

Mount Benson Regional Park – Protected Forever

The vision of finding a way to protect Mount Benson—Nanaimo’s beautiful green backdrop—was on NALT’s wish list from the very beginning, more than 20 years ago. In 2002, alarm bells started ringing, with an urgent call to the NALT office, saying “they are logging the top of Mount Benson! NALT needs to stop it!!”

After more than three years of negotiations with the landowners of the 523 acres of wilderness properties on the top north-east slope of Mount Benson, a first step towards protecting at least a part of the mountain came to pass in March 2006, with the signing of a Contribution Agreement between NALT and the RDN. The next step was realized on June 4th, 2008, when a \$50,000 cheque from Mountain Equipment Co-op, added to more than 1,500 donations—both large and small—from local donors, put the NALT campaign goal of \$500,000 over the top, and was matched by the Regional District (RDN) to cover the purchase price of \$950,000 (plus expenses). With the completion of the purchase, the Mount Benson Regional Park was realized. It is always gratifying to experience what a community, working together, can achieve!

The final step, registering a conservation covenant on title, took a while longer to complete. The process of reaching agreement on the wording of a covenant can take time—as that wording will determine the relationship between the landowner and the covenant holder(s) for all time. NALT and the RDN took time to ensure that the wording is right for both parties, that it provides for the conservation of the natural values of the land without putting undue restraints on Parks operations and recreation opportunities for area residents, and that it honours the wishes of the many donors to the Mount Benson Regional Park acquisition campaign. To guarantee the continuity of maintaining and monitoring the covenant, the Cowichan Community Land Trust (commonly called CLT) co-holds the covenant with NALT. CLT has also reviewed the document and approved of it before signing on. In the unlikely event that NALT should falter somewhere in the future, CLT will be there to carry on—and look for another land trust to serve as co-covenanter.

The conservation covenant has been signed by all three parties, and registered on the property title at the BC Lands Registry office in Victoria.

Many people worked for a long time to see this process through: Boards and staff of both NALT and the RDN have worked together since 2006. Special recognition goes to the NALT Conservation Covenants committee, led by NALT’s thoroughly competent and dedicated Covenants Specialist, Anne Kerr—who has contributed countless pro-bono hours of her time and skills. The Committee includes Dean Gaudry, Harriet Rueggeberg and Fraser Wilson, with staff representation by Gail Adrienne. Of particular note are the many hours of discussions,

reviews, revisions and negotiations, with Anne and the Committee working together with Joan Michel, RDN Parks and Trails Coordinator. Finally, NALT owes another round of thanks to NALT's pro bono lawyer, John Manning, who reviewed draft after revised draft of the covenant, provided his legal opinion, advised on changes in language and revisions to sections to ensure that the document meets the intent of land conservation. Thanks to all of you—and to the donors and volunteers over those many years—for bringing this vision to fruition.