

April 17, 2016

E-mail to Tom Osborne, RDN General Manager of Recreation and Parks

As you may or may not know I have been doing a fair bit of monitoring of Coats Marsh, Coats Marsh Creek, East Path Creek, and the NW Arm including its hydrology, water levels (beaver dam and flood control at the weir), water quality, and rainfall.

A lot of this work has involved regular access (more than once a week for almost a year now) to the marsh including to the east shore of the marsh, which is outside the park boundaries and doing this required permission from the landowner. The details of this ongoing research is posted at:

<http://www.nickdoe.ca/pdfs/Webp673.pdf>

<http://www.nickdoe.ca/pdfs/Webp673d.pdf> 2015 field notes

<http://www.nickdoe.ca/pdfs/Webp673e.pdf> 2016 field notes

The reason for my writing is that I was concerned to read that the RDN is planning to construct a trail in the marsh which I gather would extend from the causeway at the west end of the marsh, to the main entrance on Stanley Road. If this surmise is correct, I would be very strongly against any such trail building.

In the course of many hours spent at the marsh, I have met only a few visitors; nearly everyone of the relatively few people I do meet are locals and almost all, perhaps not quite all but close, have been walking their dogs. Given that the number of people so doing is small, that the dogs are well controlled, and that many are walking the trails outside the park boundary on the east side which are for the most part setback from the shores of the marsh, I have never seen a problem.

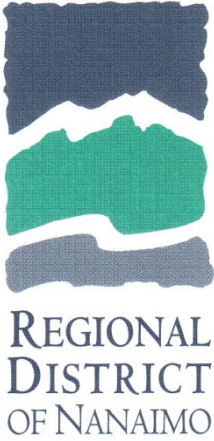
However, if a trail is built along the south shore, the chances are that there will be a significant increase in foot traffic and that people using this new trail will be as they have in the past be walking their dogs. This has the potential of severely reducing the area of the marsh that is available for the ducks, particularly the mallards and resident buffleheads, and other wildlife that inhabit it and that require peace and quiet. The ducks particularly are extremely sensitive to the presence of people, a result no doubt of their being of interest to hunters. It is impossible to walk the proposed trail route without disturbing them -- I have tried it -- particularly when moving toward the lake now and then to obtain a view as most walkers will want to do.

There is also abundant evidence in the park that trails encourage the spread of invasive species and weeds. This marsh is a beautiful property and a delightful combination of nature reserve and recreational area for naturalists and nature lovers. In my view, any funds that the RDN has available would be far better spent on helping the community to acquire all of the eastern shore of the marsh, which is an integral part of the marsh's ecology. In contrast, opening the marsh up to more human and canine interference would be a regrettable step backwards and not at all in keeping with the

bjective of keeping this area primarily as a nature reserve.

Any hope that walking dogs be avoided by posting signs forbidding it is quite unrealistic. That's not how it works on Gabriola.

Sincerely



April 27, 2016

Nick Doe

Sent via email to: nickdoe@island.net

Dear Mr. Doe:

Re: Trail Development – Coats Marsh Regional Park

Thank you for your email letter of April 17, 2016, which outlines your concerns regarding the proposed trail development in Coats Marsh Regional Park that will connect the existing trail over the berm at the north-western end of wetland to the Stanley Rd park entrance. The proposed trail route is located in the forest approximately 15-30 meters back from the high water mark of the wetland and follows along the south-western edge of the wetland. The proposed trail alignment was reviewed and supported by the ecological assessment of the property completed for the management plan (Ecological Features and Management Recommendations for Coats Marsh Regional Park, 30 December 2010), is supported by The Nature Trust, and has been approved by Environment Canada's Ecological Gift Program (EGC). Please find enclosed a copy of the proposed trail route as approved by The Nature Trust and the EGC.

The above-noted trail connection is proposed in Section 3.3.4 of the *Coats Marsh Regional Park Management Plan*. The Plan reflects the community's desire to connect the north and south ends of the park by means of a trail along the south-western side of the wetland. Your concern that the addition of this trail would increase pedestrian and canine presence near the wetland thereby negatively impacting wildlife, particularly the resident duck populations, and potentially transmitting invasive species into the Park is understood. This potential impact has been considered and in an effort to reduce habitat disturbance, the trail has been routed away from the shoreline, except where it crosses the berm at the far western edge of the wetland. As per the recommendations in the Plan, signage will be installed identifying that no dogs be allowed in this sensitive area of the park. The Plan also recommends a viewing platform be developed on the southern end of the wetland near the Stanley Rd park entrance to provide controlled access to the edge of the wetland area for educational purposes.

Your advice regarding the specific trail route location and/or any mitigation measures would be greatly appreciated. If you are interested, please contact Elaine McCulloch, RDN Parks Planner at 250-248-4744 (ex. 656) or emcculloch@rdn.bc.ca.

Sincerely,

Wendy Marshall
Parks Manager

AH

CC: T. Osborne, General Manager of Recreation and Parks, RDN
E. McCulloch, Park Planner, RDN
J. Lobb, Parks Operations Coordinator, RDN
T. Reid, Manager, Vancouver Island Conservation Land Management Program

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E-mail to Elaine McCulloch, RDN Parks Planner April 27, 2016

hi Elaine

As you can imagine I am very disappointed in this response. It is I feel being made by a "bureaucratic machine" (not meant unkindly, but you know what I mean) that has no understanding of the situation or intimate knowledge of the Coats Marsh Regional Park.

The Management Plan made in 2011 needs reviewing and updating. It is out of date.

My detailed comments are attached.

Sincerely

Letter: Thank you for your email letter of April 17, 2016, which outlines your concerns regarding the proposed trail development in Coats Marsh Regional Park that will connect the existing trail over the berm at the north-western end of wetland to the Stanley Rd park entrance.

The proposed trail route is located in the forest approximately 15-30 meters back from the high water mark of the wetland and follows along the south-western edge of the wetland.

Comment: Visitors using this route will not be aware of the importance of not approaching the lake to get a better view of it. It is the natural thing to want to do. There are several opportunities along the proposed route for a closer approach to the water's edge to be made, and in my experience, this disturbs the wildlife, particularly the waterfowl. Setback helps, but does not provide the complete solution appropriate for a nature reserve.

Letter: The proposed trail alignment was reviewed and supported by the ecological assessment of the property completed for the management plan (Ecological Features and Management Recommendations for Coats Marsh Regional Park, 30 December 2010), is supported by The Nature Trust, and has been approved by Environment Canada's Ecological Gift Program (EGC).

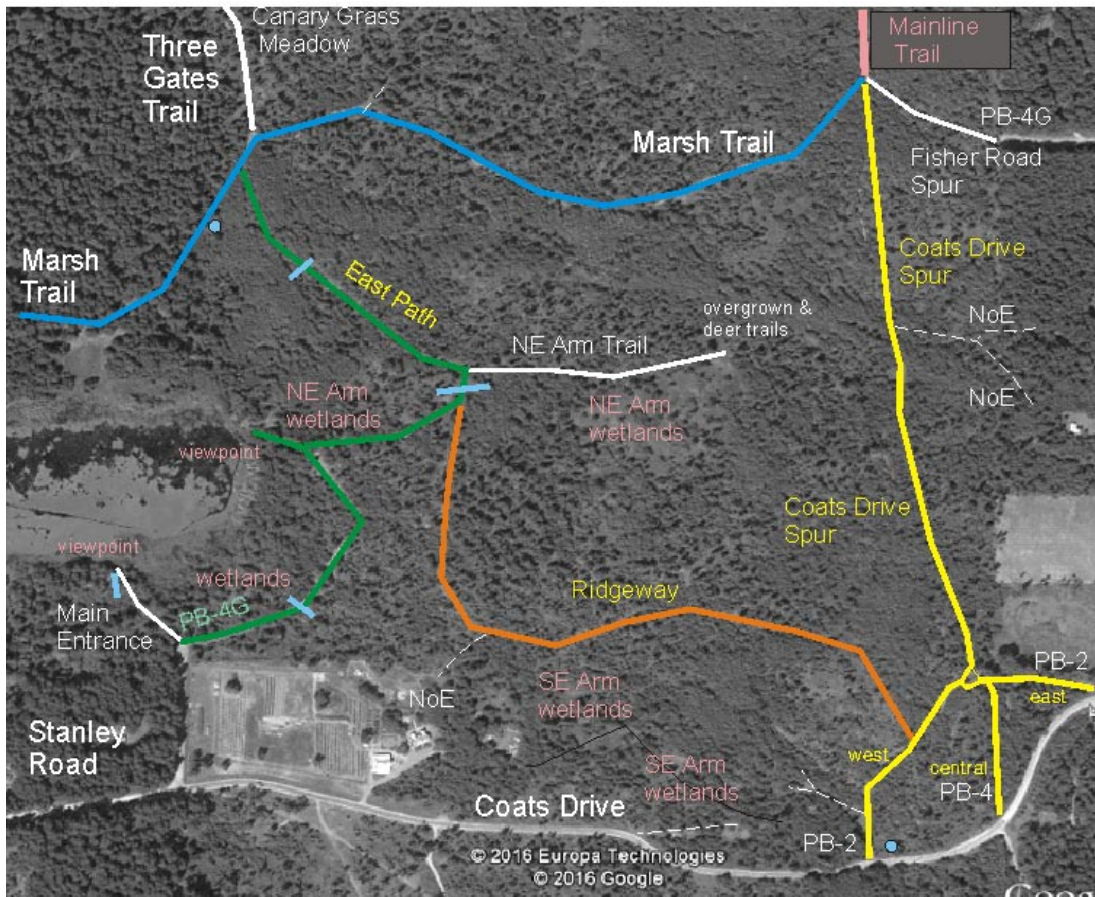
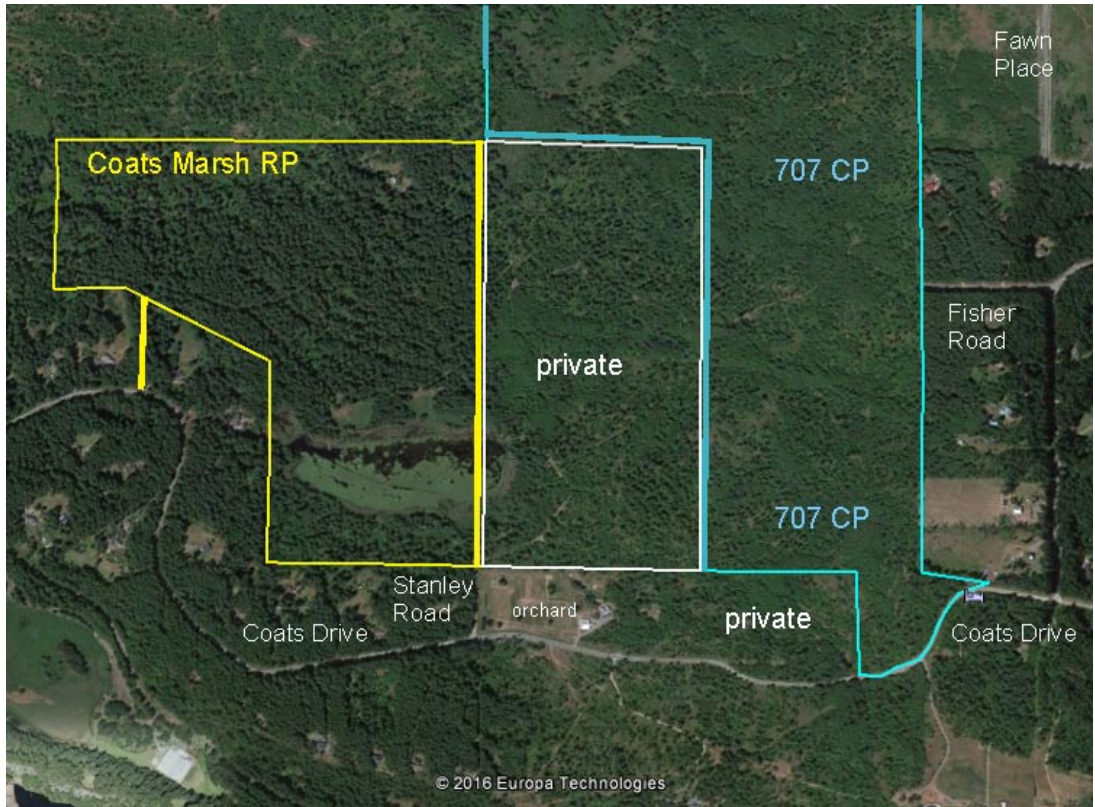
Comment: The management plan was based on incomplete information. An assessment could only be carried out over a year-long study of the hydro-geology and ecology of the lake, not a two-day visit in winter. In the past year, I have visited the park on nearly 100 occasions doing just that. The plan needs to be reviewed in the light of new information on the ecology of the lake, its hydro-geology, and the role of the beavers in controlling the water level. The value of approval by experts who have not actually been to the lake recently I would respectfully suggest is of limited value.

Letter: Please find enclosed a copy of the proposed trail route as approved by The Nature Trust and the EGC.

Comment: No copy received in the e-mail. The route is flagged. Is this the route?

Letter: The above-noted trail connection is proposed in Section 3.3.4 of the *Coats Marsh Regional Park Management Plan*. The Plan reflects the community's desire to connect the north and south ends of the park by means of a trail along the south-western side of the wetland.

Comment: This plan was formed at a time when this was the only possibility of connecting the north and south ends of the park. This is no longer the case. An application has been filed with the Islands Trust that would open up the East Path to the public officially. This path is, through the generosity of the landowner, used at present by all of the neighbours and local visitors to connect Coats Marsh RP with the 707 CP. The East Path is set back from the marsh and does not require maintenance work.



Not only would the proposed trail not be needed for conductivity if the land transfer proposal goes ahead, it would potentially negatively impact the lake by providing a route completely around the lake, leaving no shore inaccessible to people, and encouraging more use of the trail as a hiking dog-walking route rather than a trail providing access to naturalists.

Letter: Your concern that the addition of this trail would increase pedestrian and canine presence near the wetland thereby negatively impacting wildlife, particularly the resident duck populations, and potentially transmitting invasive species into the Park is understood.

Comment: I quote: “The main management objective for the Coats Marsh Regional Park property as identified by the Ecological Gift’s program, the TNT/RDN Lease Agreement and community consensus, is environmental conservation. Human access to the park property is secondary...”

Why then is providing the trail for human use being given priority?

Letter: As per the recommendations in the Plan, signage will be installed identifying that no dogs be allowed in this sensitive area of the park.

Comment: You may expect that such a notice will be ignored. Dogs are currently often to be found on the East Path, albeit well-controlled and not causing a problem because of the wide setback.

Letter: The Plan also recommends a viewing platform be developed on the southern end of the wetland near the Stanley Rd park entrance to provide controlled access to the edge of the wetland area for educational purposes.

Comment: In almost a year of visiting the park and talking to people who are using it and to neighbours, I have never met anyone who regards this idea as other than ludicrous. You cannot get within full view of the lake without disturbing the wildlife on it. It is an unnecessary and frankly unwelcome proposal probably made by people who never actually visit the marsh.

Randy Young, a former member of GaLTT who often dealt directly, and via POSAC B which keeps a fairly low-profile in the community, with you (the RDN) was strongly in favour of a trail or boardwalk around Coats Marsh, so maybe that is where your notion of strong community support for a boardwalk comes from. All I can say is that Randy’s view that human access to a nature reserve should not be restricted, even if in the best interest of the reserve, is a view not supported by the community or indeed by the majority of the GaLTT Board. At a recent meeting of the Gabriola Streamkeepers, it was decided unanimously to express concerns about the RDN plans to the GaLTT Board.

E-mail to Elaine McCulloch, RDN Parks Planner January 19, 2017

HNY and all that. Attached notes for the file on the south shore path in Coats Marsh. The lake was thoroughly iced over for a while there.

Observing ducks and geese at Coats Marsh, Gabriola Island.

Coats Marsh is used by year-round residents, winter residents, and transients in the fall and spring. Because of the small size of the lake, they are very susceptible to human and canine disturbance. This disturbance potentially impacts not only ducks and geese attempting to breed there, some of which used tree cavities for nesting, but it also impacts transients who are using the lake for two or three days during their arduous migrations.

Following is the current list of species that have been observed using the lake at one time or another (Jul.2015-Jan.2017).

DUCKS & GEESE	List 16 Version 1.1
Wood duck	Aix sponsa
American widgeon	Anas americana
Northern shoveler	Anas clypeata
Mallard	Anas platyrhynchos
Gadwall	Anas strepera
Ring-necked duck	Aythya collaris
Canada goose	Branta canadensis
Bufflehead	Bucephala albeola
Common goldeneye	Bucephala clangula
Trumpeter swan	Cygnus buccinator
American coot	Fulica americana
Hooded merganser	Lophodytes cucullatus
Common merganser	Mergus merganser

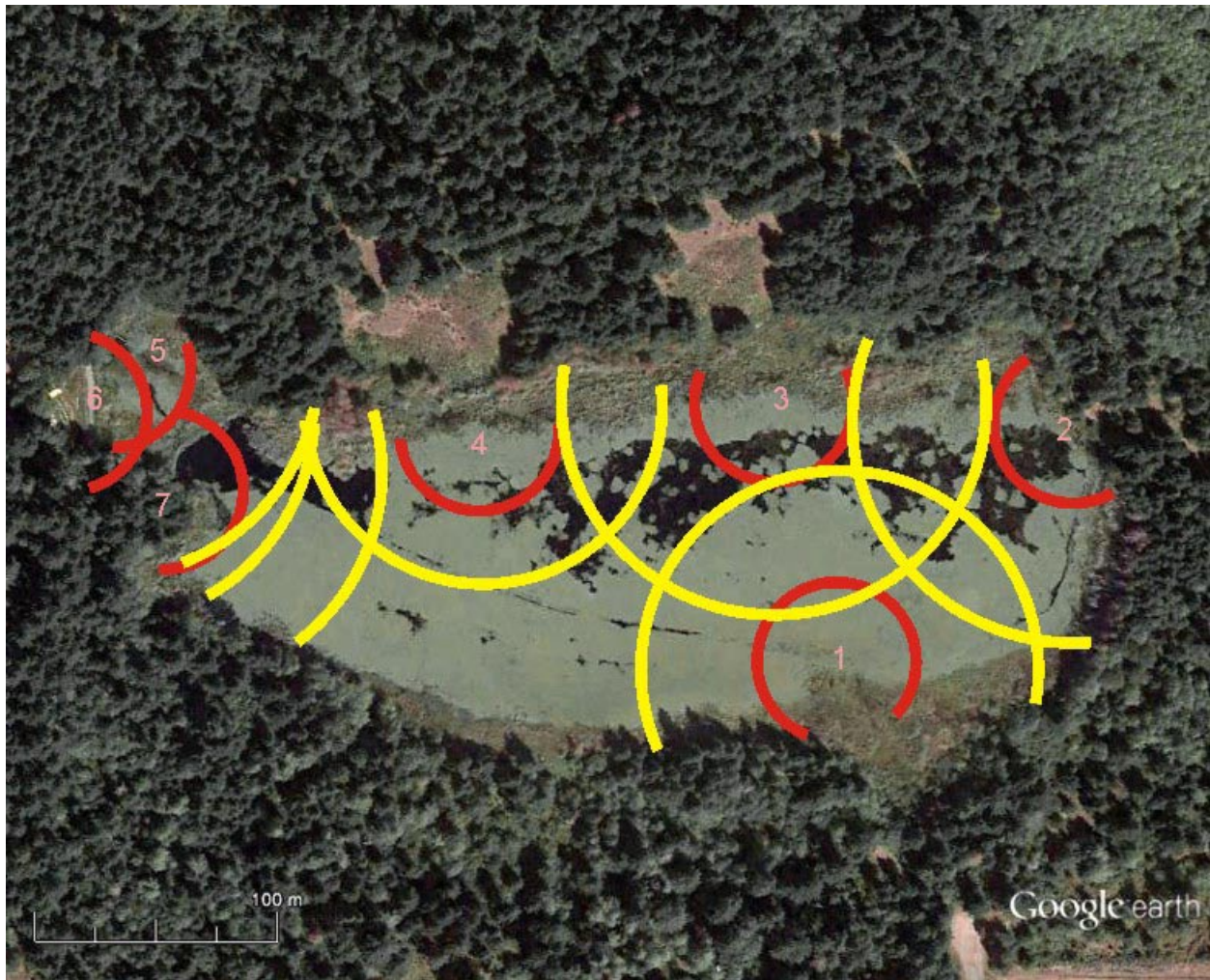
Of these only mallards are year-round residents.

Ducks that have been observed with ducklings are mallards and hooded mergansers.

Ducks and geese that are present in couples during the breeding season, but have not been observed with young, are buffleheads and Canada geese.

Common winter residents are ring-neckeds, buffleheads, and widgeons.

The remainder are transients, usually present for only a few days at a time. Transient Canada geese and mallards, sometimes in large numbers, are seen in addition to those that spend more time there.



The above map of the lake shows the areas where disturbance by human presence is most likely. The arcs are based on my observations as a fairly cautious observer taking advantage of any cover, and not moving swiftly within sight of the ducks, but not using a blind of any sort.

The red arcs (55m range) indicate areas where the birds will take flight immediately when one or more of the flocks see you. When this happens, some transients leave the lake never to be seen again, but the residents and those that spend more time there will fly off into a distant part of the lake.

The yellow arcs (90m range) indicate areas where the birds will obviously be alarmed at your presence. They will either paddle away at great speed, or they may take flight depending on how much cover is available for the viewer. Transients particularly are usually very nervous.

The viewing areas are: 1. Stanley Road entrance; 2. Popular spot off of the East Path on private property (extensive view of the lake); 3. North shore east clearing (this spot has some cover afforded by trees at the water's edge); 4. North shore west clearing (this spot also has some

cover); 5. The weir; 6. The berm; 7. The south end of the beaver dam with a view over most of the western portion of the lake.

It's clear that keeping the south shore a disturbance free zone is important not just during the breeding season, but during the spring and fall migrations. ◇