



MARY HILL INDIGENOUS PROTECTED AREA PROJECT

Neighbours and Friends: Building Trust and Community

ON THE SHORES OF THE SALISH SEA, ADJOINING THE DISTRICT OF METCHOSIN, THERE IS A 136-HECTARE (338 ACRE) PARCEL OF LAND THAT HAS NOT BEEN PUBLICLY ACCESSIBLE SINCE BEFORE WORLD WAR II.

Ecologically essential and culturally significant, the region is the ancestral land of the Sc'ianew (Beecher Bay) First Nation and comprises a considerable portion of the last old-growth coastal Douglas fir. The First Nation is part of the Te'mexw Treaty Association, which is negotiating on behalf of the Sc'ianew to acquire the property, currently owned by the Department of National Defence, as Treaty Settlement Lands.

Sc'ianew is exploring options as they prepare for ownership of this property. While a more conventional development plan is a prospect, an alternative is to preserve the land as an Indigenous Protected Area (IPA). While still relatively rare in Canada, IPAs are defined by the Indigenous Circle of Experts as "initiatives to protect lands and waters where Indigenous governments have the primary role in protecting and conserving ecosystems through Indigenous laws, governance, and knowledge systems."

Indigenous-Led Land Protection

In early 2022, the Sc'ianew First Nation and the District of Metchosin, Habitat Acquisition Trust, and Pearson College UWC entered into a Standstill Agreement to work together with a goal of creating an IPA on the land. This was the culmination of three years of collaboration.

Pearson College UWC has offered an additional 14 hectares (36 acres) of undeveloped land adjoining its main campus to be included in the IPA. "We have a great deal of interest in ensuring that these lands remain wild and undeveloped," said Brian Geary, director of communications at Pearson. "Many of our educational initiatives are experiential, where students may have the opportunity to learn on the land with the Sc'ianew and other South Island Coast Salish nations."

Funding from the Victoria Foundation created time and space to develop the relationships required to return this land to Sc'ianew, building friendships between communities

and forming a commitment not to pursue other development options during the standstill agreement.

"It was easy to do this work together because, beyond talking about reconciliation, we were treating each other as genuine equals. We are all human beings. We are working together, maybe with different interests but one common goal."

— Chief Russell Chipps, Sc'ianew First Nation

Finding the Funds

"The role the Metchosin Foundation and Habitat Acquisition Trust jointly took on was to secure grants for the funding necessary to take us through essential conceptual and feasibility phases of this project," shared Morgan Yates, vice president of the Metchosin Foundation. "Not only was the Victoria Foundation the first to commit financial support, they provided a third of the total budget and were pivotal in our ability to attract other funding sources."

"We need people to engage with the project to help us gather resources and knowledge," shared Katie Blake, executive director of Habitat Acquisition Trust. "At the end of the day, this is still a decision for Sc'ianew, so we're doing everything we can to secure the potential success of an IPA should the nation desire to go that way." 🇮🇸

