

THE GREEN EDITION



Galiano Learning Centre inspires

Permaculture food forest latest focus project

BY ELIZABETH NOLAN
DRIFTWOOD STAFF

In an age of increasingly depressing statistics around climate change, species loss and other environmental crises, it's always refreshing to get some good news.

It's quite a relief, then, to realize the Galiano Conservancy seems to have found the ability to produce inspiring success after success, much of which could arguably assuage the troubles taking place all around it.

Formed in 1989, the Galiano Conservancy primarily exists "to preserve, protect and enhance the quality of the human and natural environment" on its home island. Its programs have focused on land and marine conservation, stewardship and restoration, and environmental education and public awareness. All of its goals are happily united in its Galiano Learning Centre property, a 188-acre lot purchased in 2012.

The property includes two acres of undisturbed waterfront as well as two streams, a working farm, wetlands and over 80 acres of mature forest. Just three weeks ago, a permaculture food forest was added to the mix. An on-site native plant nursery and a foraging forest that will supply food and medicinal plants are in the works.

I was lucky enough to tag along with a field group from the University of Victoria's Environmental Studies program when they toured the learning centre grounds last week. The students were on day four of a five-day trip viewing ecological initiatives all around the Canadian part of the Salish Sea. Despite having already seen some amazing projects, they were clearly

impressed by Galiano Conservancy's ambition — and its accomplishments.

"It's really inspiring," as several of the students confided to Eric Jacobsen, the conservancy's school programs coordinator.

Though he's only been with the organization since 2014, Jacobsen felt a deep loss when conservancy founder Ken Millard passed away suddenly on Sept. 28, taking a large part of the organizational knowledge and some of its spark with him. But while they're still dealing with the emotional loss, the staff and volunteers are committed to ensuring the program stays on track.

"The only thing we can do is take his vision and run with it," Jacobsen said.

Conservation coordinator Keith Erickson demonstrated many of the ways the conservancy has done this, and will continue to build on in the coming years, during a whirlwind tour. Starting at the tiny cove which is the only possible landing point on the high bank site, the UVic group headed up a new trail built by local students to the food forest project, which had been planted just two weeks previously. The planning component took the better part of a year, however, including a debate about whether to locate it in a sunnier part of the property. Since that would involve cutting down a significant cedar tree, the other location was fixed on.

Although growing food and planting non-native species don't seem like traditional conservation activities, the 700-square-metre plot fits in with the conservancy's mandate by enhancing the human environment (building local food security) while interfacing with the rest of the property in a beneficial way.

The food forest is part of approximately 25 per cent of the property dedicated to "integrated uses," such as sustainable forestry. Sixty-six per cent is in conservation.

"We want to use the land but we also want to manage heavily for the eco-health of the surrounding areas," Erickson noted.

Consultation for the project came from permaculture experts Javan Kerby Bernakevitch and Richard Walker. Using hugelkultur beds, which are raised beds built on high piles of logs, the permaculture system cycles nutrients through the soil in the same way the forest does naturally.

"The food forest is kind of the pinnacle of ecological food production. It's not just organic gardening," Jacobsen observed.

Smaller plants get critical sunshine

in the spring and protective shade when fruit and nut trees leaf out in early summer. The beds contain plants that help retain moisture and fix nitrogen in the soil. It's expected the project will supply food well into the next century.

"That's the timeline we're looking at for managing the garden into the future, which is the same timeline I'm used to working with for restoration projects," Erickson said.

The next stop on the tour was actually one of the first projects to get going on the property, which had been most recently owned by someone who did logging and milling on site. Just next to the entrance gate the conservancy has fenced a restoration area in an attempt to bring a severely compacted parking lot, milling space and storage area into a more natural state. The project included digging up the ground to de-compact it, and inoculating the soil with a layer of forest floor that was salvaged from a building site before construction began. This imported the necessary microbes, bacteria and other organisms to kickstart the significant regrowth that is already visible.

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DRIVING

Local EV show clears the air

Numbers tell the tale from summer event

BY JIM STANDEN
TRANSITION SALT SPRING

I, on behalf of Transition Salt Spring and with the support of many local businesses and the Salt Spring Chamber of Commerce, had the good fortune to coordinate an electric vehicle (EV) show on July 24-25, 2015.

It was held to celebrate our new public Level II EV chargers that are located at Country Grocer, Island Savings and Moby's. Educational automotive events were held at those locations as well as The Fritz Cinema.

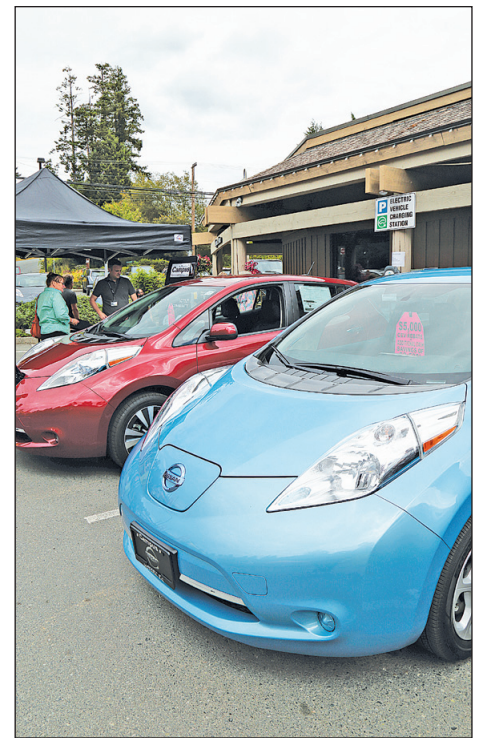
The park across from the Mid Island Co-op gas station featured electric bikes, trailers and drones, and at the high school, information was provided on the solar scholarship array. Other events were held at Mistaken Identity Winery and the library. To support the distributed events, I was fortunate to assemble a crew of 24 wonderful and energetic volunteers.

A primary mission of the show was to provide education and raise the awareness of the variety and availability of electric automobiles and electric bikes on the market, available subsidies and to raise awareness of the new driving experience that these new technology vehicles deliver. So quiet, so quick, so fun.

Success can be measured in many ways. Crowds, smiles, activities, volunteer support, feedback, off-island participation, etc.

All those happened in spades, but also 10 "verified" electric automobile sales occurred that were a direct result of the show, totalling an estimated \$215,000. I should say "so far," as sales are still being generated as a direct result of the show.

Perhaps more importantly, the event was held over two days and generated over \$8,000 in business activity into our local island economy. We made a special effort to ensure as many local vendors



FILE PHOTO BY JEN MACLELLAN

Nissan Leaf cars at July's EV show.

were featured as possible.

There are many event metrics available to analyze, but my favourite is that because of this single event, our local fully electric automotive fleet expanded by over 20 per cent (to a total of 59). This has raised the estimated reduction of our annual greenhouse gas emissions from 125 to 148 tonnes, providing us with cleaner air for ourselves and our global neighbours. This has also reduced our dependency on oil, a core mission of Transition Salt Spring. I am so proud of those particular results.

Another educational event of this nature is being considered for 2016. The vision for this event includes more education on a wider variety of energy-efficiency topics, appeal to all members of the family and involvement of our sister Gulf Islands.

University students welcomed

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Many of the learning centre activities can now find a base in the off-grid classroom, which was donated by an eco-forestry foundation in Salmo, B.C., disassembled and then brought to Galiano by flatbed truck. The hall is outfitted with solar panels for electrical needs, while water is recycled through the nearby spring. A kitchen inside uses propane stoves, while a fire pit constructed with help from visiting Penelakut elders allows for outdoor cooking.

As the host of weeklong university field courses and other educational programs, the centre has an existing tenting site. Cabins may be an option in the future and will be a help to older participants. For



PHOTO BY ELIZABETH NOLAN

Shovels used in permaculture work at the ecological centre.

example, Grandparents Raising Grandchildren has visited in the past.

The conservancy has extended its ability to offer innovative outdoor education through a number of grants and funding part-

nerships. One recent venture saw Mountain Equipment Co-op donate all the camping equipment necessary for school teachers to take small groups on the Back Country Experience. Another pilot program funded by Telus resulted in the Navigation and Geo-Cache Adventure Camp. The idea of this project is to get kids comfortable with nature — and near their treasure goal — using GPS devices at first. Clues relating to plant knowledge get them through the final stretch.

What all of the programs have in common is they foster a greater understanding of the local ecology, which leads in turn to looking for ways to ensure it continues and thrives. Perhaps the Galiano Conservancy's greatest work is creating renewed interest in that project.