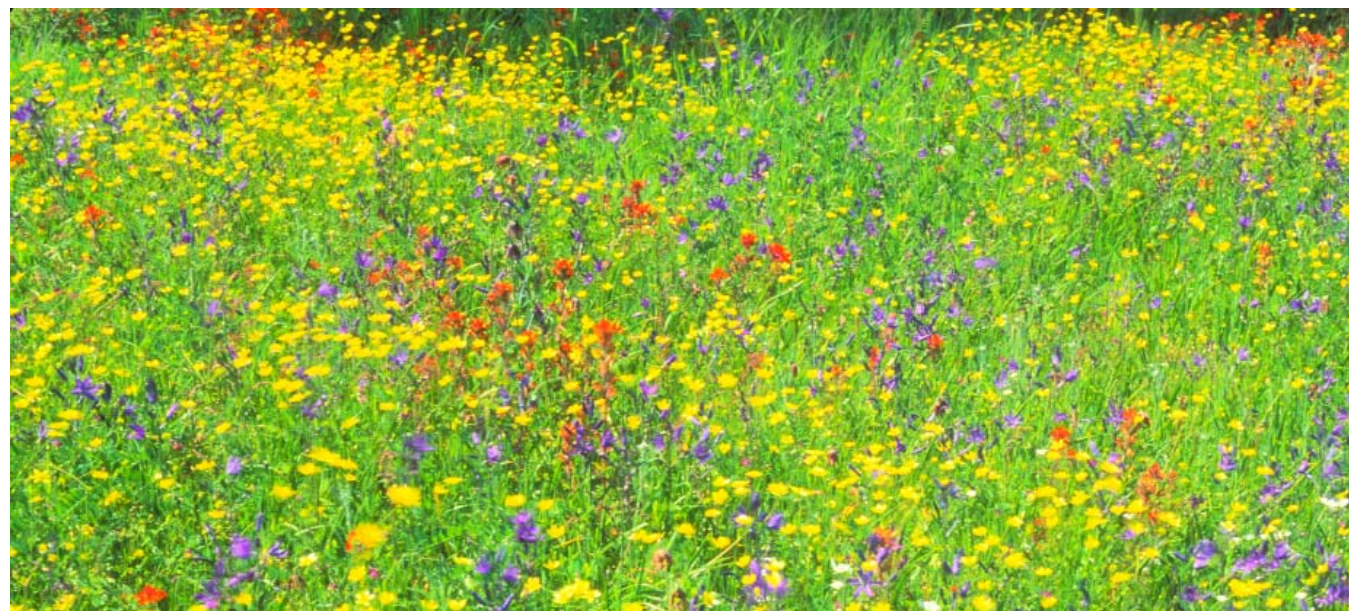
THE ALIEN INVASION

Some introduced plant species can rapidly overtake natural ecosystems and, once established, controlling these ‘invasive aliens’ can be labor intensive and extremely difficult. Scotch broom is a particularly serious threat to biodiversity of the islands of the Salish Sea, as is gorse. Lamiastrum, also known as lamium, is relatively new. This variegated vine is commonly sold by nurseries for hanging baskets but once it escapes it can overtake natural areas. Just a small piece can reproduce and spread in sun or shade, in wet or dry soil conditions. Be cautious about introducing non-native plants to your garden – they may become unwelcome guests who never leave.

One often-overlooked aspect of landscape and home planning is the look of your home at night. Minimal and considerate use of outdoor lighting will help keep the islands’ legendary night skies free from light pollution and maintain the gift of a clear night, perfect for stargazing.

From the time you choose your property, plan ahead for the conservation of the features you love and for the future enjoyment of your landscape. Make your wishes clear to your contractor and mark trees and other plants you want to save or areas where heavy equipment should not be driven or parked. Later, you can sit back and enjoy your place in the islands as soon as construction is done, and take your time with the finishing touches to make the place your own.

Natural landscaping is not only beautiful and practical, but you will spend less time maintaining it and more time enjoying it.



When I have visitors from Seattle or when my kids come, they spread something out and lie on the terrace. They look at the sky and say ... the sky is so low and you have so many stars! You don't see that in the city because of the light. Here the sky's just like a blanket.

Christa Malay, Lopez Island

For me, one of the most amazing things about being out here are the sounds. It's one of the few places where you can hear silence.

Dave Castor, Orcas Island

LIVING WITH WILDLIFE

SOME OF YOUR NEW NEIGHBORS WILL BE WILD ...
LEARN TO GET ALONG WITH THEM

Abundant wildlife is one of the great pleasures of life in the Salish Sea islands. In fact, a true measure of the ecological health of these islands is the diversity and profusion of the wildlife that share their home with us. Creatures that have lived here for eons are specially adapted to this area, but now the territory they need for their food, water and shelter is in a landscape also occupied by people.

At first glance, you may not see any nests or dens or obvious signs that animals live on your property. But “home” to animals can include all the territory they need to find food, rest in the afternoon, play, or look for a mate. In general, the more you minimize changes to your property, the more wildlife you will have.

To see what animals come to your land, look for narrow deer trails through the woods and observe the many small birds in the wild rose bushes, ocean spray and alder



*Rufous hummingbirds
(Selasphorus rufus)
are a favorite sight
at island feeders.*

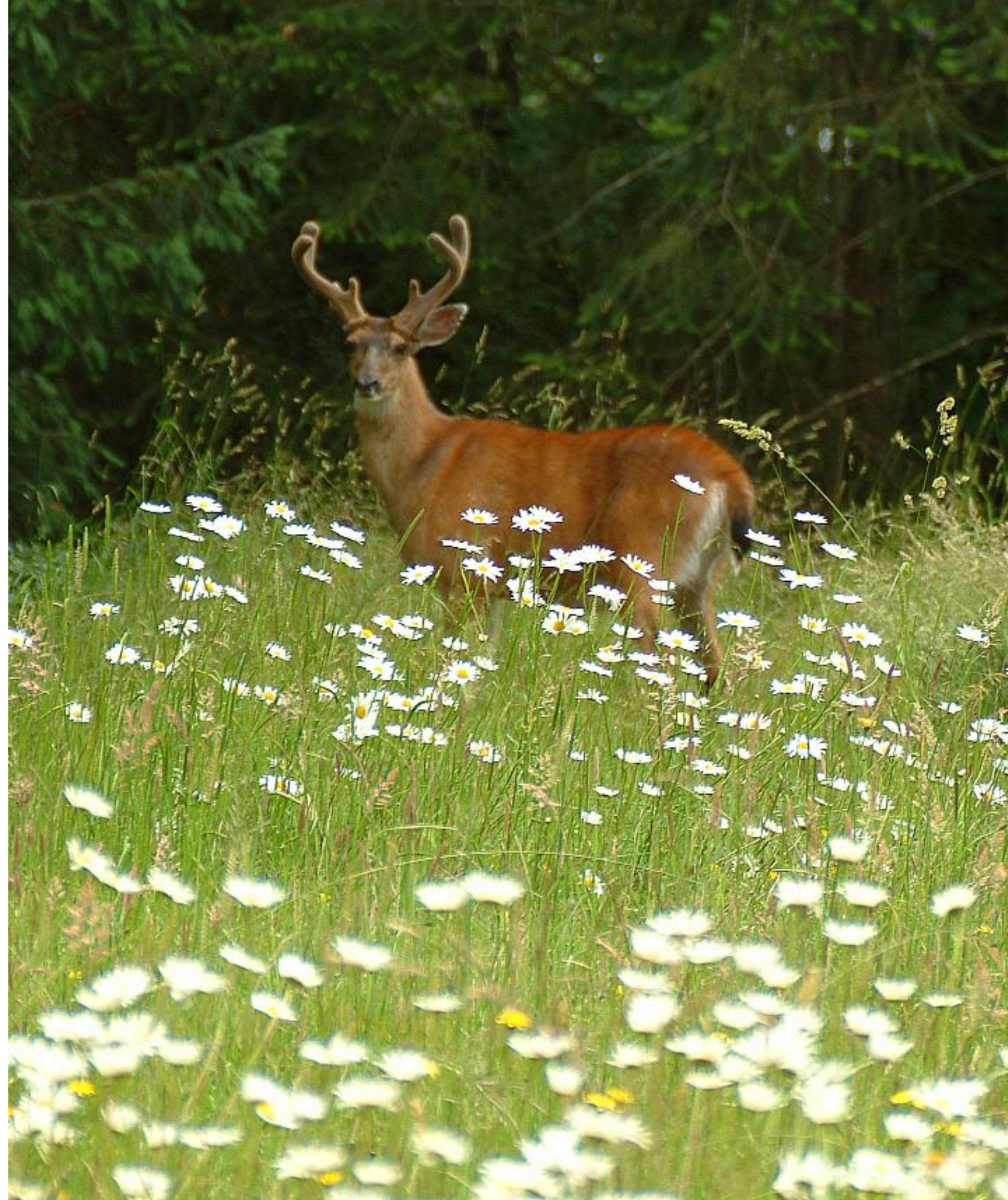
trees. If you find a messy spot with a fishy smell at the top of your bank, it is likely a place where river otters eat, play and tumble. Such pathways, vegetative cover and favorite hangouts make your place a home to wildlife.

In the islands, with numerous species of wildlife around us on land and in the sea, we have the perfect opportunity to learn to live peacefully with them. Here are a few tips for getting along with some of your most common and abundant wild neighbors:

Deer They roam throughout the islands and seem always to be crossing the road when you're rushing for the early ferry. They can jump fences less than six feet (two metres) high and they will come up on your deck to eat flowers. They can destroy tender young trees by rubbing their antlers on them.

You may hear about certain plants deer will not eat. Though they usually avoid plants like daffodils and iris, there are always a few deer around ready to try anything, just once.

To live in peace with deer, fence in everything you want to protect from them. Then you can enjoy special glimpses of their lives – that secret spot under the blackberries where they sleep in the afternoon or the sight of the first spotted fawn in June – with no hard feelings about those rhododendrons they ate.



It may be hard to believe, but a bored and uncontrolled dog – even a small one – quickly rediscovers its wild heritage and can turn into a marauder and killer, with or without the participation of other dogs. Deer and fawns (and sheep, lambs, or chickens) are often the victims of these unfortunate escapades, so keep a close eye on the family dog and build it an enclosure if it shows the slightest tendency to roam. An uncontrolled dog can itself become a casualty because state and provincial laws allow livestock owners to eliminate dogs menacing their animals.

Raccoons Raccoons like living around water. They will raid your orchard (usually the night before you plan to harvest), and will never cease trying to get into your garden.

They are cute - and very, very smart. They can get through almost any fence, untie knots, and undo latches, and like to have loud family rows on your deck in the middle of the night. They are not afraid of much and, if cornered, will put up an impressive fight, as many a city dog or cat has learned. Despite their inconvenient habits, you can learn to live with them. Secure the lids of your garbage cans



Hundreds of bald eagles hunt, fish, and nest in the Salish Sea region.

tightly, net your fruit trees, and do not leave tempting treats like dog food outside. Raccoons love anything that smells fishy, so avoid using fish fertilizer on the flowers on your deck!

Bald eagles Bald eagles live in the islands year round. Many devoted pairs (eagles usually mate for life) come back year after year to the same nest site, make some repairs and settle in to the routine of egg-laying and chick-rearing. Eagles and nest trees are protected by law so do not embark on any building project that may potentially disturb these valuable nesting sites.

Even without a nest tree, your land may be important to eagles if it has bare snags and other convenient perches – an eagle that appears to be resting may be scanning for food. If you have such a perch, let it stand and you and your guests can enjoy the sight of this magnificent bird at work.

Other large birds Several large hawks such as the red-tailed hawk, the rough-legged hawk and northern harriers need the open fields of the islands to hunt for voles or snakes. Open meadows are often manmade and will return to forest in a surprisingly short time. Judicious and careful removal of encroaching trees will give these big, graceful hawks and other birds of prey the open habitat they need.

The woods and orchards of the Salish Sea islands are home to many species of owls and one of the largest woodpeckers in North America, the pileated woodpecker. Any dead or dying trees on your property can be important to these birds because they may harbor colonies of ants and termites, the favorite food of woodpeckers. Small

owls, birds, and mammals in turn use the excavated cavities for nesting. Unless they cause a hazard, let such trees stand so you can watch woodpeckers at their vertical buffet, and perhaps be answered by a nearby screech owl when you whistle for your dog.

Songbirds The best way to attract small birds to your property is to keep much of the existing shrubbery. Bushes and shrubs offer protection and also provide them with berries, seeds, and insects for food, as well as nest sites. Feeders and birdbaths will be more popular if there is shrubby cover nearby.

Windows can be a hazard for birds. Hang bird feeders a good distance away from windows to prevent strikes from startled birds. If you have a window that birds frequently strike, one effective preventive technique is to use decorative patterns here and there on the outside to alert birds to the glass. Covering or shuttering your windows when you are away from your home, and limiting window size can reduce the chances of collision (and save you money on your heating bills).



Songbirds migrate through the islands and many, such as this American robin, nest here. Native vegetation provides an important food source, such as the madrone (arbutus) berries pictured here.

As more people make their homes in the islands, habitat loss becomes an increasingly serious problem for wildlife. Here are some things you can do to help restore the balance.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * MAINTAIN ALL OR PART OF YOUR PROPERTY IN A NATURAL STATE. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> and small broadleaf trees, tall and low shrubs, ferns and wildflowers, and groundcovers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> and red-flowering currant for hummingbirds and butterflies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the prey for the hawks, eagles, and owls that we love to watch). Birdbaths and feeders will attract more birds if there is a brush pile nearby.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * LEAVE TREE SNAGS in place to provide food and shelter for cavity-nesting birds and mammals. If safety is a consideration, remove the top and leave a minimum of a 10-foot snag. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * BUFFER NATURAL AREAS from human disturbance with screening plants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * PROVIDE FRESH WATER SOURCES. These may be as simple as an overturned garbage can lid (with the water replaced daily) or as elaborate as a re-circulating pond. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * AVOID USE OF LAWN CHEMICALS that can be lethal to wildlife and seek out organic options when possible.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * To attract the greatest variety of wildlife, PLANT LAYERS OF VEGETATION: tall conifers, large 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * USE NATIVE PLANTS as much as possible to minimize the need for water and special care. Plant trees and shrubs that provide seeds and fruits year-round, and nectar-rich plants such as honeysuckle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * MAINTAIN SMALL BRUSH OR ROCK PILES for small birds, mammals, and beneficial snakes to shelter in (remember these little guys are 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * PROVIDE NEST BOXES FOR BIRDS AND ROOST HOUSES FOR BATS.





*IF I FIND AN INJURED OR ORPHANED WILD BIRD
OR MAMMAL, WHAT DO I DO?*

If you suspect that an animal has been injured or orphaned, do not disturb it until you first contact a licensed wildlife rehabilitation center. Injured wildlife need highly specialized care that is best provided by a wildlife rehabilitator. Many seemingly “orphaned” baby animals such as deer fawns and harbor seal pups are often just left alone while the parent feeds. Juvenile songbirds, learning to fly from the ground, are usually under the watchful eye of a nearby parent and don’t need human assistance. In most cases, leave baby animals alone! They need help only if they appear listless, dehydrated or emaciated, with sunken eyes, a dull coat, or obvious injury. Adult wildlife may need assistance if it is captured easily, is favoring a leg or wing, has obvious injuries, is convulsing or has difficulty breathing, or is a bird that sits with its feathers puffed out and does not move for a long period of time. Call the closest wildlife rehabilitation facility after carefully observing the animal and before you make any attempt to capture it.

Refer to resource page in back pocket for contact information.

House cats take an enormous toll on the North American songbird population. Keeping your cat indoors can help reduce this threat (putting a bell on your cat’s collar has been proven to be an ineffective way to reduce predation). If your cat simply must have its freedom, consider keeping it indoors just during the springtime when young birds are fledging (and at their most vulnerable to cat attacks), or building your feline friend an outdoor enclosure.

River otters The river otters of the Salish Sea islands have habitual favorite places to eat, play hide-and-seek in the driftwood, and goof around.

They enjoy playing tag over and under your dock and may try to spend some of the winter under your

house. People find their antics very entertaining – until they move in. Their smell, noise and messiness are legendary.

Avoid building near their favorite haunts and do not inadvertently create new ones for them. They love cozy places under buildings close to the shore. If they move into or under something on your property, grab your tool belt, some boards, and some strong hardware cloth and fence them out securely when you are sure they (and their kits, if there are any) are not on the premises.

Watch and enjoy these and other unusual neighbors and soon you could be adding your own experiences and observations to the local wildlife lore.



FRESH WATER TREASURES

THIS REGION IS FAMOUS FOR ITS WINTER RAINS —
HOWEVER, ALL THE ISLANDS EXPERIENCE SEASONAL WATER SCARCITY

Marshes and ponds Streams and waterfalls are rare in the islands. Marshes, ponds and underground fissures are the only places where precious water resources are found.

You may have a marsh, a pond or a wetland on your property but it may not always appear to be wet. In the islands, many marshy areas are often dry during the summer months and you may not realize you have a wetland until the winter rains turn an area boggy. Like a sponge, wetlands stand ready to store water during the wet winter months and right into our dry summers.

A wet area on your property may help recharge your underground water source or provide a safe holding area for runoff that could otherwise damage structures or roads. Wetlands filter out sediment and improve water quality by taking up excess nutrients or pollutants before water runs off or soaks in to become groundwater. As wetlands can change considerably in size depending on the season, consult with your neighbors or past owners about the maximum wetland size on your land before planning any construction projects. Most existing wetlands are protected by law so check local, state and provincial regulations before altering or disturbing any wet area on your property.

A wetland or pond can also be a delightful landscape feature, part of a beautiful setting for a house. Nearby water provides habitat for wild creatures that might not otherwise come to your property. Even the smallest marshy spot may attract a handsome great blue heron to breakfast on frogs, or a chattering belted kingfisher to try his luck.

If you plan to put in a pond or create a marsh for wildlife habitat, get help with the design. If the sides are too steep, your pond could become an unattractive mud hole during dry times. Dry, steep banks can grow a thick crop of thistles too. To create a beautiful margin, the edges of the pond should be shallow enough to stay moist and fill with reeds and sedges. These shallow areas will attract marsh-loving birds, and a deep area of open water in the center will allow ducks, geese, and perhaps even a gorgeous trumpeter swan to splash down for a visit. Wood ducks, the most colorful local species, prefer ponds that have some overhanging trees shading the water and providing nest cavities in which to raise their young.

It is important to include undisturbed buffer areas as a part of any plan for maintaining wetland areas or ponds on your property. The edges of a wetland are biologically rich, and the moist soils and vegetation they support can extend well beyond the area that is obviously wet. A wide unmowed buffer area keeps your wetland healthy, protects it from disturbance, and increases its value to wildlife.

There are only a few year-round streams in the islands and you are lucky if you have one. Even if your stream runs only in winter, the vegetation along its course will attract special wildlife like the most colorful summer visitor, the western tanager. On the ground, you may catch a glimpse of a northern alligator lizard before it darts for cover from its favorite sunny stump.





Water for house and garden Part of island life is living with occasional uncertainty about household water supplies. Summers are dry and many wells produce less water. You never know when winter rains have fully replenished ground and surface water supplies, so year-round water conservation is always good practice.

The islands of the Salish Sea (with the exception of Fidalgo Island in Washington State and Piers Island in British Columbia) are unique in that the only naturally available fresh water arrives as rainfall that collects in wetlands, lakes, or reservoirs, or seeps into the soil and rock. Despite what you may have heard, island water supplies have no underground link to those on the mainland.

Rainfall that seeps through the thin island soils to the rock below tends to collect in random cracks, not in the predictable aquifer formations typical on the mainland. The glaciers that covered the area around 10,000 years ago left some island valleys covered with a layer of glacial till. A jumble of rocks, clay and mud formed as the ice moved. In these areas, underground water is sometimes trapped in small aquifer formations, making drilling for water a little more predictable than where bedrock is close to the surface. Due to this variation in geology, water may be plentiful or scarce. You may have your own well or you may be part of an established water system relying on surface or ground water supplies. Insensitive building and clearing and excessive use of water can deplete your – and your neighbor’s – water supply.

If you have your own well, find out its output and limit your use to less than what it can easily produce. Especially if your well is near the shoreline, drawing down the well too far can cause saltwater contamination that can be difficult or impossible to reverse. A well-designed water storage system can reduce the stress on your well by allowing you to pump for short periods

during the day and night to replenish your supply. Water quality testing may be available through your local health agency, as well as private labs, and should be conducted at the least annually. Some island groundwater can contain trace elements of harmful heavy metals; regular testing will help to identify this.

Fresh water here in the islands is limited, but our thinking about it does not have to be. Fortunately, there are some solutions to help meet the challenge that our demand for fresh water places on the limited supply. For instance, limiting paved areas and using groundcovers instead of turf uses less water. Hand-watering your garden early in the morning or in the evening prevents unnecessary loss of water by evaporation, and drip irrigation systems lose even less. Installing low-flow toilets, water-saving showerheads, washing machines, dishwashers, and composting toilets conserves precious water supplies. Rainwater catchment systems are growing in popularity as a way to reduce reliance on well water.

Because water is such an important issue, islanders give – and get – plenty of advice on the subject. Any mention of a new well, the operation of a nearby water system or water conservation can start a lively conversation on the ferry. Learn about water availability in your area and, if necessary, design your house and landscaping with conservation in mind so you can enjoy an adequate and reliable water supply.

***RAINWATER CATCHMENT:
AN ISLAND SOLUTION***

The average island home can capture 91,000 to 105,000 litres (20,000 to 23,000 gallons) of water a year with average rainfall. This is enough to provide about half the daily supply for a four-person household per year. See our reference page for contacts that can help with installation and design of rainwater catchment systems.



WATERFRONT LIVING

TERRESTRIAL AND MARINE CREATURES WILL SHARE
THE SHORELINE WITH YOU. YOU HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY
TO HELP CONSERVE THEIR HABITAT

As the meeting place between land and sea, the shorelines of the Salish Sea islands are dynamic and important habitats for terrestrial and marine fish and wildlife. Located at the juncture of Puget Sound, the Strait of Georgia, and the Strait of Juan de Fuca, our archipelago provides critical feeding, rearing, and migratory habitat to a wide range of marine species.

Because of their exceptional biological richness, the salt marshes and bays of the Salish Sea islands deserve special attention from their owners. These areas serve as nurseries for the whole aquatic food chain. In the past, however, some of the larger saltwater marshes in the islands were filled in before their importance to wildlife and to the local marine economy was recognized, and so the remaining salt marshes on the islands are more valuable than ever. Shallow bays and marshes support forage fish: the small, “bait” fish that are essential prey for many species of birds, marine mammals, and other fish.

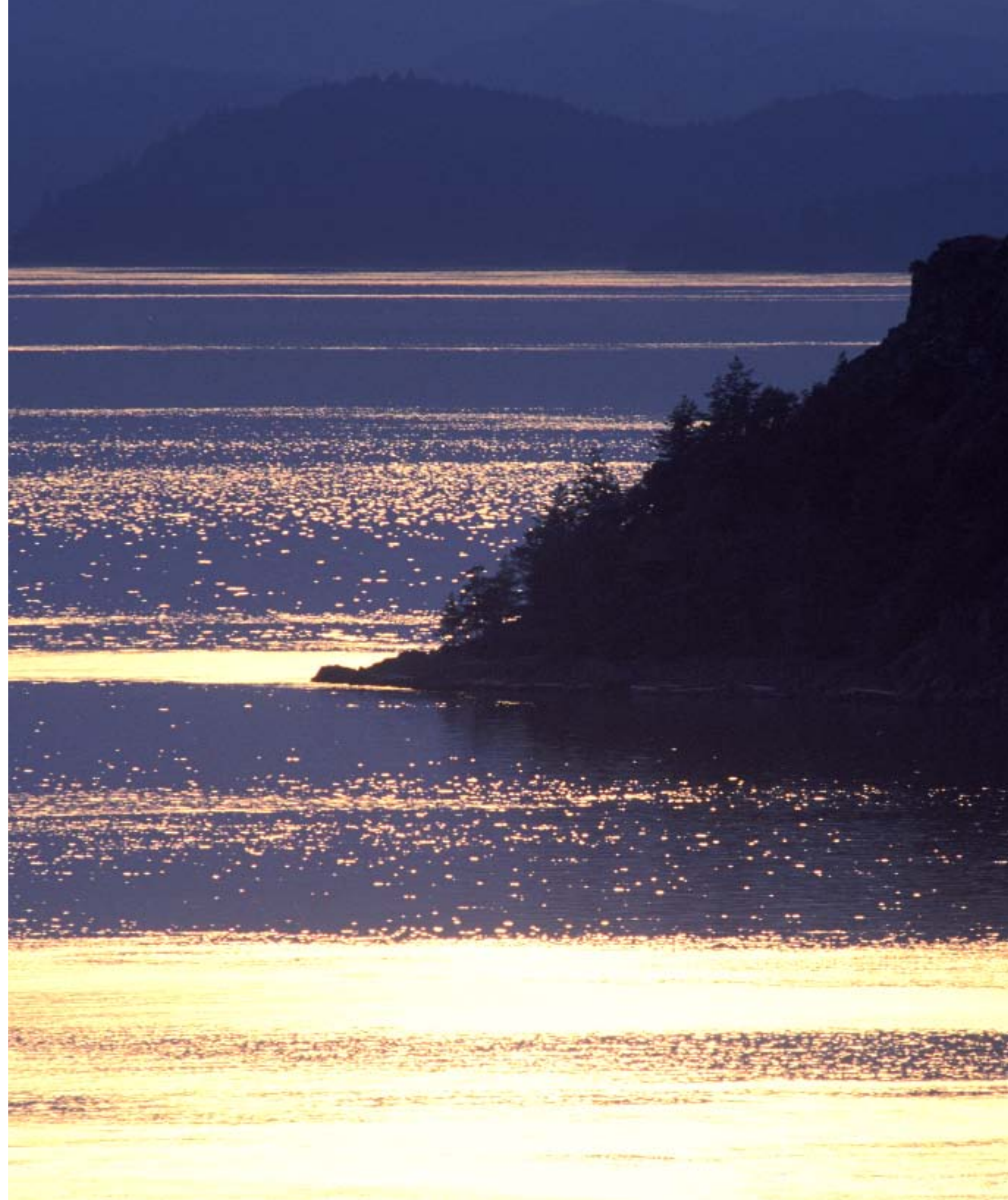
The eelgrass beds in the shallower waters around the islands are often described by scientists as the shallow-water equivalent of rainforests. Eelgrass grows in shallow bays and coves, tidal creeks, and estuaries. An eelgrass bed is a complete ecosystem: rich algae and bacteria growing on the eelgrass blades feed tiny invertebrates, which in turn are dined upon by shellfish and crabs, a cycle that continues up the food chain as larger fish, seabirds, and marine mammals feast upon the multitudes of creatures that call the eelgrass beds home.

Landowners who share the 1429 miles (2289 kilometres) of shoreline in the Salish Sea islands with other visitors and residents (human and otherwise) have a unique responsibility. With relatively small watershed areas and such extensive shorelines, what happens on the land almost always affects the marine environment, from shoreline marshes to eelgrass beds. To maintain healthy shoreline habitat, including beaches and bays, plant native vegetation as a buffer, and maintain wetlands and marshes in their present condition to serve as pollutant filters. Healthy shorelines should be unfettered by shoreline developments such as bulkheads or seawalls, which bury beach habitat and interrupt sediment supply, potentially robbing a nearby spit or bay of the sand it needs to sustain itself over time.

For many, the vistas of undeveloped, natural shorelines are what drew us into the islands, and they are the definitive physical characteristic of our home. Due to the importance of maintaining healthy and beautiful shorelines and marine waters, virtually all shoreline development activities require pre-project planning and permitting. On both sides of the border, docks, ramps, stairways, boathouses, and other shoreline structures are regulated to protect the shorelines of the archipelago.



Shallow bays with eelgrass beds and shoreline marsh areas provide protection for young salmon.





A NATURAL SHORELINE

Photo at top:

Careful siting and screening can help preserve a natural look.

Photo at bottom:

At the same level of development, less attention to siting and screening can dramatically alter the scene.





FARMS AND FIELDS

FOR MANY, THE LOVELY PASTORAL VALLEYS DEFINE
THE SPECIAL BEAUTY OF THE ISLANDS

An open meadow, fragrant with new-mown hay, the deep green edges of forest outlining the scene – surely your level of tension dropped a few points, just passing by? Maybe you stopped and feasted your eyes on that land. Maybe you bought it.

Preserving farmland, farming, and the pastoral character of the islands is a growing concern for the people who live here. As is true elsewhere in North America, there are fewer farms and farmers with each passing year, and many who work the land need to support their farms by also working at other jobs.

Some island farmers have turned from raising the traditional cattle, sheep, and hay to producing organic produce, dried flowers, jams and wine for speciality market niches.



If you intend to farm your land or raise animals, get plenty of advice about local conditions to help you choose the best varieties of fruit and vegetables for the area or the best pasture management plan to prevent erosion or overuse. If you do not want to farm your property but would like to keep it in agricultural use, you might be able to lease all or part of it to a nearby farmer.

Even if you have no wish to farm or lease, you can help preserve the rural character of your property. Think about siting your buildings in a way that causes the least change to the pastoral scene. You might be able to tuck your house into the edge of the woods, screened by a few trees, or perhaps you can build where your home is partially hidden by the terrain.

If your property is entirely flat and open, you can minimize the effect of the house on the scene by building to a smaller scale, lowering the profiles of the buildings, keeping big vertical surfaces to a minimum, using traditional rooflines and choosing colors and textures that blend rather than contrast with the surrounding scenery.

No matter where you live in the islands, you can help keep the tradition of island agriculture alive by adopting a neighborly attitude toward nearby farms and farmers. Admire those lambs! Have patience if you encounter a lumbering tractor on the road or a herd of cows being moved to a new pasture. Respect fences, close any gates you open, and remember that an uncontrolled dog can be a threat to farm animals.

One of the most enjoyable ways to encourage agriculture in the islands (and to reduce the environmental impact of transporting goods from long distances) is to buy fresh and delicious locally grown farm products. There are farmers' markets in summer and small signs along island roads indicate sources of fresh eggs, honey, strawberries, herbs and other fine seasonal produce.



A RURAL LANDSCAPE

Photo at top:

Careful siting and screening can help preserve the open space.

Photo at bottom:

At the same level of development, less attention to siting and screening can dramatically change the landscape.



Sometimes I feel very small
and hopeless in a world that
is full of insurmountable
problems, and yet here
on my little piece of property
I can at least feel useful if I
have tread quietly and been
gentle and ready to receive
the gifts that the land gives
back to me.

Nancy Spaulding, San Juan Island

Over the years I have come
to understand that I don't
own this acreage ... it owns
me and I am happily enslaved.

Cecilia Inness, Thetis Island

FORESTS, GROVES & WOODLANDS

ISLAND WOODLANDS ARE RICH AND DIVERSE ...
EVEN A FRAGMENT CAN PROVIDE VALUABLE HABITAT

The forests and woodlands of the Salish Sea islands are the result of the unique intersection of geography, geology, marine influences, climate and exposure that define the region. Almost all the diverse woodland habitats found here grow in soils of glacial, marine, or bedrock origin. They vary from dry, open Garry oak or juniper woodlands to wet or even boggy alder or red cedar groves.

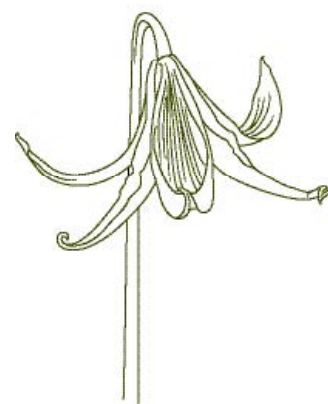
The San Juan and Gulf Islands have a high proportion of privately-owned forestland compared to other regions. In the majority of the islands, private landowners rather than governmental or commercial parties are in the best position to preserve or restore forest habitats.

Forest conditions found during pre-settlement periods were certainly different from those we see today. In pre-settlement times, fire was used by native people to clear forest areas, while later, fires were suppressed.



Clearing for farming and commercial timber harvesting have also shaped island forests. Notwithstanding the influence of logging, and the absence of fire, most of the forests in our islands remain spectacularly beautiful. This speaks to their resiliency.

By actively conserving their groves and woodlands, landowners who are fortunate enough to own forestland can derive a number of economic and ecological values. These range from providing habitat for threatened or endangered plants and animals, to deriving income from responsible forest stewardship or forest restoration. In many instances, these seemingly conflicting values can be accommodated on the same piece of forested property. Learn about forestry “best management practices” and sustainable forestry to reduce the chance of altering or compacting soils, contaminating local streams, or inadvertently introducing invasive and noxious weeds. Study “fire smarting” techniques to reduce the risk to your home from wildfire (links to helpful information can be found on our resource page). Through their actions, forest owners in the Salish Sea islands have the opportunity to write their signature on the landscape for future generations.



Hidden treasures, such as the fawn lily (Erythronium oregonum), can be found in the islands' Douglas-fir forests.





OTHER TIMES...

HUMANS HAVE LIVED IN THE ISLANDS FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS.
TRACES OF THEIR LIVES REMAIN TO THIS DAY

Things are a bit old-fashioned in the islands. The pace is gentler, people are community-minded, and many places look as if they have not changed in a very long time.

The Coast Salish Even though your land may look natural and undisturbed today, almost every part of the islands has a history of human use. Thousands of Native people once lived here, and many still do, either in distinct Native settlements such as on the Gulf Islands' Cortes, Galiano, Mayne and Saturna Islands – or as individual families (such as on San Juan, Orcas and Lopez Islands). These Coast Salish communities are people who speak several different but related languages. Their community names, which are often associated with

the islands, sometimes came from the language they spoke (such as Samish or Sliammon) or from the place the people are from (such as the Penelakut people from Penelakut spit on Kuper Island). The Coast Salish people made a livelihood in the islands by fishing for salmon with reef-nets, cultivating shellfish in great island shell beaches and clam gardens, trapping waterfowl in huge pole-nets, and hunting elk and deer in the higher elevations. They kept gardens of blue camas and tiger lilies, and burned out the underbrush in the forest to produce more berries for wildlife. You may find some tell-tale signs of these past activities on your property. In some places, Native people continue to harvest important foods like shellfish and medicinal plants in the islands today.

*Old bedgerows (left)
and traditional farm
buildings (right)
show how the land
was owned and used.
Islanders cherish these
reminders of our
recent past.*

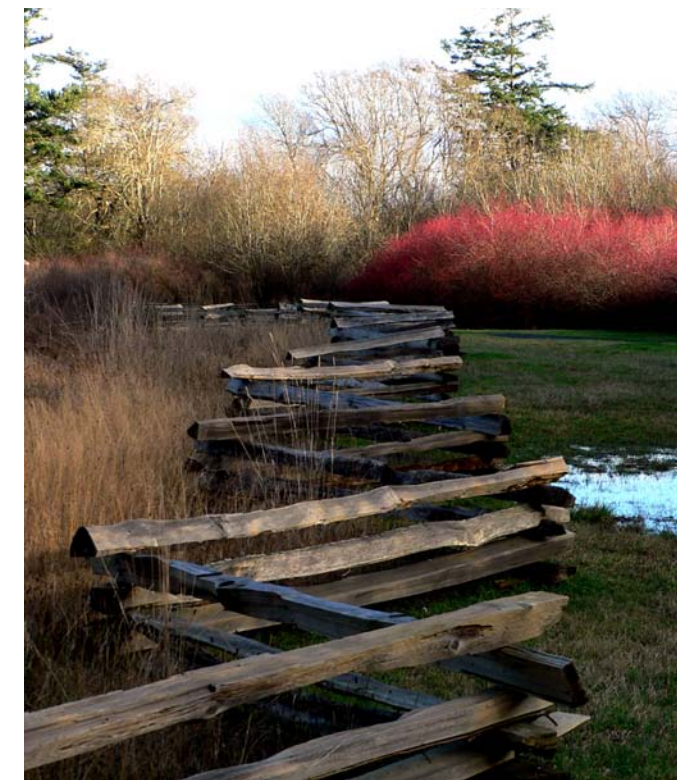


These resource uses of the islands have left a significant archaeological record of the islands' past. On the shoreline, look for black ashy soil with layers of broken seashells. Archaeologists call these "shell middens", and they are sites that testify to the richly sustaining ecosystems in our islands. They are an important part of the cultural remains of Coast Salish peoples' camps and villages, dating from recent history to more than 9,000 years ago. Some mark the location of great communal cedar plank houses, used by the Coast Salish people for the past 4,000 years. On Orcas and San Juan Islands, two of these great houses were still being used in the 1880's, and clusters of smaller houses remained at least until 1913. In the Gulf Islands, there are remains of ancient village sites at places like Bedwell Harbor (Pender Island) and Montague Harbor (Galiano Island), as well as other communities like Lyackson on Valdes Island, where these big houses are still standing and in use today.

Subtle and impressive rock carvings can sometimes be found in coves and terraces of the islands, which evoke the rich spiritual and cultural lives of the Coast Salish people. You may also find oval piles of rocks on the higher points of your property that look like graves, and that is exactly what they may be. These burial cairns are very widespread throughout the islands and are treated with great reverence and care by present day Native peoples, who often remember the families buried there.

Stone artifacts such as rough flakes of chipped black stone, finely shaped projectile points, or smoothly ground slate fish knives may turn up anywhere on your property, in your garden, in the woods or on the beach. Homeowners find polished stone maul heads, axe heads, and big cylindrical pounding tools (like pestles). Large stones weighing as much as 200 pounds (90 kilograms) with drilled circular holes, used as canoe and net anchors, are sometimes discovered in shallow water.

If you find a shell midden (protected by State and Provincial laws), cairn, or artifacts on your property, leave everything where you found it until an archaeologist can look at it with you. Take photographs if you can, for your own records and for research. Even saving a slice of an old tree that has been felled can provide clues for researchers. (Refer to the resource page in the back pocket to help you get connected with the right authorities).



Durable and practical split rail cedar fences have long been used by islanders.



Shell middens are a reminder that Coast Salish people harvested the bounty of the island's beaches for centuries.



Steep roofs, dormered windows, and wide porches typify many traditional island homes.

Though their village settlements have changed with the creation of reserves and reservations, the islands continue to be historically, culturally, and ecologically significant to the Coast Salish peoples. Their ongoing use, care, and respect of the land and resources of the islands reflect the long-term Coast Salish approach to their relationship to the land. Living beside and within these long-standing cultural connections of our neighboring Native communities is another part of what makes the islands such a special place to live today.

European settlement You may also find signs of inhabitants from our more recent past. In your woods, look for wide, old sawed-off stumps. Many of the islands' Douglas-fir forests were clear-cut in the early 1900s to fuel island kitchens, canneries, the lime kilns on San Juan and Orcas Islands, and for timber. Some of the bigger stumps might still show notches for the springboards where loggers stood to fell the trees. Many of the cleared areas have regrown, and only a few islanders can remember open fields in some places where now there are deep woods.

Your property might once have been part of an early island homestead or farm that was subdivided. If you hear someone call a nearby farmhouse the old So-and-so place, it could be a clue to the past. Some island families that go back to homesteading or early farming and fishing

days have taken care to preserve their histories, and their pictures, diaries, letters and old implements in local historical museums can help you know your community's past.

A rusty piece of horse-drawn farm equipment or the iron hoop of a wagon wheel rim could turn up in your woods, and patterns made by hedgerows and old fences in your fields or woods may reveal how the land was used.

Many older homes and outbuildings have been carefully maintained and these offer a sense of how the islands looked in days past. Architectural elements borrowed from homes built by the first settlers can help blend new houses into the modern island landscape. Driveways or other roads on your property can also be designed to resemble the narrow winding roads of the past. Attractive and practical, the traditional cedar rail fence weathers to a silvery grey and does not require paint. Planting hedgerows (or leaving existing hedgerows) provides valuable habitat for a variety of edge-loving species of animals while serving as a natural fenceline.

Whatever you build will become a part of island history. By respecting the past, keeping the history of your land and community alive, and reflecting the best of the old as you build the new, you can preserve a sense of the past and pass it on to future islanders as well.



CHECKING OUT YOUR PLANS

ZONING AND REGULATIONS HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED
BY ISLANDERS FOR ISLANDERS ... LEARN ABOUT THEM
BEFORE YOU MAKE YOUR PLANS

As an island landowner, you may encounter zoning and regulations that affect your plans to use and develop your property. Many of these local regulations reflect community values and are an effort to protect natural resources or the quality of life you want to enjoy. Some are meant to address specific problems that have arisen as the islands grow and develop. Although some may seem unreasonable at first, they may save you from making expensive mistakes, and in some cases, protect your property from thoughtless actions by your neighbors. (You do not, for instance, want someone to place a septic system too close to your well).

Land use regulations are embodied in your local governments' comprehensive official community plans, shoreline master programs, land division ordinances, land use bylaws, and the various building codes (structural, electrical, public health) that govern construction and land development. Before making extensive and costly plans for clearing, blasting, or building, check with local planning or building officials.

Local professionals (architects, engineers, building contractors, and landscape designers) who are committed to ecologically-sensitive design are familiar with the rules and can help you plan a successful project in a responsible way.

Official community plans, regulations and bylaws are amended from time to time. Official public notices regarding meetings, hearings, and new land use proposals are published in local newspapers. These often cover land use issues that may affect your property and your way of life in the future. Those new to the islands (and long-term residents as well) can learn more about their home and build new relationships with other islanders by supporting their local land trust, or joining a historical, gardening, or natural history society. Keeping well informed serves the dual purpose of protecting your investment and your community.



Newer construction can reflect the lines of historic homes and maintain a sense of the islands' past.



SHAPING THE FUTURE . . .

WHEN YOU HAVE LOVED YOUR LAND AND TAKEN CARE OF IT,
YOU CAN MAKE SURE THAT ITS SPECIAL BEAUTY WILL LAST.

Island landowners on both sides of the border are increasingly utilizing an effective and lasting land conservation option known in the United States as a conservation easement and in Canada as a conservation covenant.

A conservation easement or covenant transfers a lasting right to conserve land to someone other than the principal owner. By granting this transfer, you can give an established conservation organization the right to protect specific natural or scenic resources, carefully defined in the easement, for the benefit of both current and future island generations.

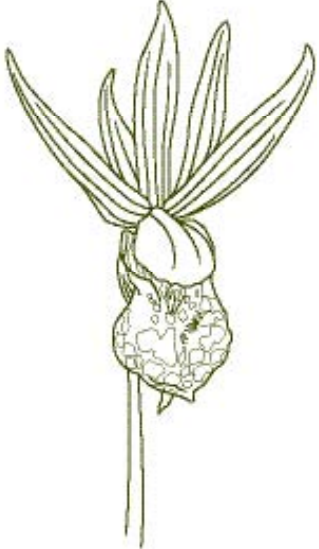
A typical conservation easement or covenant can restrict or prohibit such things as future subdivision of the property, construction of additional houses, or certain commercial activities. The document you write may also include provisions to protect or encourage desired uses of the land, such as farming or preserving wildlife habitat. Each easement is tailored to fit the property and the owner's wishes for future conservation.

Land under this type of conservation protection remains in private ownership, and the owner continues to pay property taxes. The land can still be sold, given away, or passed on to heirs but no matter who owns the property, the conservation easement remains in effect, held and monitored by the conservation organization.





In addition to providing for long-term protection of your land, placing a conservation easement or covenant on your property may offer significant financial advantages. In the Gulf Islands, you may be eligible for a certificate that will exempt you from a portion of your property tax. On both sides of the border, the donation of a conservation easement to a qualifying organization is a tax-deductible charitable contribution. Conservation easements can also play an important part in estate planning and, in some cases, may help reduce capital gains tax when property is sold. Americans donating property or cash to Canadian land trusts can benefit from tax savings under a recently created trans-boundary charitable organization (more information available in our reference page).



The future of native plants like this calypso orchid (Calypso bulbosa) will be shaped by the decisions made by island property owners.

Laws, terminology, and regulation of conservation easements or covenants differ on both sides of the border. If you would like to find out more about the many benefits of protecting your land for the future, contact the following organizations for information.

THE SAN JUAN PRESERVATION TRUST

is a private, non-profit organization that accepts gifts of land and conservation easements. Created in 1979 and managed by a local board of trustees, it holds conservation interests on hundreds of properties in the San Juan Islands.

THE SAN JUAN COUNTY LAND BANK

is a public agency, created in 1990 by a countywide vote, that uses public funds from an excise tax on property sales to purchase land and conservation easements.

THE ISLANDS TRUST FUND

is a land trust created in 1990 to preserve and protect the unique character and environment of the Islands Trust Area by holding conservation covenants and owning nature reserves. It is managed by a board of trustees.

There are various island conservancies throughout the Gulf islands that are eligible to hold conservation covenants. More information is available through the Land Trust Alliance of British Columbia (see resource page).



WORKING WITH NATURE

TAKING NATURE INTO ACCOUNT WHEN PLANNING YOUR PROJECTS: A SEASONAL GUIDE

WINTER (DEC-FEB)

- Birds are not nesting – best time for clearing property
- Birds are feasting on insects wintering over in rotting logs and leaves – leave some winter-felled trees and branches if possible
- Good time to put up nest boxes for returning songbirds such as tree and violet-green swallows
 - Time to provide fresh water sources where natural sources have frozen
- Avoid disturbing wet or boggy areas – Pacific chorus frogs begin mating late winter
- Best time to board up and exclude river otters, raccoons, and other “denners” from undesired locations such as attics and crawlspaces
- Best time to walk property to determine size of wet and boggy areas

SPRING (MARCH-MAY)

- River otter and raccoon kits giving birth now – do not try to seal off entrances to denning areas unless the mother has removed all kits
- Mallards and bald eagles nesting – take special precautions around wetland areas and eagle nest trees
 - Barn and cliff swallows return
- Douglas squirrels born in tree cavities now through June – be careful when removing trees
 - Songbirds nesting now through summer. Mowing or clearing of vegetation (grass, trees, and shrubs) during breeding season may remove potential nest sites, directly destroy nests, expose nests to predators, and decrease food sources such as insects. (Birds nest everywhere from directly on the ground to the tops of trees, but generally within 5 metres of the ground.)
 - Kingfishers excavating burrows in mud banks – another reason to avoid retaining/armouring walls on shorelines
 - Wood ducks nesting in hollow tree cavities
- Songbirds building nests – leave dog hair, dryer lint out on bushes for nest building



SUMMER (JUNE-AUGUST)

- Native fruit-bearing plants abound. Leave berry-producing shrubs until they are spent before clearing (usually late in September)
- Harbor seal pups are born – don't disturb if alone on a beach; the mother will return for it
 - Goldfinches and cedar waxwings nesting
 - Garter snakes bearing young – watch for them in the grass when mowing lawns
 - Fledgling songbirds on the ground – keep your cats indoors!

FALL (SEPTEMBER-NOVEMBER)

- Most migratory bird species have moved on – best time to clean out nest boxes to prepare for next spring
- Good time to plant shrubs/trees – wildlife-friendly native choices include elderberry, huckleberry, salal, serviceberry, salmonberry, and red flowering currant
- Winter residents begin arriving from the north – rough-legged hawks, merlins, northern harriers, peregrine falcons, and snowy owls
- Best time to seal up unwanted roosting sites for bats – bats migrate out of the area



If you moved here because it is beautiful then something within your heart obviously recognized the raw native talent of this place. Honour your good taste and leave a legacy by doing nothing to improve on it.

Briony Penn, Saltspring Island

SPECIAL THANKS TO THE ISLANDERS WHO OFFERED THE WISDOM OF THEIR EXPERIENCE, IN PARTICULAR:

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FUNDING FOR THIS PUBLICATION GENEROUSLY PROVIDED BY:

The R. Bruce Bedell Conservation Fund of Washington State

The Real Estate Foundation of British Columbia

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Peter Siu: *page 1*
April White: *inside back cover (below)*

DESIGN DONATED BY:

Brown463, Seattle, WA

PRINTING:

Blanchette Press, Vancouver BC

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Printed on recycled paper.



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PRICE: \$9.99 CDN / \$8.99 U.S.