

Healthy Ecosystems Healthy Community Initiative

February 16, 2008

Dear Community Member:

We are writing to inform you of a new vital initiative for Salt Spring Island: the “Healthy Ecosystems, Healthy Community Initiative” (HEHCI).

Hearing about “healthy ecosystems”, you may be thinking: “Oh, yet another environmental issue”. Not so! Ecosystem health is about more than maintaining the proper functioning of our forests, streams, lakes, and marine waters. It is also about our own health and well-being. By ensuring the health of our ecosystems, we also safeguard our livelihoods, the health of our community, and yes, even property values!

This initiative will provide a much needed “health check-up” for our island’s ecosystems. The HEHCI will bring together and integrate many of the studies and reports already available, as well as initiate new studies to fill data gaps. It will set in motion a process for regular monitoring and evaluation on Salt Spring, so that problems can be identified early on, when it is possible and cost-effective to address them, before they become crises.

This project is all about being prudent, and not squandering what makes so many of us, both residents and visitors, think our island is “paradise”. It is about understanding the links between our activities and the health of our ecosystems, our personal health, and our quality of life. It is about keeping Salt Spring the desirable and vibrant place it is, for ourselves and future generations alike.

The HEHCI has been developed and will be spearheaded by two Salt Spring scientists, Drs. David Rapport and Luisa Maffi. They have pioneered and are active in two relevant fields of research -- ecosystem health and bio-cultural diversity. They have had extensive experience in assessing, monitoring, and restoring the health of ecosystems in many parts of the world, working for governments and international agencies, as well as for local communities. They are putting this experience to the service of the community as largely a pro bono effort. During 2007, they initiated a study group on ecosystem health and human health with Salt Spring health providers. This led to a community dialogue at Lions Hall (August 2007) on “Healthy Ecosystems, Healthy Community”, resulting in a call for a follow-up initiative (see Article in the Driftwood, February 13th, 2008, A15).

The proposed initiative will be undertaken in three stages. Stage 1 is already generously supported in part by pledges from the LTC and the CRD, as well as by invaluable in-kind contributions from the SSI Conservancy. The cost of Stage 1 will be \$10,000, of which \$6,300 is already in hand. The cost of Stage 2 will be \$15,000. For Stage 3, funding will be sought from foundations and other major donors.

Please see the attached to learn more about this initiative and how to make your contribution. We strongly encourage you to support the initial stages of this initiative -- as healthy ecosystems for a healthy community on Salt Spring are truly in everybody’s interest.

Sincerely,

Michael Ableman, Dave Abley, Derek Crawford, Carol Fowles, Jean Gelwicks, Andrew Haigh, Dr. Richard Hayden, Dan Jason, Neil Morie, Margery Moore, Marion Pape, Dr. Ron Puhky, Cathryn Seedhouse, Craig Seedhouse, Mark Starik, Dr. Ron Reznick, Matt Steffich, Christine Torgrimson, Bob Weeden, Elizabeth White, Dr. David Woodley



Healthy Ecosystems: Everybody's Business!

Launching an Island-wide Initiative on "Healthy Ecosystems, Healthy Community"

What is ecosystem health? Ecosystem health is about sustaining our livelihoods without compromising the vitality of the ecosystems on which our lives depend. Healthy ecosystems support a diversity of wildlife and flora; keep soils fertile; maintain water-tables; prevent invasive species from spreading; reduce vulnerability to disease; and much more!

What are the goals of this Initiative?

- To provide the first comprehensive "health check-up" on SSI's ecosystems;
- To assess the implications for the health and well-being of our community;
- To identify key indicators of the health of our ecosystems and community;
- To contribute a solid basis for action to restore ecosystem health where it has been compromised and reduce future problems.

Why is it needed? Compared to most other places, many of us feel SSI is "paradise". But we do have our share of problems: some of our watersheds are in trouble (for example, toxic algal blooms in St. Mary Lake); deforestation results in loss of soils and water runoff; green slime appears in our harbors. Many of these issues are not only related to the quality of our environment, they also raise concerns for our health and well-being. Dealing with these issues one at a time, we never seem to get ahead of the game. This initiative will connect the dots to give us the big picture and head off problems before they become crises.

Who is doing it? The initiative will be coordinated by Drs. David Rapport and Luisa Maffi of SSI. They are internationally recognized as leaders in the areas of ecosystem health and bio-cultural diversity and are engaged in full-time careers in these areas. Rapport is the developer of the statistical system for state of the environment reporting used in Canada and internationally. He co-directed and co-authored Canada's 1st State of the Environment Report. Maffi is co-founder and director of the NGO Terralingua.

What is the "game plan"?

- 1st stage: gather and integrate existing information on SSI's three main watersheds (St. Mary, Cusheon, Maxwell); identify potential indicators of ecosystem health; identify the data gaps.
- 2nd stage: carry out a rapid assessment of the health of SSI's watersheds in relation to community health; consult with community on the findings and what they mean for planning.
- 3rd stage: establish and carry out a systematic monitoring program that provides regular updated reports on the health of SSI ecosystems and its community.

What support does the Initiative need? The total cost for Stage 1 is \$10,000. The Local Trust Committee and the CRD have each pledged \$3,000 toward this cost (pledge letters available upon request). The Initiative now seeks support from a broad spectrum of the community.

How can I contribute? Contributions of any size welcome. Suggested contributions: Individuals: \$100 - 500; Businesses: \$250 - 1,000; Major Sponsors: \$1,000 and above. Please use attached contribution form. All contributors to this initiative will be recognized in publications and at events.

Act today—the health and future of SSI depends on it!