

## **Facilitating Traditional Food Harvesting: A Policy for Indigenous Hunting at the Millard Learning Centre**

The GCA board and membership have renewed this policy to permit traditional deer harvesting by Indigenous hunters at the 188-acre Millard Learning Centre (MLC) on a two-year basis (to be reassessed at the 2024 AGM) subject to the following restrictions:

- Hunting is not permitted on any other GCA lands
- Hunting is not permitted on the MLC property during the Spring and Summer seasons
- Hunting is not permitted within 150 metres of Porlier Pass Road, or within 150 metres of property boundaries
- Hunting only occurs during pre-arranged hunting events when no community or public classes are scheduled and the MLC can be effectively closed to all members of the public for at least 24 hours prior to as well as during the hunting event
- Any hunting activities will be scheduled well ahead of time, through formal channels, and receive consent from board and staff
- Hunters are expected to adhere to all applicable hunting rules and regulations
- A member of the GCA staff and/or board will be present at the MLC for the duration of the hunting event
- All parts of the deer are dealt with in an ethical, appropriate, and respectful manner
- The GCA will cooperate with other island organizations to offer venison preparation workshops to benefit the Galiano community as well as First Nation partners

This Indigenous hunting policy operates on four clear principles:

1. Safety must remain paramount at all times.
2. Scientific evidence should drive approaches to deer management, with the restoration and conservation of ecological integrity as the goal

3. Facilitating traditional practices, such as deer hunting, can simultaneously improve food security, increase local resiliency, foster meaningful reconciliation, and support an Indigenous cultural resurgence
4. Community sensitivities to hunting must be taken into consideration

## **SAFETY**

The GCA, which has offered outdoor education programs to more than 37,000 schoolchildren as well as hosted thousands of university and adult learners, must have as its central concern the safety of all staff, program participants and community members. The use of lethal weapons for hunting at the MLC, while offering significant benefits for deer management and resurgence of traditional practices, must be carefully considered and managed at all times according to the above principles, of which safety is paramount.

## **A SCIENCE-DRIVEN APPROACH**

As a conservation organization, the GCA has active concerns with the current overabundance of native Columbian black-tailed deer (*Odocoileus hemionus hemionus*). There exists a mounting, scientifically well-established cascade of negative impacts of hyper-abundant deer on wildflowers, songbird populations, and tree/shrub growth and regeneration. There is also an abundance of scientific evidence showing that healthy ecosystems must have top predators to keep the ecosystem balanced and resilient.

Although we anticipate hunting activities at the MLC to have a negligible effect on the Galiano deer population as a whole, it also is our goal to achieve a better ecological balance for the deer population and ecosystems at the MLC by simulating natural predation through hunting. In this way, the MLC can act as a living laboratory, where the effects of deer harvesting can be studied. Data on the age, gender and number of deer taken will be collected after each hunting event to facilitate long-term study.

We are already actively addressing deer overpopulation by fencing our garden and restoration sites, staying abreast of the best available management science and engaging in public education campaigns. We have begun and will continue close monitoring of the impacts of deer browsing through the comparison of deer exclosures and control sites.

Venison is a high-value protein that can be ethically and sustainably harvested, with a far lower carbon footprint than commercial meat production. Deer harvesting is also a positive way to promote both food security and cultural resurgence for Indigenous peoples.

## **FOSTERING STEPS TOWARD MEANINGFUL RECONCILIATION**

For reconciliation to be truly meaningful, it will require those with control over lands and waters to open them to First Nations to resume and reinvigorate traditional practices and economies.

The Galiano Conservancy Association (GCA) has already begun to facilitate the gathering of traditional plant food and medicines by Indigenous people on GCA lands and gardens, including our Nuts'a'maat Forage Forest and in the Permaculture Food Forest.

Traditional deer hunting helps significantly to meet the food, cultural and ceremonial needs of Indigenous peoples who have occupied the southern Gulf Islands since time immemorial.

In December 2019, in response to requests from some Penelakut Tribe members, the GCA accommodated a controlled hunt inside the MLC's 188 acres, which was followed by a hands-on community workshop on deer butchering, with participants taking home several venison products. The workshop facilitated sharing of skills and food with our Penelakut neighbours, and enjoyed broad community support here on Galiano. More people asked to attend the event than the GCA was able to accommodate. Since then, the GCA has hosted this deer butchering workshop on an annual basis, each time in partnership with Penelakut knowledge keepers. The GCA has also received numerous requests from several Penelakut residents for future deer hunting opportunities, and believe this policy will facilitate offering such opportunities more

consistently.

The GCA has reached out to Penelakut Chief and Council with the intent to establish a formal relationship that would uphold the goals of reconciliation, while also respecting the wishes of the GCA membership. Although the partnership envisioned would encompass more than just food harvesting, a formalized agreement on access to the MLC for harvesting deer and other traditional foods will be one of the topics discussed.

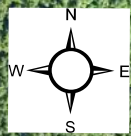
The GCA recognizes that Galiano Island lies within the asserted, unceded, and traditional territory of numerous First Nations. This policy applies equally to all Indigenous peoples who hold traditional rights and responsibilities in and around what is now known as Galiano Island, and the GCA will actively seek further partnerships.

## **COMMUNITY CONCERNS**

While the GCA acknowledges the asserted and unceded rights of Indigenous peoples to harvest food within their traditional territories, which for many Central Coast Salish peoples include Galiano and the MLC lands, the GCA is a community-driven non-profit that is responsible to its membership for upholding and pursuing its broader constitutional mandate ([see link](#)). We are privileged to act as stewards of the land on behalf of our community and we may, at times, have a responsibility to make decisions about hunting at the MLC in a way that strikes a balance amongst the interests of multiple stakeholders. We recognize that indigenous rights to hunt *“apply to privately owned lands, subject to the granting of access by landowners”* and that granting access to MLC lands for such use is subject to the wishes of the GCA membership.

The board, having received membership support through motions presented at the 2020 and 2022 AGMs, feels that this policy, by narrowly defining where, when, and how hunting can take place, is a reconciliatory and respectful path that is in line with the GCA’s values.

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- Public\_Highway
- MLC\_HuntingBoundary
- DL57\_Property\_Line

0 0.13 0.25 0.5 Kilometers