

# Forest project gets plants growing

Conservancy uses hands-on skill to diversify land

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A unique forest restoration project initiated by the Galiano Conservancy Association (GCA) aims to restore a commercial plantation to a fully functional forest ecosystem — all by hand.

Odin Scholz, restoration coordinator for the conservancy, said the parcel of land located near the centre of Galiano Island was logged twice and replanted in 1980 with homogenous Douglas-fir seedlings. He said the area has become a simplified version of what a natural forest should be.

Scholz and his team are now in the process of assisting nature to diversify the land and make it part of a complex ecosystem.

For the last six years, Scholz and the conservancy have worked on the land, mimicking nature by pulling down, cutting and pruning the trees without the use of machinery and with as little impact on the environment as possible.

“It does require a shift in thinking as we’re out there killing trees,” he said last Wednesday at the GCA office.

He said restoration is really about learning how to manage the forest. The 152-acre parcel of land has a long history of human disturbances and negative impact on the ecosystem.

While the plantation density is 1,000 to 2,000 trees per hectare, a natural old-growth forest contains 100 to 120 trees in the same space.

Scholz said the overcrowding prevents other native species from growing, which results in a deserted forest floor.

“We are trying to promote faster growth and create more complexity in the forest.”



PHOTO BY CHRIS STEPHENSON

From left, Galiano Conservancy Association members Odin Scholz, Ken Millard and Pauline Brest van Kempen take a break near the entrance of the forest restoration site last Wednesday.

The team is currently working on a 15-hectare parcel of the plantation. Workers use a pulley device to take down some of the trees, which opens up the forest canopy to let in more light and allow other plants to grow.

Scholz and his team also use hand-held saws to cut off the tops of trees, creating “snags.” Also known as standing dead trees, snags are vital in the forest ecosystem, he said. They are used by insects, small mammals and birds, including the pileated woodpecker.

Another technique the team uses is “girdling.” Scholz will take off the bark of the tree around the base, which slowly kills it. As the tree dies, it gradually loses its needles and branches, slowly letting more light reach the forest floor and providing nutrients to the soil.

The team also arranges stumps and moves piled wood debris around the for-

est to further diversify the area. Scholz stressed that none of the trees or wood are taken out or sold.

The conservancy has seen an improvement in the land over the six years, he said. Woodpeckers are looking for insects in the snags, native species of plants are growing and the soil is more fertile.

For the conservancy, the restoration project also provides a great educational tool for students who visit the area on field trips.

The conservancy brings in groups of students from Vancouver and Vancouver Island for a number of educational programs. Part of a field trip involves a guided walk in the woods, which allows students to see a sample of an old-growth forest, the plantation and the restoration site.

GCA environmental educator Patti Pringle said the educational programs help empower students environmentally. After the students finish their field trip, the

educators see how the kids can make changes in their own community or become more involved in environmental stewardship.

Many of the students come from inner-city backgrounds and have no connection to the natural environment, she said. The program’s focal point is to re-establish that relationship.

“If you have a connection with [nature], you will have respect for it,” she said.

The restoration site is just one stop for the students, with marine, wetland and other forest environments also included on Galiano field trips.

For Scholz, showing students the restoration site is key to the project’s success. He said it’s important for people to know that a healthy forest is one that is managed properly.

To get more information on the GCA, check out its website at [www.galianoconservancy.ca](http://www.galianoconservancy.ca) or call 250-539-2424.