

Group aims to raise \$1 million in 100 days for a new regional park

PEDRO ARRAIS
Times Colonist

Greater Victorians have 100 days to raise \$1 million to purchase about 49 acres of urban forest for a new park, with a commitment by the seller to match the first \$200,000.

Habitat Acquisition Trust has teamed up with the Capital Regional District to purchase the Saanich property, located near Prospect Lake, unofficially known as the Mountain Road forest.

The family that owns the property has allowed community access to it for the past 50 years. They have decided to sell but have given HAT the opportunity to purchase the property so it can be protected from development.

The CRD has pledged \$2 million toward the \$3.4-million purchase price, and more than 200 individuals have donated since the fundraising campaign began in December.

Habitat Acquisition Trust is aiming to raise the remaining \$1 million needed by April 22 — Earth Day — to complete the purchase.

"This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to purchase a significant coastal fir forest and protect it into perpetuity," said Katie Blake, executive director of Habitat Acquisition Trust. "It is hard to not feel your soul fill up a little bit when you visit the property."

She said that the property features a "spectacular example" of mature second-growth coastal Douglas fir forest. It is an important part of the coastal Douglas fir ecosystem, one of the rarest forest types in British Columbia and the smallest in distribution.

Close to 95 per cent of its original range has been lost to logging and development. The property also contains a Garry oak meadow and stands of arbutus trees. Key wildlife species include the western screech owl and common nighthawk.

Saanich Mayor Fred Haynes said the pandemic has highlighted how valuable green spaces are to residents.

"We have a wonderful oppor-



Saanich Mayor Fred Haynes and Habitat Acquisition Trust executive director Katie Blake check out Mountain Road Forest in Saanich. DARRIN STONE, TIMES COLONIST

tunity to collaborate with the CRD, with HAT and with our local residents to protect an additional 20 hectares of prime urban forest," he said.

He still recalls walking the property's trails when he first moved to the area years ago.

To jump-start the fundraising

campaign, the family selling the property made a commitment to match the first \$200,000 in private donations.

For every donation of at least \$100, HAT will issue a symbolic deed certificate to commemorate the donor's participation in the project, Blake said. All

donations are tax-deductible.

Habitat Acquisition Trust is a local land trust and registered charity that acquires titles and covenants of land to preserve it for future generations.

For more information, go to mountainforest@road.ca. parrais@timescolonist.com

COVID-19 reported at St. Michaels, three Cowichan Valley schools

JEFF BELL
Times Colonist

One school in Greater Victoria and three in the Cowichan Valley are reporting exposures to COVID-19.

The St. Michaels University School COVID-19 response committee met over the weekend after someone with COVID-19 was at the junior school, located on Victoria Avenue.

Head of school Mark Turner said Island Health has already anyone deemed to be a close contact of the infected person. "All other students and staff can be reassured that they are not required to self-isolate," Turner said. "However, everyone should continue monitoring for symptoms, in keeping with our existing expectations."

There is no risk to anyone at the Richmond Road campus, where the middle and senior schools are located, he said. Island Health is responsible for contact tracing, Turner said. "As you would expect, we will be redoubling our efforts to sanitize, physically distance and be rigorous in the enforcement of our mask policies. It remains our priority to keep all students and staff as safe as possible."

Turner asked for a calm and kind response to the situation "without speculation and rumour."

He said the schools continue to prioritize in-class instruction during the pandemic in the belief that students make the most academic progress there and feel the most support.

Meanwhile, three Cowichan-area schools — Cowichan Secondary School and Quamichan School in the Cowichan Valley School District, along with the private Duncan Christian School — have reported COVID-19 exposures in the past week.

An exposure means that one person attended a facility while infected.

The potential dates of exposure were Jan. 5-7 at Quamichan School, Jan. 5-7 at Cowichan Secondary School, and Jan. 6-8 at Duncan Christian School.

Island Health has completed contact tracing at all three Cowichan-area schools.

"We have complete confidence in the support and direction being provided by Island Health," Duncan Christian School said in a letter. "We are monitoring the situation together. There are any concerns regarding your child's exposure, you can expect to be contacted directly."

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Two UVic students fined after campus 'bush party'

Times Colonist

Two University of Victoria students picked up \$230 fines for disobeying COVID-19 regulations after Oak Bay police responded to a Saturday "bush party" attended by about 100 other students — many

of them not wearing face coverings.

The tickets were issued for not dispersing after being told by police.

Police were called by UVic security staff to help deal with a crowd gathered in the bushes near Cedar Hill Cross Road.

When officers arrived, the group spread out and continued to congregate in smaller numbers around the campus.

Saanich police were also called to assist.

Mark Fisher, Oak Bay police's

deputy chief, said it is disappo-

inting to see large gatherings

like this one "in blatant disregard for the public health orders that are designed to protect us."

"We all have a role to play in minimizing the spread of COVID and understanding the burden it is placing on our hospitals and front-line health-care providers."

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Search for missing kayaker expands to Port Renfrew

Times Colonist

A search for a missing kayaker was expanded to the Port Renfrew area on Monday.

The Victoria Rescue Co-ordination Centre was contacted about 7 p.m. Sunday about a kayaker who had set out around noon from an area near Ella Beach.

Sooke RCMP said 38-year-old Timothy Ross, an experienced kayaker, was expected to return around 4 p.m.

Several witnesses reported a solo kayaker travelling along the coast toward Port Renfrew, with the last sighting near the Shirley area, police said.

Juan de Fuca Search and Rescue are actively searching the coastline, police said. Several other search crews are assisting.



Timothy Ross went kayaking on Sunday around noon, but failed to return. VIA Sooke RCMP

A Cormorant helicopter and Buffalo aircraft were dispatched and searched until about 11 p.m. Sunday.

The search resumed about 5 a.m. Monday and included a Cormorant, a Buffalo, a United States Coast Guard boat, three Canadian Coast Guard boats, and the Royal Canadian Marine Search and Rescue team.

Police are asking people on the water or the coast keep an eye out for Ross, who is described as white, five-foot-eight and 170 pounds with blond hair and blue eyes. He was last seen wearing a black wetsuit and a striped wool maroon toque. He is believed to be in a blue white-water kayak.

If you see Ross or his kayak, call Sooke RCMP at 778-290-3791.

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