

LIVING ON “SCENERY AND FRESH AIR”:

Land-Use Planning and Environmental Regulation in the Gulf Islands

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IN 1974, THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT of British Columbia established an organization called the Islands Trust to oversee and guide the development of the southern stretch of the Gulf Islands.¹ With its creation, the Islands Trust took on a broad mandate “to preserve and protect, in co-operation with municipalities and the Government of the Province, the trust area and its unique amenities and environment for the benefit of the residents of the trust area and of the Province generally.”² Creation of the trust marked only the beginning of a new phase in what had been an ongoing, and often controversial, process of land management in the Gulf Islands, which had begun in earnest in the

¹ While for most of the twentieth century the term “Gulf Islands” referred to what is today known as the “Southern Gulf Islands” (i.e., the islands extending from Saturna Island in the southeast and D’Arcy Island in the southwest, north to and including Gabriola Island), due to a shift in the 1990s to speak of the waters between Vancouver Island and the mainland as a whole, the “Gulf Islands” came to encompass all of the islands in the region. Thus, the term “Southern Gulf Islands” came into use to distinguish those islands further north, including Quadra and Cortes, from the more southern ones. The major focus of this study is the Southern Gulf Islands; however, in order to remain consistent with the source material from which this work draws, and which employs the older terminology, throughout this article I refer to the region as the “Gulf Islands.” This terminology is complicated by the fact that the Islands Trust territory extended beyond the Southern Gulf Islands to include the northern islands of Lasqueti, Denman, and Hornby as well as the Howe Sound islands, Bowen and Gambier. Primarily, though, I further narrow my focus by looking in detail at the history of those islands that fall under the jurisdiction of the Capital Regional District: James, Sydney, Portland, Piers, Saltspring, and the “Outer Islands” – North and South Pender, Mayne, Saturna, and Galiano. I chose these islands because their relative population density, proximity to major population centres, and prominence in debates and controversies over time all make them a focal point of broader “Gulf Islands” trends. Speaking of the Gulf Islands as a unified entity is problematic, and it is a tension that I acknowledge exists throughout this article. However, while the internal dynamics of each regional district involved with islands that make up this area varies, by focusing on those within the Capital Regional District, which was most active and covered the largest number of islands, a good impression of the issues at play can be developed. See BC Geological Services, “Gulf Islands,” *BC Geographic Names*, available at <http://apps.gov.bc.ca/pub/bcgnws/names/4119.html>.

² Islands Trust Act, R.S.B.C., ch. 239, s. 3.1 (1974).

mid-1960s with the establishment of the regional district system. Before the 1960s, management existed in the form of settlement programs and regulations for forestry, mining, and fishing, as it did in all areas falling within the province's boundaries. But with rapid growth following the Second World War, the need for increased planning and the regulation of development became apparent. This, in the 1960s, led to a concerted effort to implement plans and controls to manage change on the land. Politicians, experts, and community members offered competing visions for the future and pushed to have them established through regulatory mechanisms. The resulting mandate of the Islands Trust, along with the organization's initial policy documents, enshrined a particular vision of the Gulf Islands as a "special" and "unique" pastoral environment, which had emerged as the dominant conception of this region throughout the course of the twentieth century.

Individuals are able to act in a multitude of ways to shape the world so as to conform with their vision. Property owners may clear land, erect fences, put sheep out to pasture, or tend gardens. Alternatively, they may choose architectural styles or activities that recreate elements of their idealized vision. While these individual choices are part of a process that shapes the overall environment, communities, groups, and governments, as collectives, also actively work to give form to their shared perceptions. In the Gulf Islands, during the second half of the twentieth century, the primary method for this collective shaping of the physical landscape was through land-use planning and other environmental management policies. In this article I explore and examine these mechanisms. I argue that a perception of the Gulf Islands as a pastoral environment, one fit for an idyllic Arcadian lifestyle, became increasingly predominant through the first half of the twentieth century. This pastoral perception, in turn, informed land-use debates and decisions that began in the mid-1960s, led to the specific formulation of the Islands Trust in 1974, and guided the policy choices this organization made during its first years of operation. While it is necessary to explore the development of the pastoral conception of the Gulf Islands in its broad twentieth-century context, this is not my primary task. Numerous environmental historians have skilfully addressed the issue of how individual and group perceptions of the environment form. Instead, I hope to develop an understanding of how these perceptions are used to shape land-use planning policy and, subsequently, the environments with which they are concerned.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the Gulf Islands were not very different from other rural regions in British Columbia. They were characterized by a small population pursuing mixed economic activities to supplement subsistence or small-scale commercial agricultural operations.³ By the end of the 1960s, however, residents, politicians, developers, and preservationists painted the Gulf Islands as "special" and "unique." Such perceptions of the region came, in part, from the interactions of individuals and groups with the physical landscape. Islands, in general, hold a particular allure in the Western imagination as spaces of retreat and relaxation, and the Gulf Islands, with their open meadows, moderate climate, agricultural valleys, and rugged forested terrain, were easy for early observers to interpret as an idyllic pastoral world. Relaying the story of a tour through the Islands at the turn of the century, a reporter for the *Times Colonist* was pleased to note that numerous farms existed to "redeem the islands from the lonely savagery of unreclaimed nature."⁴ As another *Colonist* reporter described in 1922, the "sunny open spaces" broke up the otherwise dense, dark coastal forest and presented a natural pastoral landscape where "sweet wild flowers and fruits bloomed and ripened in the soft salubrious air."⁵ Together, the climate, topography, vegetation, and human intervention created a Gulf Islands environment that was unique in Canada, fostering a perception of the region as something akin to an "Eden" on the West Coast.⁶ Such ideas were also deeply rooted in the cultural fabric that constrained, shaped, and informed the impressions of individuals and groups interacting with the space. Political, economic, and cultural discourses, commonly grouped under the banner of agrarianism (which valorizes the moral worth of agriculture and agricultural lifestyles, anti-modern resistance to disruptions brought on by the modernization of society, and cultural associations with and metaphorical uses of island environments), all worked together to shape perceptions of the Gulf Islands' physical environment.⁷ A full understanding of an idea of the Gulf Islands as

³ R.W. Sandwell, *Contesting Rural Space: Land Policy and the Practices of Resettlement on Saltspring Island, 1859-1891* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005).

⁴ "A Delightful Holiday Trip," *Times Colonist* (hereafter *Colonist*), 20 August 1901.

⁵ "Gulf Islands of British Columbia," *Colonist*, 3 December 1922.

⁶ Pete Loudon, "Big City Hustle-Bustle Serpent in Gulf 'Eden,'" *Victoria Daily Times* (hereafter *Times*), 15 February 1964.

⁷ For a more thorough analysis of these phenomena in the Gulf Islands, see J.L. Weller, "Living on 'Scenery and Fresh Air': Land-Use Planning and Environmental Regulation in the Gulf Islands" (MA thesis, University of Victoria, 2016). These cultural elements were, of course, not unique to the Gulf Islands. In varying ways they affected development across British Columbia and throughout Canada. A number of impressive studies explore these elements in other historical contexts: David Demeritt, "Visions of Agriculture in British

a special/unique pastoral environment, then, needs to see such an idea as an outgrowth of the interaction between individuals and groups and their broad physical and cultural environments.

During the first half of the twentieth century, however, the Gulf Islands were not uniformly accepted as a pastoral environment wherein a leisured rural lifestyle could be maintained, as they came to be in the postwar period. Rather, like many rural areas in the province, the Islands were home to a mixed economy.⁸ Primarily due to geographic and transport limitations, large-scale commercial operations did not flourish; instead, the Islands' economy remained diverse, based on small-scale agriculture, logging, fishing, and tourism. Despite the realities of hard labour as settlers engaged the landscape and its resources in the pursuit of independence, depictions of the region penned by reporters, tourism promoters, travel writers, and Islanders themselves increasingly characterized the Islands as pastoral bastions of a leisured, Arcadian lifestyle. These depictions were not without a basis in reality. Apart from being expressions of appreciation for the physical environment, they focused on a small population of well-to-do English migrants drawn to the Islands in pursuit of a romantic, idyllic lifestyle.

English gentlemen and other wealthy newcomers were a prominent feature of settlement in British Columbia during the decades before the First World War. Unfortunately, because of the limitations of immigration records, the exact number of such settlers in the Gulf Islands is impossible to determine; however, based on broader trends, newspaper reports, and reflections by residents, it appears this population was sizeable. As a reporter for the *Colonist* noted in 1902, "the 'old country' element predominate[d] on the islands," where there were numerous "young Englishmen on small private means, who like[d] the freedom and open-air life and the peculiar charm of the islands."⁹ Marjory Harper estimates that, between 1891 and 1921, approximately twenty-four thousand of the 175,000 British settlers who came to British Columbia fell

Columbia," *BC Studies* 108, 29 (1995): 29-59; James A. Montmarquet, *The Idea of Agrarianism: From Hunter-Gatherer to Agrarian Radical in Western Culture* (Moscow: University of Idaho Press, 1989); Sharon Wall, *The Nurture of Nature: Childhood, Antimodernism and Ontario Summer Camps, 1920-55* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009); Ian McKay, *Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994); James E. Murton, *Creating a Modern Countryside: Liberalism and Land Resettlement in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007); John R. Gillis, "Not Continents in Miniature: Islands as Ecotones," *Island Studies Journal* 9, 1 (2014): 155-66; Godfrey Baldacchino, "Islands as Novelty Sites," *Geographical Review* 97, 2 (2007): 165-74.

⁸ Morton B. Stratton, "History of Agriculture on Salt Spring Island," unpublished report for Salt Spring Island Historical Society, 1991.

⁹ "Life on the Islands of British Columbia," *Colonist*, 2 February 1902.

into this category. The explanations for why so many of these gentlemen emigrants moved to Canada are diverse. For those second and subsequent sons who were denied an inheritance of land, traditional career outlets as clergymen, lawyers, doctors, and army officers became "either less popular, over-crowded, or too competitive." As a result, Marjory Harper argues, "these redundant products of the British public school system were ... dispatched across the Atlantic to seek their fortunes" in the colonies.¹⁰

More than just "push" factors were at work, however: a range of "pull" factors, such as the opening of the Canadian west, which provided many opportunities for land acquisition, business development, and adventure, also motivated potential settlers.¹¹ Many young Britons grew up reading romantic adventure stories about life in Canada and the United States "in which[] tales of the wild Indians and the intrepid hunter or cowboy ... were set against the backdrop of a rugged, primitive landscape, beckoning those who could afford it to a lifestyle seemingly more exciting and unrestricted than they could expect to find at home."¹² Important for the Gulf Islands in particular, romantic literature in the vein of the *Swiss Family Robinson* and/or *Robinson Crusoe* also regularly employed the trope of islands as places of adventure and freedom, creating for gentlemen emigrants an additional draw to the region. In addition to stories of adventure in the Canadian west, promotional literature geared towards prospective emigrants cited promising economic opportunities, a mild climate, strong ties to Britain, and "well-developed cultural and social amenities" as reasons to take up residence in British Columbia.¹³ Furthermore, the agricultural pursuits of dairying, fruit farming, and ranching, which predominated in the province, offered the hope of an Arcadian lifestyle that many such migrants sought.¹⁴ In the Gulf Islands, with its rolling hills, open meadows, access to urban centres, and small diverse farm operations, gentlemen farmers found a particularly fitting pastoral landscape upon which to project their desires. As noted above, as early as 1902, newspaper articles commented on the growing "old

¹⁰ Marjory Harper, "Aristocratic Adventurers: British Gentlemen Emigrants on the North American Frontier, ca. 1880-1920," *Journal of the West* 36, 2 (1997): 41.

¹¹ Patrick Dunae, *Gentlemen Emigrants: From the British Public Schools to the Canadian Frontier* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1981), 5-7.

¹² Harper, "Aristocratic Adventurers," 42. While it is likely that such books were not the deciding factor for many people who were considering moving overseas, they certainly contributed to a wider desire for adventure that is difficult to quantify but that was certainly influential.

¹³ Harper, "Aristocratic Adventures," 48.

¹⁴ Jason Bennett, "Apple of the Empire: Landscape and Imperial Identity in Turn-of-the-Century British Columbia," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, n.s. 9 (1998): 63-92.

country” element in the Gulf Islands. There was a “peculiar attraction for a certain class of settler,” one *Colonist* reporter noted, a settler who was seeking the most “pleasant and peaceful existence imaginable” in an area in which: “he is out of the world altogether, and yet, when he wants, for a change, the stir and bustle of city life, he can get on board one of the steamers plying on the island route and be in Victoria in a few hours.”¹⁵ Mixed agriculture, the reporter further observed, promised a reasonable profit with far less work than was endured by the “farmers in Ontario.”¹⁶ But, despite the lure of an Arcadian paradise in British Columbia, many of the English who did migrate experienced failures and bankruptcy upon confronting the hardship and isolation of frontier life.

For those who had been disappointed, the outbreak of the First World War provided an escape: they and thousands of others driven by patriotism, ideas of adventure, and/or the desire to escape would respond to the call of duty and return to England. According to Harper, after four years of brutal war in Europe only a minority of English migrants returned “in an attempt to take up the threads of their old life,” but what they found was a “radically altered economic and social climate.”¹⁷ To the young gentlemen who survived the war, Canada was no longer so attractive. Economically, the immediate postwar years were ones of depression and limited growth as the Western world struggled to return to normalcy. In British Columbia, the economy quickly rebounded due to an expanding forestry sector, but such enterprise offered little incentive for further increasing the population of settled agriculturalists. Socially, the institutions of British colonial expansion were not as dominant after the war, and, in 1925, the British government’s abolition of primogeniture (the practice of granting first sons exclusive rights to family inheritance) allowed second sons greater opportunity at home, further reducing their desire to go abroad.¹⁸ Finally, postwar British Columbia, Harper argues, was more “antagonistic than the gently mocking environment of the pre-war West.” Yet, in the Gulf Islands, where it is reasonable to conclude that, like elsewhere in the province, there was a diminishing presence of gentlemen settlers, the “old-country” atmosphere of leisured gentlemen immigrants proved durable. Although it is difficult to tie this impression to demographic realities, given the inadequacy of migration and settlement statistics, persistent beliefs that the Islands were the

¹⁵ “Life on the Islands of British Columbia,” *Colonist*, 2 February 1902.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Harper, “Aristocratic Adventurers,” 50.

¹⁸ Dunae, *Gentlemen Emigrants*, 225–26.

haunts of leisured English gentry had a significant impact on the region's long-term identity.

The pastoral depiction of the Islands that drew upon this period of English settlement became increasingly hegemonic with the growth of the tourist industry in the region during the interwar period. Anticipating tremendous growth in tourism, calls emerged from Islanders at the end of the 1920s to promote the sector as a means of economic development.¹⁹ Alongside calls for better access in order to support tourism, a growing campaign to "sell" the Islands drew upon an idealization of the pastoral landscape to draw in visitors. Promoters depicted the Islands as a pastoral retreat, praising the scenery, the rural charms, the "old-country" element, the leisured pace, the wild forests, and the domesticated farms of the region. As Robert Connell, writing for the *Colonist*, comments:

But to the wonderment at this scenery of water, rock, and vegetation, which makes the Gulf Islands without parallel on either Atlantic or Pacific Coasts, is added a domestic charm by the farmhouses and more leisured homes that appear along the lower shores or crown the less formidable headlands.²⁰

Promoters increasingly depicted the Islands' environment so as to fulfill the needs of the tourism industry, and, in the process, they relegated the local agricultural and industrial economies to serving as an aesthetic backdrop, adding a "domestic charm" to Island scenery. This effort to "sell" the Islands was largely successful. The campaign, along with improved access to the region brought about by the expansion of the ferry service in the 1930s, not only bolstered tourism but also contributed to an increasing interest in real estate development in the 1940s.

The immediate post-Second World War decades witnessed dramatic changes on the Gulf Islands. A wartime real estate boom – fuelled in part by the Canada-wide emergence of the institution of retirement, an aging settler population, the out-migration of youth (driven by the war as well as by the decline of the agriculture-based Islands economy) – led to a reduced and increasingly aged population.²¹ At the same time, across the

¹⁹ Charles F.M. Bultrum, "Bring Tourists to the Gulf Islands, Letter" *Province*, 1 December 1929, magazine section; "A Paradise for Tourists: Says Gulf Island Member in Telling Legislature about His Constituency," *Times*, 19 February 1931. For a description of the rise of tourism and consumer culture in British Columbia during the 1930s and 1940s, see: Michael Dawson, *Selling British Columbia: Tourism and Consumer Culture, 1890-1970* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004).

²⁰ Robert Connell, "Among the Gulf Islands," *Colonist*, 25 September 1938, magazine section.

²¹ Lynn McDonald and Richard Wanner, *Retirement in Canada* (Toronto: Butterworths, 1990); "Gulf Islands Sanctuary of Seniors," *Vancouver Sun*, 13 February 1968; "Gulf Islands' Trade

province and beyond, widespread economic prosperity (characterized by higher wages, paid vacations, and reduced work hours), the rapid expansion of urban centres, improved and expanded transportation networks, and a prominent interest in reconnecting with nature or “getting away from it all” created an increasing demand for the development of homes, seasonal residences, and tourist facilities on the Islands.²²

Despite this demand, early in the 1950s, challenges in establishing a regular and adequate ferry connection to all of the Islands hindered growth.²³ But, with the establishment of a steady and convenient transportation network during the latter half of the decade, the Gulf Islands’ popularity among travellers in southern British Columbia and the United States steadily increased.²⁴ By 1960, the Islands were already a popular summer destination. In addition to the drivers noted above, this popularity was the result of pre-existing efforts by provincial authorities to “sell” the Gulf Islands to tourists, a campaign that increased in intensity during the 1950s. As did earlier publications, these promotions drew upon a pastoral depiction; for example, one government travel bureau tourist brochure from 1950 noted the quaint beauty of the Islands encountered as “one approaches close enough to see the blue smoke of the fishing villages or the colour of small settlements.” Promotional materials also worked with wider cultural ideas about “Island life” as offering a relaxed, eminently desirable existence in a coastal paradise. Invoking images of the Hawaiian Islands, the brochure asks readers: “Who is there who has not dreamed of them [the Pacific Islands] at some time or another? Of visiting if not living on one?” The local and more accessible answer to this perceived desire, the brochure continues, is the Gulf Islands. There, one could find a place where “the sun does shine, the climate is mild,

Killed by Cost of Reaching Markets,” *Times*, 14 November 1953; “Gulf Islands in Industrial Slump: Now Eye Tourists,” *Vancouver Sun*, 3 December 1953.

²² “Where to Quit Work in BC,” *Vancouver Sun*, 10 August 1940, magazine section; “Many People Buying Islands’ Waterfront,” *Times*, 20 September 1943; “Gulf Islands in Demand for Homes,” *Colonist*, 21 September 1943.

²³ “Chamber of Commerce Committee Will Seek Improved Ferry Service,” *Colonist*, 19 July 1951; “Ferry Run to Islands Given Study,” *Colonist*, 11 November 1951; “Gulf Islands Ferry Link,” *Colonist*, 21 November 1951; “Wrathful Mayne Island Residents Condemn CPR Steamship Service,” *Colonist*, 6 January 1951; “Federal Aid to Islands Brings High Praise,” *Colonist*, 21 March 1952; “Ferry Change Feared,” *Colonist*, 30 October 1952; “Better Service for Islands,” *Colonist*, 23 April 1953; “Long Awaited Ship Services Resumes Today,” *Colonist*, 26 April 1953; “Ship Service Cut Blow to Islands,” *Colonist*, 30 August 1953; “Gulf Islands to Protest Cut,” *Colonist*, 3 September 1953.

²⁴ “Constructive Ship Proposals,” *Times*, 8 September 1953; “Coast Ferries’ Proposed Daily Service from Gulf Islands,” *Colonist*, 14 January 1954; “New Deal Pledged for Gulf Islands,” *Colonist*, 23 July 1954; “Gulf Islands Can’t Cope with Sudden Tourist Boom,” *Colonist*, 27 May 1956.

and the atmosphere is such that many have retired to them." Linking this environment to long-established vacation isles in the Caribbean and Mediterranean, the writer describes travellers to the Gulf Islands as being content to leave the more strenuous things to "mañana."²⁵ Such promotional materials, then, set out to sell not only the Islands environment but also the relaxed Islands lifestyle. The "leisure and contentment" available there, Gulf Islands MLA Earle Westwood told the House in 1961, constituted "the most important single commodity we have to sell tourists."²⁶ These efforts to sell the Islands were only bolstered by W.A.C. Bennett's establishment of the BC Ferry Corporation in 1958, which took over the Gulf Islands ferry service and, in the following years, instituted a determined promotional campaign that drew upon earlier depictions of pastoral and leisured lifestyles.²⁷ As a result, according to Charles Kahn's history of Saltspring Island, "connections with the outside world improved dramatically."²⁸ More than just visitors, however, the Islands were attracting a growing number of seasonal and full-time residents.

Another result of the provincial government's commitment to increased ferry service at the end of the 1950s was that developers and would-be property owners quickly recognized the potential for development on the Islands. Until 1966, the number of full-time residents departing the Islands tended to outweigh new arrivals; after this date, however, the population began to increase rapidly.²⁹ Demand pushed land prices to a premium. In 1968, Moira Farrow, writing for the *Vancouver Sun*, interviewed a Mayne Island real estate agent who explained that prices

²⁵ British Columbia Archives (hereafter BCA), British Columbia Government Travel Bureau, NWP 971.96 G971, *British Columbia's Enchanting Gulf Islands*, 1950.

²⁶ "Visiting British Columbia: A Nice PLACE to Go," *Gulf Islander*, 25 February 1961.

²⁷ The BC Ferry Corporation emerged out of a labour dispute brought on by the Seafarers International Union, which "struck the CPR ferry connection between Vancouver and Victoria and sympathetic work stoppages threatened the Black Ball Line, the only other ferry service" between the two. W.A.C. Bennett, realizing the threat a coastal ferry shutdown held for the region's economy, proclaimed the Civil Defence Act, taking over the Black Ball Line and subsequently forcing both sides to return to work. Coming out of the strike, however, Bennett recognized the importance of a ferry system to provincial transportation networks and purchased Black Ball Ferries, going into competition with the CPR. The BC Ferry Corporation thrived, and overtime pushed the CPR out of business. See David Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1983), 269-72. For an example of the BC Ferry Corporation's Gulf Islands promotional campaign, see BCA, British Columbia Ferry Authority, NWP 971.1 Gu B862cr, *Cruise British Columbia's Sunny Gulf Islands via BC Ferries*, 1963.

²⁸ Charles Kahn, *Salt Spring: The Story of an Island* (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing, 1998), 277.

²⁹ Between 1966 and 1971 the population on the Gulf Islands increased from 3,171 to 4,538. See Barbara Prescott, *Gulf Islands User Study*, Research Section, Planning Division, Parks Branch, Department of Recreation and Travel Industry, Victoria, British Columbia, 1976.

for waterfront property had doubled over the previous two years.³⁰ To keep up with demand, real estate firms were subdividing large tracts of land and individuals bought them up almost as quickly as they went on sale. Perhaps the most controversial of these developments was the twelve hundred-acre (4.8 sq km) Magic Lake Estates on North Pender Island, which transformed the land around Dead Cow swamp into thirteen hundred residential lots. Nor was interest in the Islands limited to neighbouring urban centres: across Canada, the United States, and internationally, would-be property investors, retirees, and vacationers were looking to the Gulf Islands.³¹ Unfortunately, this development pressure was not controlled. As unorganized territory, the Gulf Islands were without adequate land-use regulations, and unrestrained development quickly became a source of great concern.³² Uneasy about the impact such development would create, residents such as Jean Lockwood, editor of the Galiano-based newspaper the *Gulf Islander*, lamented the “discovery” of the Islands by “day-trippers,” “litter-bugs,” and “speculators” whom she saw as ruining the traditional way of life with their garbage and calls to “modernize” the region.³³ “We like our black-topped roads,” Lockwood explains, “but we don’t want sidewalks. We like our country lanes and split rail fences – and our party lines. If we didn’t like the woods and bush and beaches, we wouldn’t be here.”³⁴ Even Premier Bennett, who eight years earlier had optimistically predicted that the Islands were on

³⁰ Moira Farrow, “Gulf Islands Become a Gold Mine,” *Vancouver Sun*, 29 August 1968.

³¹ “Tourists Flock to Gulf Islands,” *Colonist*, 5 August 1960. A great deal of advertisement was directed at the Prairie provinces, where rising prosperity from the postwar oilfield boom created a large population looking to invest their money in a booming real estate market. “You Can Take a Boy Out of the Country...,” *Times*, 6 September 1967; “German Family Owns 3,000 Island Acres,” *Times*, 12 January 1962.

³² Until 1965, when the Bennett government, recognizing the need for controlled development of resources and land, passed legislation providing for the creation of regional districts, all areas in the province that were not incorporated into municipalities were controlled in a piecemeal fashion. In unorganized territory such as the Gulf Islands, which did not fall under municipal jurisdiction, services such as water and sewer systems, fire protection, and hospitals were provided by a variety of special purpose boards, and land management functions were carried out on an ad hoc basis by various provincial government departments. With no mechanism for comprehensive planning in these unorganized areas, residents received only minimal services and lacked control over development. Thus, in 1965, the BC Legislature created twenty-eight regional districts to assume planning responsibility on these lands. The Gulf Islands were not, however, amalgamated within a single district; instead, the Islands were included in seven different districts, which varied in the level of attention paid to them, resulting in a ranging variety and quality of services. See Laura Kathryn Porcher, “The Islands Trust: An Institutional Experiment in the Management of Scarce Natural and Social Resources” (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 1980), 24–25.

³³ “For Lo, the Winter Is Past, and the Time of the Litterbug Is Come!,” *Gulf Islander*, 28 February 1964; “Notes and News,” *Gulf Islander*, 5 February 1965.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

the doorstep of rapid development, began to express concern. During a 1963 speech inaugurating a new ferry, the *Queen of the Islands*, Bennett expressed his hope that, despite greater access, the ferry would not "accelerate the relaxed tempo" of Islanders' lives.³⁵ While Islanders were strident in their opposition to development, a clear articulation of what was to be preserved took more time to develop.³⁶

By the late 1960s, Islanders responded to the perceived threat that unbridled development posed to the Gulf Islands' "way of life" with a more strongly articulated, and distinct, regional identity to act as a reference for opposition. As Alan Gordon argues, "threats to the character of place often, paradoxically, involved an entrenchment of 'distinctive' cultural features."³⁷ As well, by the 1960s, many people living on the Islands had no family roots in the region. The Gulf Islanders' idea of "community" or "identity" was, therefore, as Ann Rayner observes, much more "artificially constructed than in other rural regions, where historically-continuous social relations" and habitation persisted. In turn, Gulf Islanders often invoked "the talisman of 'community' in order to establish authority and moral ownership of the land and to mount opposition to further development in the area."³⁸ In forging this community identity, Islanders drew upon those Arcadian ideals and pastoral depictions that had been projected throughout the first half of the twentieth century. But this process of identity formation was not immediate, nor was it as simple as this may suggest; rather, it was an ongoing negotiation among residents, new and old, who sought to make sense of, benefit from, and/or control the changes occurring around them.

One rhetorical position adopted in the 1960s defined the Gulf Islands, in part, as a fragile ecosystem that was under threat. However, given the extensive history of material use, settlement, and resource exploitation, a case for the Islands as "pristine" was both hard to maintain and out of keeping with the lifestyle elements so important to many residents. Accordingly, Islanders more commonly came to adopt and promote a sense of the region's "special" and "unique" lifestyle, one very much in keeping with an Arcadian tradition, and they viewed their ecological values within this framework. The landscape came to embody

³⁵ Terry Hammond, "Paradise Found by New Ferry Link but Islanders May Call It Paradise Lost," *Colonist*, 5 July 1963.

³⁶ "Gulf Islands Growth 'Shocking Disgrace,'" *Times*, 16 May 1968; "We Are Destroying the Unique Gulf Islands," *Province*, 18 June 1968.

³⁷ Alan Gordon, *Making Public Pasts: The Contested Terrain of Montréal's Public Memories, 1891-1930* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 13.

³⁸ Anne Patricia Rayner, "Everything Becomes an Island: Gulf Islands Writing and the Construction of Region" (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 1995), 62.

the Arcadian ideal so overwhelmingly that, as Rayner argues, “other characteristics of place – economics, social organization, government, and politics, for example – appear to fall inevitably into the category of pastoral.” Agriculture and the evidence of land use became less a means of improving the economic strength of the Islands and more a means of bolstering “claims to the region’s ‘rural’ character.” In using agriculture in this way, Rayner continues, “the pastoral becomes a charming illusion: the landscape that was once used for these purposes retains its visual integrity, but its persistence depends not on stable conditions but on deliberate steps taken to preserve it.”³⁹ This is not to say that the creation of this identity was an entirely conscious or deliberate process undertaken to oppose development. Identity formation would serve this purpose, no doubt, but it was also a natural tendency among individuals who were new to an environment and were seeking to define their place and their attachments to the landscape. Through local histories, guidebooks, travel accounts, and newspapers, the identity of “Gulf Islanders” as living an Arcadian lifestyle within a pastoral environment gained legitimacy and came to dominate public understanding. Uncontrolled development, then, was far more than an affront to the ecological integrity of the Islands: it was a threat to a special and unique way of life rooted in this landscape.

Calls to preserve and control development on the Islands gained attention from regional and provincial politicians, but, throughout the latter half of the 1960s, the regional district planning authorities were slow to act. This lack of effort to limit development can be understood not only as an outgrowth of the district’s desire to promote growth, both as a measure of economic success and as a means of increasing its tax base, but also as a result of the peripheral nature of the Gulf Islands relative to the district’s more populous urban core. In late October 1969, as pressure mounted for the provincial government to respond to the perceived failure of the regional district, Social Credit minister of municipal affairs Dan Campbell imposed a new community planning area on the Islands. This measure put a halt to small-lot (under one acre [0.4 hectare]) developments, which many saw as the source of the greatest pressure, by establishing a minimum lot size of ten acres (four hectares) for all future subdivision on the Islands. This “ten-acre freeze” was presented by Campbell as a “crude” mechanism to limit residential density, but one that would provide the regional district planning boards with a “breathing spell” in which to prepare formal plans for the Islands.⁴⁰

³⁹ Rayner, “Everything Becomes an Island,” 47.

⁴⁰ “Subdividing Halt Called,” *Colonist*, 29 October 1969.

The implementation of the ten-acre freeze marked the beginning of a concerted effort on the part of the province and regional planning authorities to find a solution to land-use management issues in the Gulf Islands. Land-use planning, however, is not a rapid process, and the degree of commitment exhibited by regional authorities varied across districts. Even for the Capital Regional District (CRD), the most active of any of the planning authorities, three years of studies, consultations, drafts, and revisions did not bring about ministerial approval of any substantial land-use regulations. It was not until 1972, when the NDP took control of the provincial government, that innovative efforts to address issues on the Gulf Islands began to take form. After two decades of electoral success under the leadership of W.A.C. Bennett, the New Democrats led by Dave Barrett defeated the Social Credit government. The NDP's campaign motto, "Enough Is Enough," captured the attention of voters who, since the previous election, were disillusioned with the Social Credit government's handling of three years of "inflation, labour strife, a slowing economy, automation in the extractive industries, unwise cabinet appointments," and Bennett's growing detachment from the general population.⁴¹ During the campaign, questions surrounding land-use planning were hotly debated.⁴² The New Democrats ran on a series of promises to stop excessive development, push back against big business interests, and maintain land for the good of the people.

Under the leadership of Dave Barrett, an energetic politician with a desire for big change, the new government was, as Barrett recalls, "free and unfettered to roam in new directions."⁴³ Sensing a historic and unlikely to be repeated opportunity, Barrett and his colleagues moved quickly to implement the changes they felt the province needed.⁴⁴ Where the W.A.C. Bennett government passed about forty bills during a legislative session, the new NDP government enacted ten times as many

⁴¹ Richard Rajala summarizing George Woodcock, *British Columbia: A History of the Province* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1990), 246-47, 266; Richard Rajala, "Forests and Fish: The 1972 Coast Logging Guidelines and British Columbia's First NDP Government," *BC Studies* 159 (2008): 82.

⁴² Debates around land-use issues were largely focused on the loss of farmland. During the campaign, all three parties promised some solution to the issue. See Geoff Meggs and Rod Mickleburgh, *The Art of the Impossible: Dave Barrett and the NDP in Power, 1972-1975* (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing, 2012), 74.

⁴³ Dave Barrett and William Miller, *Barrett: A Passionate Political Life* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1995), 61.

⁴⁴ For further reading on the 1972-75 NDP government, see Meggs and Mickleburgh, *Art of the Impossible*; Barrett and Miller, *Barrett*; Paul Hurmuses, *Power without Glory: The Rise and Fall of the NDP Government in British Columbia* (Vancouver: Balsam Press, 1976); Lorne Kavic and Garry Nixon, *The 1200 Days: A Shattered Dream - Dave Barrett and the NDP in BC, 1972-75* (Coquitlam, BC: Kaen, 1978).

in its first year alone.⁴⁵ While the new government put many pieces of legislation forward, it was not until 1974, when it passed the Islands Trust Act, that it responded to calls from residents; local, provincial, and federal politicians; and conservationists to preserve the Gulf Islands. Standing in the Legislative Assembly on 24 April 1974, Minister of Municipal Affairs James Lorimer presented Bill 112, the Islands Trust Act. As noted earlier, the object of the act was “to preserve and protect the trust area and its unique amenities and environment for the benefit of the residents of the trust area and of British Columbia generally.”⁴⁶ To accomplish this rather ambitious and loosely defined task, the Islands Trust was to consist of three general trustees appointed by cabinet and twenty-six local trustees, two elected from each of thirteen designated islands. Sitting for a period of two years, the trustees held differing responsibilities. General trustees were appointed to represent wider provincial interests, whereas local trustees brought the diverse opinions of the individual islands to the table. Issues pertaining to the Islands were determined as either general (affecting more than one of the islands) or local (affecting only one island) affairs, a designation determined by the chair, who would be chosen by the minister from among the general trustees. The collection of twenty-nine trustees formed the informal Islands Trust Council, which was to discuss matters of general concern and make recommendations to the General Trust Council (consisting of the three general trustees and two local trustees, elected by their peers).⁴⁷

The original powers given to the Islands Trust, however, were limited considering the scope of its mandate. The Islands Trust Act, as Porcher explains, “gave the Trust no powers to systematically plan or regulate development on the Islands.” That jurisdiction remained with regional districts through community plans and zoning and subdivision bylaws;⁴⁸ rather, the trust was meant to encourage and assist the planning process and “coordinate the activities of the different departments of government and the Crown corporations as they dealt with the islands,” yet, beyond the power to veto plans and bylaws put forward, the trust had no representation from these other departments nor did it have any power to impose coordination.⁴⁹ The duties of the Islands Trust, therefore, included such

⁴⁵ Jean Barman, *The West beyond the West: A History of British Columbia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 323.

⁴⁶ Islands Trust Act, R.S.B.C., ch. 239, s. 3.1 (1974).

⁴⁷ Islands Trust Act, R.S.B.C. (1974); Laura Kathryn Porcher, “The Islands Trust: An Institutional Experiment in the Management of Scarce Natural and Social Resources” (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1980), 30–31.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁴⁹ Province of British Columbia, *Hansard*, James Lorimer, 21 May 1974, 3259.

tasks as the recommendation to cabinet of preservation and protection policies for the trust area as well as the coordination of and input into the development and implementation of these policies. Most significantly, the act gave the trust veto powers over all community plans, regional plans, zoning and subdivision bylaws, and land-use contracts within the trust area as well as power of approval over construction and alteration of buildings and other improvements. Finally, the act required the province to give notice to the Islands Trust before developing or disposing of any Crown land in the trust area.⁵⁰ The debate that emerged immediately after the government presented the act to the legislature, and which continued to dominate discussion, did little to question the general thrust of preserving the Islands' "unique amenities and environment" and, instead, focused primarily on the structural issue of the make-up of the Trust Council.

Critics believed that ministerial appointment of the three general trustees, whose veto power could overrule the desires of the twenty-six duly elected representatives, verified their fear of provincial domination over the region. MLAs, regional directors, and local residents felt the structure of the Trust Council overshadowed the desires of residents. In a series of public meetings sponsored by Saanich-Gulf Islands MLA Hugh Curtis, a member of the opposition Social Credit Party, and local Islands chambers of commerce, Islanders complained that the trust was being given too much power.⁵¹ At one such meeting, a local resident presented a copy of an NDP caucus newsletter entitled *MLAs at Work* as evidence of the "true" intentions of the government. In the newsletter, an article entitled "Playboy Paradise Plucked by People" commended the success of the NDP at bringing to an end the "development of the Gulf Islands in the limited interest of Islanders and landowners ... the rip-off development in the islands by greedy speculators and fast-buck recreation lot developers ... [and] the end of the influence of rich foreign landowners who range from German barons to Hong Kong sweatshop bosses and California surgeons."⁵² Given such crass allusions, it is little wonder that Islands residents felt they were coming under the control of a provincial government that failed to respect their right to control their own affairs. Hugh Curtis, despite having originally endorsed the idea of the trust, embraced the controversy as a vehicle to drive home a message

⁵⁰ Porcher, "Islands Trust," 32-33.

⁵¹ "Will Trust Make Them Coney Islands?" *Vancouver Sun*, 4 May 1974; Randy Glover, "Gulf Islands Trust Bill Labelled as 'a Catastrophe,'" *Vancouver Sun*, 7 May 1974.

⁵² "NDP Letters to Islanders Called Insult," *Province*, 11 May 1974; Province of British Columbia, *Hansard*, Hugh Curtis, 21 May 1974, 3260.

that the Islands Trust Act would undermine local democracy. Defending the Islands Trust Act as being, in fact, a boon to regional control, Municipal Affairs Minister Lorimer argued that “local governments ha[d] not fulfilled their responsibilities concerning the Islands.”⁵³ Under the trust, Lorimer insisted, Islanders would have greater input than under the jurisdiction of the CRD, where they held only two of forty-seven seats.⁵⁴ Lorimer’s rebuttal did little to quell the critics. Even Liberal David Anderson, who, five years previously, had put forward a proposal for an even more radical kind of Islands Trust,⁵⁵ was dissatisfied with “a bill which brings out the worst in the centralizing tendencies of this government.”⁵⁶ References to the “centralizing tendencies” of the NDP government must be understood within the context of more general criticisms of the social democratic agenda undertaken by the NDP.⁵⁷ As one editorial in the *Colonist* argued, the NDP government had moved fast to push forward its leftist agenda, and the author lamented the proliferation of unelected commissions such as “the Insurance Commission, Land Commission, Liquor Commission, Gulf Islands Trust Commission, Provincial Police Commission, Universities Council, [and the] Energy Commission.”⁵⁸ While the perceived threat to local democracy remained the focal point of the Islands Trust Act debate, at least one MLA saw fit to question the trust’s underlying premise.

In a House speech supportive of the Islands Trust Act, NDP Comox MLA Karen Sanford recalled that, during their research trip to the Gulf Islands, members of the Select Standing Committee on Municipal Affairs (a research committee tasked by Minister Lorimer after the NDP victory to study the Gulf Islands problem and whose report originally proposed the trust concept) would very often comment “that the islands were unique.” So frequently did members make this comment, Sanford noted, that they “often smiled when [they] used that term because [they] used it so often.” “But it’s true,” she persisted, “they [the Gulf Islands] are unique. They are different and they are special. And they need the

⁵³ “Islands Trust Act Carries Big ‘Stick,’” *Province*, 25 April 1974.

⁵⁴ Province of British Columbia, *Hansard*, James Lorimer, 21 May 1974, 3258.

⁵⁵ As reported in the *Colonist*, Anderson’s scheme would “declare the Gulf Islands a national park” and have “all private property ... expropriated,” but it would allow residents to remain on their land until, following the owner’s death, the property would revert to the federal government. See “Gulf Islands Should Become National Park,” *Colonist*, 27 October 1970.

⁵⁶ Province of British Columbia, *Hansard*, David Anderson, 21 May 1974, 3266.

⁵⁷ For an analysis of the social democratic policies implemented by the NDP, see Philip Resnick, “Social Democracy in Power: The Case of British Columbia,” *BC Studies* 34 (1977): 3–20. For further reading on Barrett’s tenure as premier, see Meggs and Mickleburgh, *Art of the Impossible*.

⁵⁸ “The New Democracy,” *Colonist*, 14 June 1974.

special protection that an island trust will provide them with."⁵⁹ Louis (Allan) Williams, Liberal MLA for Vancouver-Howe Sound, however, did not agree. "To suggest that the islands are unique," he reasoned, "is to deny that the Cariboo is unique, that the Kootenays is [*sic*] unique, that the Queen Charlottes are unique. And to suggest that this paternal legislation – or maybe I should say maternal legislation – is going to be the solution for these islands and their uniqueness, is absolutely beyond belief."⁶⁰ Williams's Liberal Party colleague David Anderson agreed that labelling the Gulf Islands as "unique" set a dangerous precedent, warning that, if such overriding of local democracy as embodied in the Islands Trust could be achieved in this context, then similar draconian action could be taken anywhere in the province.

The mere questioning of the entrenched presumption that the Gulf Islands constituted some kind of unique rural landscape is telling if for no other reason than its lack of traction. So firmly embedded in the collective imagination had the depiction of the Islands as a special pastoral environment become by this time that few even thought or desired to question it. While the Liberals raised the question, their concern found little purchase among the public or within the Official Opposition, and, this being the case, the debate around the Islands Trust remained focused on the perceived undemocratic process of appointing general trustees rather than having them elected by Islanders.⁶¹ In response to widespread criticism, the NDP government did soften the Islands Trust Act in small ways, such as by removing a section of the original bill that made any ruling by the trust "final and binding and not subject to appeal to, or review by, any court."⁶² But, with this concession, the government pushed through the creation of the Islands Trust.

While residents were still uneasy, the government's announcement of the general trustee appointments in early September quelled some of their fears. Hilary Brown, a long-time resident of Hornby Island and former member of that island's advisory planning commission, was appointed as chair of the Islands Trust. In addition to Brown, Marc Holmes, a well-respected Saltspring Island resident and former CRD director for the island, along with former Liberal MLA David Brousson, a part-time resident of Bowen Island, filled the remaining

⁵⁹ Province of British Columbia, *Hansard*, 21 May 1974, 3264–65.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 3265.

⁶¹ "Plan for Islands Trust Paternalism - Campbell," *Province*, 26 April 1974; "Islands Bill: Well Intended but Bad," *Vancouver Sun*, 23 May 1974; "Gulf Islanders 'Worried Sick' by New Act," *Colonist*, 27 August 1974.

⁶² "Islands Trust Softened," *Province*, 27 April 1974.

two general trustee positions.⁶³ With the trust in place, residents and critics settled into a new reality and allowed the trust to do the work it was meant to do, albeit amidst uncertainty about what that work would be. As David Jones argues, the Trust's ill-defined "preserve and protect mandate," which was unusual for a local decision-making body, "allowed the Trust to establish its own agenda and to develop policies to promote its philosophy."⁶⁴ While there was flexibility in what could be done, the pervasive and near uniformly accepted vision of the unique rural character of the Islands led to a set of policies and projects designed to preserve, protect, and promote the pastoral Gulf Islands environment. The policy of the trust, put forward in a 1975 document, reiterated the common tropes that defined the region and proposed an ambitious agenda to "regulate the rate and extent of development taking place in the Trust area and encourage types of development that [would] maintain the essentially rural nature of the islands."⁶⁵

The most pressing concern the Islands Trust tackled was that which brought it into existence – uncontrolled development. But, as the responsibility for planning remained the jurisdiction of regional districts, the trust was somewhat limited in its powers. It supported the development of community plans for each island, believing such plans to be the most effective mechanism for controlling land-use patterns in a way that was responsive to individual island desires. However, an issue arose because, even though the Islands Trust had the power to approve final plans, there was no obligation on the part of regional districts to consult it during the planning process. As well, due to years of uncontrolled development, the Islands Trust was utterly powerless to reverse what had already occurred. While conducted a few years later, a 1978 study identified 16,388 parcels of land in the trust area, a number that had not grown significantly since 1974. Of these parcels, 55 percent were vacant, 24 percent were seasonal dwellings, and 21 percent had permanent residences. Therefore, regardless of action taken by the trust, subdivision on the Islands *already* allowed for over double the number of residences that existed in 1974. According to this study, the population of the trust area, without any further subdivision, could in the most extreme case increase from 9,490, according to the 1976 census, to forty thousand people if every parcel was

⁶³ "Islands Trust Proclaimed, Board Named," *Colonist*, 7 September 1974.

⁶⁴ David Keith Jones, "British Columbia's Islands Trust on the Local Government Continuum: Administrative Agency Or Local Self-Government?" (MA thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1994), 89.

⁶⁵ BCA, Hilary Brown Papers, MS 1246, box 1/13, Policy of the Islands Trust, 2-3.

the site of a dwelling with an average of 2.8 occupants.⁶⁶ There were no agencies, including the Islands Trust, that could control the development of homes on privately owned residential lots. As such, the Islands Trust was somewhat hamstrung in its ability to influence property development patterns on the Islands. This inability to control such a significant aspect of landscape change was a major challenge for an organization tasked to preserve the pastoral character of the Islands. While the trust was limited in its ability to influence property development, it did have a great deal of power to control the discourse surrounding the Islands, to push for changes from (and support the work of) other government departments, and to use these mechanisms to achieve its preservationist mandate.

One of the most important areas of focus for preserving the pastoral character of the Gulf Islands had to do with the use of agricultural land.⁶⁷ In the original policy document, the Islands Trust committed to support the aims of the Land Commission, which oversaw the Agricultural Land Reserve system. The Land Commission, established only months after the 1972 election, was a province-wide NDP initiative to put a stop to the loss of limited farmland to residential and commercial development through the Land Reserve, described as "a form of zoning that protects the land from the encroachment of non-agricultural development and limits the use of land within the Reserve to agricultural and other uses that do not diminish the capability of the land to produce crops."⁶⁸ The goal of protecting farmland, which was at the core of the Land Commission, paralleled and supported the broader "character" preservation goals of the Islands Trust. As the Islands Trust policy documents claim: "farming activity is a land use that is essential to the character of the islands."⁶⁹ The Islands Trust was not solely concerned with the preservation of land devoted to farming, then: it was also concerned with the activity of farming as it served to enhance the overall "character" of the Islands.

The major initiative taken in support of agricultural activity in the initial years of the Islands Trust involved a study to determine "what special action and programs could be initiated to revive and encourage farming."⁷⁰ The trust hired Shirley Preston, a retired agriculturalist and former director of the provincial crop insurance program, to study the question. In an interview with the *Times Colonist*, Islands Trust chair

⁶⁶ Lorna Barr, *Land of the Trust Islands: A Review of Subdivision, Housing, and Ownership* (Victoria: Islands Trust, 1978).

⁶⁷ Christopher Garrish, "Unscrambling the Omelette: Understanding British Columbia's Agricultural Land Reserve," *BC Studies* 136 (2002): 25-55.

⁶⁸ BCA, Hilary Brown Papers, MS 1246, box 1/13, Policy of the Islands Trust, 6.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ BCA, Hilary Brown Papers, MS 1246, box 1/4, Briefing Notes for the Minister, 22 December 1975.

Hilary Brown made it clear that, while the Islands had been extensively farmed in the past, the idea was not to return to the “old type of farming.” Instead, Brown explained: “the committee is looking at the possibilities of establishing production on small holdings – especially for young people who are settling on the islands.”⁷¹ The young people to whom Brown is referring were part of a growing back-to-the-land movement in the 1970s, which drew a number of migrants to the Islands.⁷² As the contemporary iteration of older Arcadian and agrarian traditions, the back-to-the-land movement promoted a return to agricultural occupations as a rejection of consumerist culture. Depictions of the Gulf Islands as a pastoral landscape drew in these would-be agriculturalists, and the Islands Trust embraced their migration as a means of achieving preservation goals.

In her 1976 report, Preston embraces the vision of the Islands as presented by popular histories and cultural producers. She draws direct ties to the “desires” that brought original settlers to the Islands and those that continued to draw people there. “Despite the move away from farming on the Gulf Islands and the rapid increase in population,” Preston explains, “the desire for a rural and independent type of lifestyle has changed little.”⁷³ The report is not, however, glowingly supportive of the back-to-the-land movement or other iterations of Arcadian idealism. Preston takes an especially pessimistic view of those who “prefer to incorporate other philosophies into their farm or garden practices,” referring to alternatives such as the production of “natural foods,” “organic farming,” or “refraining from all use of pesticides and commercial fertilizers.”⁷⁴ Instead, she presents a conservative assessment of how best to produce maximum yields and the challenges that faced producers. The most pressing concerns Preston identifies included the shortage of water and the lack of storage options, low soil fertility, inflated land prices, “costly and time-consuming transportation facilities,” inadequate training and research services, an aging land-owner population, challenges in

⁷¹ “Gulf Islands Studies for Agricultural Renewal,” *Times*, 12 April 1975.

⁷² For greater details on the back-to-the-lander movement, see Sharon Weaver, “First Encounters: 1970s Back-to-the-Land Cape Breton, NS and Denman, Hornby and Lasqueti Islands, BC,” *Oral History Forum* 30 (2010): 1–30; Terry Allen Simmons, “But We Must Cultivate Our Garden: 20th Century Pioneering in Rural British Columbia” (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1979); Jeffrey Jacob, *New Pioneers: The Back-to-the-Land Movement and the Search for a Sustainable Future* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997); Rebecca Kneale Gould, *At Home in Nature: Modern Homesteading and Spiritual Practice in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

⁷³ BCA, Hilary Brown Papers, MS 1246, box 1/20; Preston, L., “A Study of the Agricultural Resources and Potentials of the British Columbia Gulf Islands,” 8.

⁷⁴ Preston, L., “A Study of the Agricultural Resources and Potentials of the British Columbia Gulf Islands,” 23.

obtaining financing, and "inexperience, lack of 'know-how' and/or a lethargic attitude concerning modern methods of agricultural economics, production, grading, packaging, and sales."⁷⁵ With regard to many of these issues, caused as they were by environmental limitations or broader trends in agribusiness, the Islands Trust was powerless to act.

Despite these challenges, however, in the attempt to fulfill its preservationist objectives, the Islands Trust did devote considerable time in its first years of operation to upholding the perceived value of agriculture. Adopting the position that education was an essential first step, the Islands Trust began by offering a series of agricultural seminars on various islands.⁷⁶ Education, however, was of little use if land was not available. To address the issue of farmland preservation, the trust supported the work of the Land Commission and pressured that organization for reviews of the Islands so that land could be brought under the Agricultural Land Reserve. Apart from land preservation, the trust worked to make farmland, the price of which had increased dramatically over the previous decades, more accessible. In a brief to the BC Commission of Inquiry on Property Assessment and Taxation, the trust argued that the land-use controls presently available, such as zoning and bylaws, were effective forms of negative planning. But, while these methods might restrain development and "consequently preserve open space," they also tended to create clusters of residential density as opposed to more dispersed, low-impact settlement.⁷⁷ Consequently, there was an increasing need for "positive inducements" to reduce the incentive to subdivide land. The trust argued that a taxation system based on the assessed real estate value of the land was challenging for many who sought to keep their land as open space rather than to subdivide it. The existing system, the trust argued, favoured landholding by wealthy individuals who could afford to pay high taxes, exposing the Islands to a future in which they would "become a rich man's preserve or a shelter for foreign or other capital willing to pay high prices to buy and to hold land."⁷⁸ Asserting the unique "character" of the Islands and, therefore, the need for special treatment, the trust's brief states that the "objectives of any taxation policy then must be different in the Trust Area."⁷⁹ A solution, the brief argued, was to have tax assessments take into

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

⁷⁶ BCA, Hilary Brown Papers, MS 1246, box 1/14, report to the Islands, 2 September 1976, 6.

⁷⁷ BCA, Hilary Brown Papers, MS 1246, box 1/5, brief from the Islands Trust to the Commission of Inquiry on Property Assessment and Taxation, 14 January 1975, 2.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

account covenants, easements, reserves, and the ecological uniqueness or fragility of a site when determining market value, thus reducing the tax burden for those who retained open space and placed preservationist restrictions on their property.

The Islands Trust's concern for open space was not, however, limited to agricultural land. While retaining farmland and promoting agricultural activity as a means of preserving and creating the unique character of the Islands was a priority, preservation of forest lands, as a means of controlling subdivision, providing recreational space, and fostering a light industry in keeping with the character of the Islands was also important. In a 1975 brief to the Royal Commission on Forest Resources, the Islands Trust expressed concern over the retention of forested lands in the region. In order to achieve the preservation of forests, the trust supported in principle the Certified Tree Farm system. Such status, the brief argued, ensured that "the timber resource on some privately owned land [was] under sound management techniques" as well as allowing it to be "used by the public for recreation."⁸⁰ The concern, however, related to the ability of the owner to withdraw lands for development, as demonstrated by a controversy surrounding a proposal by MacMillan Bloedel in the late 1960s to develop up to 2,700 residential lots on 1,100 (4.5 sq km) of the total 8,500 acres (34 sq km) that the company owned on Galiano Island (a total that amounted to approximately 79 percent of the total land base).⁸¹ In order to dissuade property owners from developing forestlands, the trust supported a tax recapture provision that would require property owners to pay back taxes that did not apply while the land was under Certified Tree Farm status.

In addition to the large forestry companies such as MacMillan Bloedel, small-scale logging operators, who worked by acquiring cutting rights on smaller sections of land held by private property owners, presented both a benefit and a concern to the aims of the Islands Trust. As a benefit, small-scale logging operations produced materials for use by Islanders and brought wealth to the region. But, for privately owned property, little regulatory power was available, either to the trust or to other agencies, to limit the extent of clear-cutting.⁸² Given these concerns, the trust

⁸⁰ BCA, Hilary Brown Papers, MS 1246, box 1/5, brief of the Islands Trust to the Royal Commission on Forest Resources, 17 October 1975, 9.

⁸¹ "Island Proposal 'Madness,'" *Times*, 27 March 1972.

⁸² BCA, Hilary Brown Papers, MS 1246, box 1/5, brief of the Islands Trust to the Royal Commission on Forest Resources, 17 October 1975, 11–12. The main problem was lack of control. The deputy minister offered three possible routes that the Islands Trust could take through the Islands Trust Act: "That perhaps section 6 of the Islands Trust Act could be interpreted to allow the planning authority to limit tree-cutting through land use contracts

promoted a kind of "boutique logging" that would enhance the rural character of the Islands if conducted "on a scale appropriate for the island concerned."⁸³ Operators would move and gather logs "in a manner that [would be] the least damaging to the environment and in areas that [would] not conflict with other shoreline uses." As well, the trust hoped to see local sawmilling continue, restricted to "small mills supplying mostly local markets." But since milling would not enhance the pastoral imagery the trust sought to preserve, the mills would need to be "screened from public view."⁸⁴ Interestingly, the Islands Trust did not perceive extractive industries other than forestry, such as mining, quarrying, and drilling for hydrocarbons, to have a benefit for the Islands and disallowed such operations. Rather than such industrial and commercial development, which was not "generally in keeping with the Islands' character," the trust saw the local economy being grown by craftspeople pursuing "artistic occupations, small businesses, and workshops which serve local needs and provide employment" while representing "important elements of a rural environment."⁸⁵ The trust successfully inserted this vision into planning documents by insisting on controls around what land zoned for industrial or commercial development would entail. The 1976 Official Community Plan for Saturna Island defined industrial use as all "non-noxious and non-offensive use providing for the manufacture, storage, and transportation of goods and services."⁸⁶ Moreover, any use deemed by planners "to have a deleterious impact on adjacent land use, the natural environment, and the socio-economic structure of the community" would be subject to closure or denial.⁸⁷ In addition to efforts to preserve agricultural and forested lands, and encourage certain types of activities in order to maintain the unique pastoral character of the Islands, the

(now replaced by bylaws and development permits), plans, or bylaws, to preserve the aesthetic appeal of any existing trees and shrubs or other vegetation." Alternatively, it was suggested that the Islands Trust prepare regulations under section 11 (Islands Trust Act), which could then be approved through Order-in-Council. A third option suggested was that the Islands Trust could present an amendment to the Islands Trust Act through the Department of the Attorney General. See Porcher, "Islands Trust," 267-68.

⁸³ Howard Macdonald Stewart, "Five Easy Pieces on the Strait of Georgia: Reflections on the Historical Geography of the North Salish Sea" (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2014), 349.

⁸⁴ BCA, Hilary Brown Papers, MS 1246, box 1/13, the policy of the Islands Trust, August 1975, 7.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁸⁶ Capital Regional District, Planning Department, *Capital Regional District by-law No. 250, A by-law to designate the community plan for Saturna Island (contained within the Outer Gulf Islands Electoral Area) as the official community plan for the said area* (Victoria: Capital Regional District Planning Department, 1975), 6.4.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.4.2.

trust was also concerned with the connective tissue that linked these lands and activities together.

Transportation networks figured prominently in the trust's strategy of maintaining the rural character of the region. The Department of Highways established standardized roadway allowances and applied them uniformly across British Columbia, regulating road widths, requiring clearing on either side of roadways, and instituting grading limitations. For the Islands Trust, however, these broad stroke standards ran counter to the organization's objectives, requiring excessive "tree clearing and unsightly cuts and fills which destroy the pastoral nature of the islands."⁸⁸ As a response, trust officials met with the Department of Highways and succeeded in negotiating special standards for the Islands. In November 1976, the province announced new road designs for the Islands that would "reduce the number of fills required, allow for reduced road widths, permit increases in the maximum allowable grades and establish limits on maximum distances a road can run without a curve," thus helping to conserve "natural beauty and maintain a rural environment."⁸⁹ Beyond changes to the physical infrastructure, though, the trust also sought to address transportation activity. As it saw the issue, excessive reliance on automobiles undermined the character of the Islands. While it was certainly no small task to try to influence the transportation choices of residents and visitors, the trust attempted to have an impact by advocating BC Ferries and the Bureau of Transit to shift their emphasis from car ferry service to foot traffic. Both organizations agreed, and, while they did little to reduce car traffic, they did work to make foot traffic more efficient.⁹⁰

While the above is not a comprehensive examination of all of the activities undertaken by the Islands Trust during its first two years of operation, the themes presented demonstrate that the land-use policies that were implemented focused on preserving the unique rural character of the Islands. This character refers to both the tangible functions and forms, such as farmland, forests, roads, and clusters of development, and to the intangible but equally significant ingredients of Islands life, such as individuals' methods of transportation, occupations, and land-use activities. It was not easy for the trust to accomplish its preservationist aim, and it was unable to create immediate and drastic changes to the environment. For the most part, the initiatives discussed above, with the exception of work to develop special roadways standards, did not

⁸⁸ BCA, Hilary Brown Papers, MS 1246, box 1/4, briefing notes for the minister, 22 December 1975.

⁸⁹ "Islands Keep Winding Roads," *Times*, 27 November 1976.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 22 December 1975.

result in immediate or obvious changes to land-use or environmental conditions. But by espousing a pastoral image of the Gulf Islands, along with promoting the lifestyles deemed legitimate in such a space, the Islands Trust was able to embed these associations into land-use planning structures that would have long-term impacts.

Due to the requirement that the Islands Trust give final approval to all regional plans and bylaws, the Official Community Plan (OCP) became the most effective means of implementing the trust's ideas. As the Municipal Act describes them, OCPs are "a general statement of the broad objectives and policies of the local government respecting the form and character of existing and proposed land use and servicing requirements in the area covered by the plan."⁹¹ While an OCP did not commit the Regional District to any particular undertaking, it did ensure that no land-use practices could occur contrary to the guidelines set out in the plan. As the trust was committed to seeing these OCPs developed through community consultation and consensus, progress was slow. Beginning in 1972, regional planners worked with the various Islands to create island-specific community plans. Most of the large Gulf Islands – Saltspring, Galiano, South Pender, and Saturna – passed plans relatively quickly, completing work between 1974 and 1976. North Pender (and others, such as Denman and Hornby, outside this study area) was embroiled in contentious public debate and took longer, only having its plan approved at the end of the decade. While the timing and final details varied, the codification of the Islands' "unique rural character" was uniform throughout the documents. In the 1976 OCP for Saturna Island, a main overarching objective was "to preserve and protect the unique rural environment for future generations."⁹² Similarly, on Galiano Island the first criterion for determining land-use decisions was to accept that the "rural nature of the area shall be preserved."⁹³ Such objectives were prominent in all of the plans and are further reflected in the regulations that control specific land-uses. OCPs would be the primary guiding documents for land-use management in the Gulf Islands over the following forty years. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of

⁹¹ Municipal Act, R.S.C.B., 1987, ss. 945.

⁹² Capital Regional District, Planning Department, *Capital Regional District by-law No. 250, 2.2.3. A by-law to designate the community plan for Saturna Island (contained within the Outer Gulf Islands Electoral Area) as the official community plan for the said area* (Victoria: Capital Regional District Planning Department, 1975).

⁹³ Capital Regional District, Planning Department, *Capital Regional District by-law No. 218: A by-law to designate the community plan for North Pender Island (contained within the Outer Gulf Islands Electoral Area) as the official community plan for the said area* (Victoria: Capital Regional District Planning Department, 1975), 5.

this study to examine the plans in detail or to explore the ways in which they were reviewed and revised since their formation. However, given their guiding role in land-use management, it is safe to say that they have influenced the physical, social, and cultural environment of the Gulf Islands in ongoing and significant ways.

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In passing the Islands Trust Act in 1974, the NDP ushered in a new period of land-use planning in the Gulf Islands. After over a decade of calls from residents; local, provincial, and federal politicians; and conservationists to preserve the Islands, the provincial government established an organization whose mandate was to do just that. While an increasing range of actors became interested in the future of the region, the focus of debates centred on structural issues pertaining to topics such as local governance and individual property rights. However, throughout this process, the question that remained less clearly articulated by policy-makers was: What exactly is it about the Gulf Islands that merits preservation? Calls throughout the 1960s targeted the special/unique environment/character of the Gulf Islands as a reason for their preservation. This was a way to articulate pastoral conceptions of the landscape, along with their associated lifestyles, that, thanks to the interaction of various cultural, social, economic, and environmental features of the Gulf Islands, developed over the twentieth century. The eventual mandate of the newly formed Islands Trust, to “preserve and protect ... the unique amenities and environment” of the region, captured the ambiguity surrounding these notions in calls for preservation. Despite the lack of clarity inherent in this mandate, the early work of the Islands Trust offered a clear and well-defined interpretation of Gulf Islands amenities and environments. The trustees and staff embraced the pastoral conception of the region, which had been increasingly accepted during the decades before the trust’s creation. The trust then set about preserving and maintaining this environment through a policy program that supported farmland, forest, open space retention, and winding rural roads, and it encouraged activities such as small-scale agriculture, forestry, and handicrafts – all of which were deemed to be in keeping with the unique character of the Islands. The Islands Trust’s initial work of enshrining the pastoral character of the Islands within land-use planning policies and programs set out a framework for ongoing efforts to shape the landscape, economy, development, and identity of the region into the present day.