

Lindsay Dickson update

By Anne de Cosson

the land swap negotiations were in danger of collapsing

In January, the Denman Conservancy Association asked the membership and other islanders to write letters of support for the continuation of the Lindsay Dickson project. Over 100 people responded with faxes and e-mails to the Minister of the Environment; Joan Sawicki, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs; Dale Lovick, and Evelyn Gillespie our local MLA. As stated at that time the land swap negotiations were in danger of collapsing due in part to the difficulty of addressing the interests of all the parties who are now involved in the trade in some way: Richard Schellinck (the current owner of the Denman land), B.C. Crown Lands (owners of the land 'to be traded'), First Nations (who currently have an interest in all Crown Lands, and in particular the land to be traded), Comox Valley residents (who have an interest in their crown land, and in the community forest potential), and Denman Islanders, who hope to protect the 140 acres (54 hectares) of forest land on East Road!

Evelyn Gillespie responded with the following:

"OPEN LETTER TO THE RESIDENTS OF DENMAN AND HORNBY ISLANDS

Thank you all for your letters, faxes and e-mails expressing your support for continued negotiations with regard to the Lindsay-Dickson land exchange. I am aware of the hard work and dedication that members of the Denman Conservancy and other residents of Denman Island have contributed toward making this exchange possible and would like to bring you up to date.

The land exchange agreement is still in good standing with both parties doing their best to fulfil their obligations under it. The provincial government will not abandon the exchange while it is possible for both parties to complete it. As you know, I have supported the work of my predecessor, Margaret Lord, in order to negotiate the designation of the Lindsay Dickson property as a protected area. It is my intention to continue to work toward this end."

While this letter was prompt and expresses Ms Gillespie's desire to continue negotiations, the Conservancy at this point (Jan. 21) is still not sure where the negotiations are between the Ministries involved and the First Nations. It is our sincere hope that they are continuing and we await

their response.

For some of you, a very brief outline of the conservation history of the Lindsay Dickson project may be in order. When the Conservancy was initially formed in 1990 this property was one of two properties targeted for protection in some way. The other was 10 hectares of forest land on Pickles road, adjacent to the existing 23 hectare nature reserve around the beaver pond, which was purchased in 1992.

In 1991 the Denman Conservancy Association offered \$400,000. for the Lindsay Dickson forest and was turned down. Richard Schellinck bought the land for \$375,000. in late 1993 after almost two years of legal wrangling with the Conservancy and Lindsay Dickson family members. Conservancy members banged on numerous doors for support during this time, showing many land experts and funding agencies the land. The Conservation Data Center of the Ministry of the Environment stressed the importance of preserving the land both for the protection of certain rare species on the property and as an important prime quality representation of the dwindling Coastal Douglas Fir Biogeoclimactic zone in B.C.

John Cashore, Minister of the Environment at the time and Margaret Lord both pledged support for the protection of the forest. Later Moe Sihota, the new Environment Minister also pledged support. By early 1994 the B.C. government was involved enough to sign an initial Memorandum of Understanding with Denman Conservancy as to our joint efforts to preserve the property. Denman Conservancy agreed to raise \$150,000 towards the purchase. In March of 1994 the Schellincks were offered \$1.5, then \$1.7 million for the property. The Schellincks turned this down, stating they wanted land not money. After intense lobbying not to drop the project at this point the government finally agreed to consider a land trade.

Since 1994, the complex manoeuvrings of the land trade have been taking place. Moe Sihota was replaced by Elizabeth Cull, who also agreed to support the trade; she was replaced by Cathy McGregor who also pledged to continue the project. Finally some Crown land on Plateau was identified as the

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important for community forest potential. Also by 1998 First Nations groups were expressing interest in local crown lands. In August 1999, a contract was signed between Richard and Cheryl Schellinck and the government for the land trade subject to native approval amongst other things, with the closing date to be the end of January, 2000.

This brings us to the present conundrum; the problem has, over the years, become larger than just the government and Richard Schellinck. There has, as yet, been no satisfactory completion to the consultations between First Nations and the government. The Denman Conservancy Association can only hope that the government continues to negotiate to find a solution that works for all parties that are now involved in this process. With consultation and the will to succeed an equitable solution can be found.