

The Galiano Island Stewardship News

A newsletter of the Galiano Conservancy Association, where the people of Galiano Island can share ideas, stories and perspectives on stewarding the land.

In this issue: a special focus on the work being completed at the Galiano Learning Centre and opportunities for becoming involved.



“What can I do?”

Galiano Islanders Join Together to Create a New Learning Centre

By Gary Moore, Galiano Conservancy Board Member



Hands Across the Island: Galiano School children plant native plants in the restoration of the old mill site at the Learning Centre entranceway. A Galiano musician holds a spontaneous benefit concert for the GCA at a local cafe. A local senior walks with a group of visiting “Grandparents Raising Grandchildren”, providing good company for her peers in the visiting group, and learning about Galiano’s natural environment from Conservancy staff educators. A local machine operator donates his time as a group of volunteers gathers materials for his chipping machine. A ten-year-old boy is the first walker to finish the route at the 2014 Walkalong for Learning, raising over \$200.00 to sponsor city children attending a Forest to the Sea nature programme. Musicians play in the woods as walkers go by on the Walkalong route. A crew of volunteer carpenters works to reconstruct the recently donated Silva Forest Foundation classroom on the Learning Centre land. A Vancouver graphic designer creates a beautiful and impactful layout for a newspaper funding appeal. And many people make regular financial contributions to help fund all of these projects.

There are literally hundreds of examples like these, as Galiano residents, property owners and friends of the island have discovered the joys of volunteering and the satisfaction of doing a good job for a worthwhile cause. Of course everyone knows that a small self-reliant community like Galiano offers many “opportunities” for volunteers. But sometimes we don’t know quite what to do to get involved with a project we hear about.

This newsletter... will tell you what is happening at the newly acquired district lots just south of Retreat Cove, and extend an invitation to you to share in the fun we are having establishing our new residential environmental Learning Centre. We host regular work parties to clean up the old site and apply the fascinating principles of ecological restoration to the landscape. We host visiting classes of elementary, high school and university students for diverse ongoing programmes. A garden area has been reclaimed and an old greenhouse repaired to be used for feeding students and offering gardening experience to young people. All of these programmes rely on volunteers and offer an opportunity to participate in a world-class project in its inaugural stages. The Conservancy always welcomes new participating members.

Watch for the signs.... informing you about work parties, community workshops and public events at the driveway entrance to Lot 57, 10825 Porlier Pass Road, on the Conservancy’s bulletin board behind the Sturdies Bay mall, and in local newspapers.

Over 100 volunteers helped to restore the old mill site.

“Life is either a daring adventure or nothing.”

— Helen Keller

Old Mill Site

By Vincent Hamann-Benoit,
recent graduate from the Restoration of Natural Systems Program of the University of Victoria

We were sitting by this crackling fireplace in the community room of the Galiano Film School, excited to be catapulted into this whole other world that Galiano Island seemed to be. Patti Pringle, an Education Coordinator for the Galiano Conservancy Association (GCA), came as one of the first guest speakers to talk to our group of students representing both the Restoration of Natural Systems (RNS) and Environmental Studies programs of the University of Victoria. We were taking a five-day field course focused on advanced concepts of ecological restoration led by professor Eric Higgs. To break the ice, Patti made us play the matching game of animal sounds, whereby we had to mimic the call and gestures of the animal name we had drawn from a hat. If I recall correctly, I was an eagle, and my matching animal counterpart was Ken Millard, a director on the GCA Board. This activity set the tone for our course. It was a tone of humility. It is my experience, that the GCA carries out its endeavours with the best of intentions, with a sense of wisdom and humility.

Patti then spoke of her involvement with the GCA, and how she strives to actively involve groups from all walks of life in the conservation and restoration activities of the organization. I became immediately inspired by the inclusivity the organization was striving for. She spoke of participation and experiential learning with words that seemed to come from a genuine place, and her care for both people and the land was immediately apparent.

Many of the other guest speakers that cradled our fireplace lectures addressed the theme of history, and interconnectedness between past, present and future. There is recognition, at the GCA, that what we see in ecosystems today is the result of past interactions between the land and people, and there is a desire to honour this heritage while learning how things could perhaps be done in a better way for the future.

When we were first introduced to the mill site, it spoke to me right away. The site was a quarter hectare area near the entrance to the Learning Centre property where the former owner ran his small-scale portable milling operation.

Perhaps this was the case because my first experience in the field of ecological restoration had taken place in Montréal with an NGO that transforms heavily degraded urban lots into educational urban oasis. I had witnessed the immense possibility that lies in the healing of these heavily degraded places. Working on such sites can become the most rewarding and inspiring experience, as the transformative powers of ecological restoration become most tangible. These sites can illustrate how human agency, when working hand in hand with the incredible forces of life, can result in rapid healing. Working on heavily degraded sites also brings a securing impression that no further harm could potentially be done, and it appears easier to respect one of the most important guiding principles in the field of ecological restoration: “First, do no harm”.

When Keith Erickson, Conservation Coordinator at the GCA, enthusiastically reacted to my suggestion of coming back later that year to work on the mill site for my capstone project with the RNS program, it became even more evident how inclusive and participatory the approach was going to be, something very compelling to me. Additionally, the mill site constituted the gateway into DL57, the “Galiano Learning Centre”, and its restoration would contribute to the ecological connectivity between very important conservation areas of Galiano, all of this making it a vital restoration site.



I came back in early September of 2013, and began a rich personal learning experience, as we tackled the restoration of the mill site.

The first task, before we intervened with restoration treatments, was to document the ecological condition of the site. This provides a baseline 'picture' so that we can look back years later and compare the restored area to what it once had been.



The baseline assessment provided a great entry point for the students from the Galiano Community School to begin their participation in the project. They came up for a field trip to investigate the degraded site and compare it with a nearby, healthy ecosystem (reference site). As they stepped out of the bus, the students immediately rushed to the southern margin of the mill site where they had completed a small introductory restoration project in the spring of 2013. They had carefully planted, fenced and labelled dozens of native species in an effort to re-vegetate an exposed slope; their sense of pride and

care was palpable. We then moved on to the assessment and went over to the centre of the site to look at a few soil pits. The ability of these young students to look at soil profiles and interpret the story behind them was stupendous. They deciphered, for instance, the presence of a buried surface horizon about two feet below the surface. Witnessing the ability of these students to connect with, interpret and care for the natural world became a great source of hope that followed me for the rest of the project.

Once our assessment was complete we created a work plan and got to it in the fall of 2013. Clean-up was the first item on the agenda. With the help of volunteers from the local community and from the University of Victoria, we salvaged any remaining useful milled wood, collected garbage and recycling and chipped the huge piles of cedar mill ends and scrap. The cedar chips were set aside for future use on trails and at our campsite.

With the site free of debris, Fred Stevens was able to get his excavator in. Using the 'rough and loose' method, he de-compacted the central part of the site to a depth of one meter. This method creates a diverse, mounded surface that is conducive to natural in-seeding. It was recommended by Dave Polster, arguably one of British Columbia's most



experienced restoration ecologists. Fred also brought twelve dump truck loads of wood chips (primarily red alder), which we mixed with three cubic meters of salvaged forest floor litter and spread across the freshly de-compacted site. The salvaged litter inoculates the wood chips with a rich diversity of soil organisms: fungi, bacteria, actinomycetes, arthropods, and earthworms, to name only a few. This kick-starts the soil building process, contributing valuable organic material to the site over the long-term, while helping to deter the growth of invasive grasses, thistles and shrubs. It is important to recognize that these soil organisms, along with the native plants, are the ultimate restorationists in these stories, and that we only re-institute the conditions that will hopefully allow them to thrive.



We also spread old logs and large pieces of woody debris that had been left in a pile on the site, adding to its structural complexity and providing additional ecological niches for countless creatures. We even stood a few up to create large diameter snags suitable for woodpecker nesting sites.

Then came one of the most rewarding phases of the project; planting! We re-vegetated the site with 426 plants brought from the GCA Native Plant Nursery, including 72 red alder, a critical player for the regeneration of our coastal forests. Each of these plants was supplemented with some compost to help during the establishment phase, providing an additional source of nutrients. These plants were individually fenced to be protected from browsing by deer.



Seeing an incredible opportunity for gaining scientific knowledge about restoration processes, we decided to embed an experimental area within the restoration site to assess the effects of different soil amendments on the recovery of soil and plant health. Students, teachers, and parents of the Galiano Community School made it back up to the mill site to participate in this unique activity, helping us to plant the experimental plot. Working with the school was a fantastic experience and I remain inspired by the enthusiasm and interest of the students.

When I last saw the site in April 2014, there were already promising signs indicating that the de-compaction was effective, allowing water, air and roots to penetrate and move through the soils. Aesthetic improvements are undeniable, and the topographic and structural features of the site are

more complex. Only time and careful monitoring will tell how effective the restoration process is; and I am certainly optimistic!

The entire project, from planning to planting to monitoring, has been a collaborative effort, made possible through the effort of many volunteers. Over 200 volunteer-days were spent on the mill site, by people of all ages representing the Galiano community, the student and professorial community of the University of Victoria, youth from as far away as Germany and the scientific community at large. It is my hope that this has set the stage for the development of long-lasting bonds and reciprocal healing between these many people and this little piece of land that once was a mill site.



The restoration of the Mill Site was made possible through financial support from...

This project was undertaken with the financial support of:
Ce projet a été réalisé avec l'appui financier de:



Creating a Place for Learning

The Story of Our New Classroom Building

By Jenna Falk, Development Coordinator for the Galiano Conservancy

There's something special about a place where learning happens. For some of us it's a reading nook in our living room, or a bench out back where all the curious questions have space to come up. It's bringing a community together to share ideas, and opening up windows for imagination and reflection as well as some discipline and hard work, where ideas can pop into existence, smash into the walls and floor, and make things more alive.

This was always the vision behind the Galiano Conservancy Learning Centre – to have a place for community, imagination, reflection, inspiration, and hands-on work. We acquired the land in 2012, and now we have a building – a building that reflects our values of conservation,

creativity, and community – and it arrived here on a flatbed truck from the other side of the province.

In the 1990s, a small but determined group of people in the Kootenays wanted to expand the possibilities for learning about forest ecology, forest conservation, and sustainable local economies. Realizing the effectiveness of experiential education and benefits of participating in rich, hands-on learning, the Silva Forest Foundation, Led by Herb and Susie Hammond found the perfect place for a field school deep in the inland temperate rain forest of the West Kootenays near Salmo. Here they would explore the principles of Ecosystem-based Conservation Planning with the next generation of forest activists and forest professionals.

A school of this kind had never been done before. Built by largely volunteer labour and donated materials, they named the main classroom building “Aspa”, short for Aspen, a dominant tree species on the land. For over eight years, from 1995-2003, hundreds of students flocked to participate in the programming, workshops and field experiences offered there.

But as George Harrison of the Beatles said, “all things must pass,” and the school closed up shop in 2003. In 2011 the land was sold to Vaagen Fibre Canada, a forestry company, and the building was boarded up.

But the Aspa story was far from over. In the summer of 2013, Herb approached long-time friend Ken Millard at the Galiano Conservancy. With the recent addition of the Learning Centre, the Conservancy needed an all-season building at the campground there. Herb saw a good fit for the Aspa building on Galiano; indeed, here it would reinvigorate the past legacy of outdoor education and respectful living with ecosystems. Two small hitches – the building was now owned by Vaagen Fibre Canada, and it was sitting a ferry ride and a 700-km drive away in the Kootenay mountains.

Ken approached Vaagen with the idea of relocating the building. Discussions ensued and with resounding support for the Learning Centre vision, Vaagen not only donated the building, but also the machine time for fixing up the access road and loading the flatbed truck needed for transport back



Above: De-construction crew poses with one wall to go.

Below: Nail pullers not impressed with the ridge pole.



to Galiano. With Vaagen's generous donation and support in place, the biggest challenge was still to come – how to efficiently disassemble the building without electric power, and to move and reassemble the building. Drawing from his technical abilities as a physicist, Ken devised a creative solution. Using hand-powered chain-and-cable pulley systems, the 60-foot long timber frame walls were taken down intact and loaded onto the truck. The roof, windows and floor were disassembled, stacked and strapped for easy loading on top of the walls. The deconstruction crew quickly became grateful that Aspa's builders had used hammers rather than nail guns and had been motivated by its remote location to be conservative with nails. The whole building was deconstructed and loaded over a 12-day period in June and July, 2014.

After a long haul, the building arrived on Galiano and was unloaded next to its new foundation at the Learning Centre campground. A small crew of Conservancy staff and volunteers have since worked on the reconstruction of the roughly 1200-square foot building and it is nearing completion. It will be ready for program use in the spring of 2015. The Aspa building and its accompanying water purification system will be powered by solar energy. A gravity-fed system sourced from a nearby year-round spring

will deliver the water. The rich and unique history of the Aspa building, along with its energy and water systems make it a teaching tool unto itself, and a perfect fit for the experiential education vision of the Galiano Learning Centre.

Thank you to all of the financial and professional service donations that have made this project a reality: Vaagen Fiber Canada, Glover Contracting, Stevens Excavating, Galiano Freight, Galiano Trading, Hennessy Hammocks, Tides Canada Foundation, Greater Victoria Savings Credit Union Legacy Foundation.

A special thanks to Silva Forest Foundation, our deconstruction and reconstruction crews, our volunteers and supporters.

Curious to explore the Learning Centre and the Aspa building? Come and join us for the annual New Year's Day Walk at the Learning Centre, all are welcome. We'll meet at 11 a.m. at the parking lot and info kiosk near the entrance (10825 Porlier Pass Rd). We'll be ending the walk with a cozy potluck lunch at the old, but new to us Aspa building.

The Aspa building settles in to its new home at the Learning Centre.



Welcome to the Lush Coastal Forest of the Real

The value of Experiential Education in Nature

By Eric Jacobsen, Education Coordinator for the Galiano Conservancy

Out here, you are enough. I have always believed that it is experience that makes people care.



In the fading light and the way the coming of the dark refracts all the colours through the sky, the island was lit up pink, yellow and blue on the bark of the oaks, the stony shore and the now amber meadows. The tide was in and the bay was full of seals feeding and splashing, their odd fingered flippers thrust up and thrashing as they scoured the shallow bottom. The evenings light shimmered off the water and too rippled with the movement of hundreds of birds on the sandy spit and rocks that closed in the bay.

As an environmentalist, these are the moments that make me care.

In a time when, for many people, the virtual is becoming as much a part of life as the real, as we are inundated with information mostly trying to make us consume more, the need to connect with the natural world has never been greater.

There are few teaching tools that work like wonder and awe; and there are few students that don't get something out of finding themselves in a natural place. Of course we hope they have a chance to gain some ecological knowledge but what is really important is the relationship between the self and the wild.

For some students getting outside with their class is a chance to showcase knowledge and skills they don't get to express in school, for some it is an opportunity to learn a sense of comfort with being outdoors. When children, supported by their teachers and peers, explore nature together and are encouraged to wonder and question, they feel safe taking extra steps. I remember children from the city who at first thought touching seaweed was gross later in the day bringing me a dead fish they found on the beach and begging me to cut it open so they can see what was inside.

Experiential learning is a departure from highly curated environments, a chance to engage with a world that humans do not control. It has no explicit messages, there is no manipulation, it is not inherently a cultural construction; and it will not perform for you at the push of a button. The natural world is fascinating because it is based upon processes and interactions that work on their own time scales. It is beautiful because it is not constructed, because it is alive. There is such an incredible value in understanding that the living world is in process that is beyond ourselves, that its mysteries are made available to us only through investigation, observation and patience.

Getting young people out into nature is essential because it is there that they will form an emotional connection to the ecology that supports us all. This connection matters, as it will help them navigate inherited ecological challenges, and most importantly it is necessary for their well being; a fact that is well documented. I also suggest that experiences in nature can serve as a counterpoint to the virtual world, where we are bombarded with information that is pre-packaged, where we are fed things that lead us to particular conclusions.

Experiences of nature in some ways compete with virtual experiences for the hearts and minds of young people. Facebook competes with the forest for providing a sense of connection to the world. Youtube competes with the coming and going of the tide or the changing sky for delivering information relevant to our lives. All of these experiences are repositories for meaning, for understanding and for connection.



In many ways we are blessed to be connected to each other and allowed to freely share ideas through technology. In fact, there are even ways of meaningfully integrating experiences of nature and technology. But still, there is something to the medium being the message, to the inherently consumerist slant of commercial media that separates us from reality. It is in the advertising, the marketing, the messages that an algorithm has selected based on an analysis of what we look up and what we say. This separation is carefully crafted and, in terms of the bottom line, it is almost the entire point of broadcast media and Facebook. There is a perpetual state of grasping for something that is just out of reach that media cultivates, a subtle dissatisfaction that drives us to consume things that we don't need.

There is something alienating about these virtual spaces where we are encouraged to broadcast a highly constructed identity, where we are bombarded with messages that we are not enough, that if only we were doing this or owned that. It is healing to be in a world of real feedback, a place where you won't see animals if you're too loud, where you can miss the breaching of a whale or the passing of an eagle by looking at your phone. This is a place where we are rewarded for looking deeper, for listening longer.

As an environmental educator I am heartened by the inherent advantages the outdoors has to the virtual world. After all, the natural world has a few million years of lead-time on Facebook. I am time and again moved to watch the transformation in attention, the opening up of curiosity and joy and excitement that I see when people get out of their day-to-day lives and into a more wild space.

Even when expressed in destructive ways, our interactions with the living world are valuable teaching moments. Out in the living world we are given the opportunity to affect change, to nurture or kill, and we are able to do these things and feel their emotional fallout. Sometimes, you get the opportunity to watch realizations happen in real time. I can remember the look on a young boy's face after I told him that the barnacles he has happily been smashing are actually living creatures. Imagine the effect of this awareness expanded to corporate

or political leaders that are recklessly wreaking havoc on the biotic world; maybe they were never taught that the world is actually alive.

Our educational programs at the GCA are based on the primacy of experience, we believe in a hands-on, immersive experience in the natural world. We provide this opportunity to school groups locally and from the surrounding cities as well as to university groups, at-risk youth, and grandparents raising their grandchildren. The Learning Centre property is becoming a springboard for facilitating more in-depth connections; we have recently hosted a week-long field school for the University of Victoria's environmental studies program, and have served as the base camp for a Quest University Adventure Club kayak adventure as well as a group from the Take a Hike program for at-risk youth from Vancouver.

We are rapidly expanding the opportunities for this kind of education and engagement. In 2015 we will begin developing a Geocache Navigation Adventure Game that will help young people build confidence, skills and comfort navigating through natural spaces. We are creating longer programs that allow participants to really sink in to their environment, to spend several days on-site camping, hiking and engaging with their surroundings.

In our small way as environmental educators, I like to think we are providing an important antidote to what philosopher Jean Baudrillard calls the "Hyper-real" - experiences that are indistinguishable simulations, these are things that seem real but aren't - experiences of natural spaces allow our identities a period to re-adjust, to settle in to something that isn't pre-programmed. These are opportunities to develop a sense of self in relation to something that is real, that is alive. For all of the thousands of hours we might spend looking for ourselves through the pixels of a screen, out here, we are enticed into the actual expedience of ourselves by the thrill of an eagle flying low through the big windswept trees or even just the rich smell of the forest floor.

A Once in a Lifetime Experience

My International Student Internship at the Galiano Conservancy

By Lisa Ott, student of Landscape architecture and planning at the Technical University of Munich-Weihenstephan

This past summer (2014) I had the opportunity to work with four other international interns and two summer students for the Galiano Conservancy Association. I was doing a mandatory internship for my undergraduate studies in Landscape Planning at the Technical University of Munich in Germany. Intuitively I wanted to work somewhere beautiful on the West Coast of B.C. but I was a little bit anxious about the fact that Galiano is so small and kind of hidden in the Gulf Islands. I will never forget my first impression when I stepped off of the ferry on a beautiful morning in mid-May. The first glimpse of the beautiful mosaic of rocks and grass at Bellhouse Provincial Park made me realize that this summer was going to be something special. After the warm and friendly welcome of the whole team of the GCA I was totally enthusiastic and positive that this was the right place for me to be.

For my first few weeks I was doing ecological restoration work on Retreat Island, Mount Sutil and all over Galiano wherever the invasive species Scotch Broom was ready to be cut by one of us interns. This is how I got to know the team and it was really amazing how easy and fun it was to work with all of them. Once a week we all met at the Native Plant Nursery where I learned a lot about the native plants and their site preferences. I also helped to create and care for the garden site on the Learning Centre property and learned a lot about gardening and increased my craftsmanship.



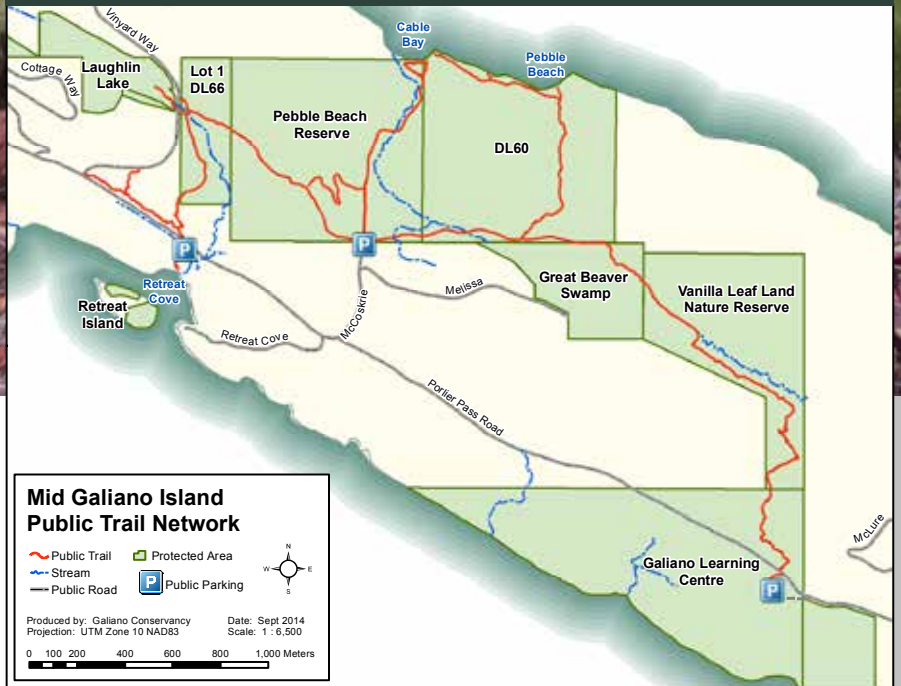
The rest of the time we interns focused on our projects - as part of my internship I was required to complete a number of personal projects directly related to my studies. First I worked with Quirin Hohendorfer (fellow intern from Germany) and Camille Mohn (summer student going to school at UBC) on a monitoring study of the restored Mill Site at the entrance of the Learning Centre property. We collected information about the height, vigour and herbivore damage of the newly planted local shrubs and trees. Our main project was creating an Invasive Alien Species Control Plan for the Learning Centre property. We surveyed all of the invasive plant species on the property using a GPS and created a map showing the distribution and intensity of the spread of each species. After reviewing the literature and best practices, we analyzed the map, identified appropriate control methods and recommended priorities for controlling invasive alien species on the property. In addition to this project I had two smaller projects where I tried to find the native Western Painted Turtle on Laughlin Lake and an endangered Lady Beetle (ladybug) at the Learning Centre.

At the end I can tell that something really precious was given to me: the ability to appreciate and love nature. And I guess that's more valuable than all the theoretical things I have learned at the university so far. During this summer I really enjoyed this unique climate and nature of the Gulf Islands and I have deeply appreciated the time that I was able to spend on this island with my new life long friends.





New Public Trail Open!



If you've got a hankering for a good hike, try the new trail from the Galiano Learning Centre through Vanilla Leaf Land Nature Reserve and the Great Beaver Swamp to Pebble Beach or beyond.

The new trail links the Centre to the Pebble Beach area offering a first class tour of Galiano's varied landscape – steep south facing sandstone cliffs, moss laden ridge tops, a lush alder valley, one of Galiano's largest and most bio-diverse wetlands, old coastal forest and spectacular shoreline along the Georgia Strait.

Portions of the trail are quite steep, others can get wet and muddy in the winter. A one way trip from the Learning Centre to Pebble Beach is roughly 4 km and will take an average hiker 45 minutes to an hour to complete.

Please feel free to leave your car at the Learning Centre's Mill Site parking area at 10825 Porlier Pass Road or at the entrance to the Pebble Beach Reserve at the end of McKoskrie Road.

Happy Hiking!

Want to Get Involved?

Here is a list of some of our ongoing and upcoming projects, contact us if your interested in learning more or helping out...

- the development of a permaculture food and medicinal forest
- the ongoing expansion and care of the kitchen garden
- restoration of the shoreline forest around the Learning Centre's cove
- caring for and propagating native plants at the nursery
- caring for our native plant demonstration garden at the Recycling Centre
- assisting our educators to deliver programs to youth
- construction of the Aspa building and other infrastructure projects
- trail building and maintenance
- fundraising and outreach for the Learning Centre and our programs
- **New Years Day walk and potluck – 11am**
@ Learning Centre entrance (10825 Porlier Pass Road)



Galiano Conservancy Association
2540 Sturdies Bay Road
Galiano Island, BC
V0N 1P0
250.539.2424
e-mail: development@galianoconservancy.ca

Visit our website galianoconservancy.ca and follow us on Facebook for project details and updates on opportunities to participate!