



Gulf Islands Centre for Ecological Learning

Issue: 1 Spring 2005

Message from the board Chair

Our Great Work

In this first issue of our GICEL Newsletter I am pleased to bring greetings from the Board of Directors and a brief message about the deeper meaning behind our work.

One of the defining challenges for humanity in the 21st century is to achieve a mutually beneficial relationship with the natural world. If we look back over 5000 years of known history we see an uneven trajectory along a course we choose to call development. It is uneven for many reasons, but chiefly because of the disparity among human settlements around the world and because the collective pressure of those settlements is running counter to the principle of ecological balance.

The good news is that we are now more knowledgeable than ever before about how we should design our societies in order that we might live together well on a rich but finite planet. The bad news is that we are showing very little inclination to embrace the knowledge we now have and apply it to make the changes for mutual benefit.

This suggests that there is something amiss in the sphere of the human spirit. As a species we have become disconnected from the natural world that sustains us and have lost our sense of the sacred in that world. The great work of the 21st century is to regain the connection we have lost and create a global civilization that lives in harmony with itself and the universal life force that sustains it.

Like all great enterprises this work begins with the first step. More accurately, it begins with thousands of first steps taken by a network of committed people and organizations in every part of the world. The Gulf Islands Centre for Ecological Learning in British Columbia, Canada is one of those brave first steps. Inspired by belief in a dynamic learning relationship between humanity and nature, we are creating opportunities for people of all ages, but particularly for young people in schools, to access nature-based learning. We recognize our great good fortune to live in a part of the world endowed with the attributes for such learning to be enjoyed and celebrated.

We have just begun on this grand adventure. We acknowledge and thank those who are helping us to move forward by becoming members and supporters. We invite you to participate as fully as you can, but above all to spread the news that here on these beautiful Gulf Islands there is a spirit and an enterprise abroad that can change the world.

Very best wishes with sincere thanks for your support.

Desmond Berghofer PhD
Chair



At our summer earth education program on Mayne Island

Welcome to the Gulf Islands Centre for Ecological Learning!

I remember very vividly, the beginning, so to speak. I was on a Mayne Island beach in June 2000 doing Oceans Day explorations with Mayne School children. At that time, I shared an idea I had about creating a centre



Bennett Bay, Mayne Island

that was dedicated to nature-based and place-based experiential learning within the Gulf Islands. One of the parents present was May MacKenzie, chair of School District #64 Board, who immediately embraced what I was saying and offered to assist in making it happen through the School District. So the journey to create the Gulf Islands Centre for Ecological Learning or GICEL (pronounced J-EYE-CELL) on the five Outer Gulf Islands began, then and there.

In this inaugural newsletter I want to highlight the events of the last four years that have confirmed for me that this is an idea whose time had come. First off, I continue to be amazed by the number and quality of people who have been, and continue to be, involved in the development of GICEL from our earliest brainstorming sessions with a cross section of southern Gulf Islanders to the dedicated volunteers who make up our present Board of Directors and staff. Through this time we have forged some incredible partnerships with School District #64, the Troubadour Foundation, the Institute for Ethical Leadership, the Galiano Conservancy Association, the Hope Bay Bible Camp, the Fulford Community Nature School and Parks Canada whose constituents have become avid supporters of what GICEL is accomplishing. Also, within the island

communities, we have had tremendous support from local service clubs and societies particularly for our summer earth education programs.

Over these four years, GICEL has been creating dynamic and exciting opportunities for learning about and exploring the rich ecosystems of the Gulf Islands. The children and adults who have participated in our summer earth education programs, day programs and restoration programs and their enthusiasm for what they have experienced has been personal highlights for me. The staff who facilitate these programs are the core of this success.

In closing, I would like to express my sincere appreciation of you, the members of GICEL who have shown your long term commitment to our vision and its intended outcomes. Thank you.

Michael
Dunn,
Executive
Director



Investigating the creatures of Bennett Bay

News brief

As part of the ongoing process to develop facilities one of the areas we have been working on is an agreement with BC Parks to occupy a small site in the Burgoyne Bay lands of Salt Spring Island. The Salt Spring Island Foundation and the CRD contributed funding towards our commitment to help preserve this land as a Provincial Park. GICEL has been guaranteed access and siting of a day-use facility on this property.

from Pender Island

Coming up very soon on Pender is a Spring Break program to celebrate Spring. Julie Johnston and Christy Neufeld will be leading this exciting week of ecological exploration during the first week of Spring Break (March 21st to the 24th). The program runs from 1 to 4pm Monday to Thursday and takes participants through a variety of ecosystems, a new one each day in fact. There will be a marine ecosystem exploration, a farm visit, a stream survey, and a fabulous forest adventure. Sounds like fun!

We pleased to announce that we are now advertising our week-long ecological programs for off-island school groups. These will take place in and around the parks of Pender with a base at the Hope Bay Bible Camp.

From Salt Spring Island

Salt Spring has held a number of one day events out of the Fulford Community Nature School through this school year. These have included a day spent with all sorts of creepy-crawlers and critters of that sort, a GPS mapping day, and a very successful day of birding throughout Fulford Harbour.



Summer program at Burgoyne Bay on Salt Spring Island

Salt Spring will soon play host to a gathering of School District #64 students in a celebration of

Earth Day. The events kick off at 10:30am on Friday, April 22nd. Our participants will choose from a variety of activities including a guided kayak trip in and around Ganges Harbour, a nature session with Robert Bateman, an Earth walk at Ford Lake, wildlife drawing with Donald Gunn, learn more about the history of our environment with Chris Arnett, or explore the creatures of the intertidal zone in Fulford Harbour.

We are also offering two sessions for parents or teachers during the morning session (10:30am to 2pm); choose from a talk by Dr. Peter Carter on "Environmental Children's' Health", or a guided walk through the Andreas Vogt Nature Reserve, led by Andrea LeBorgne and Kate Leslie of the Salt Spring Island Conservancy.

If you would like to join us (or attend any of the programs), please let us know, you are more than welcome! You can call #539-0619 or email gicel@gulfislands.com to register.

From Mayne Island

Our Executive Director, Michael Dunn, organized a very successful "Broom Bash" at Bennett Bay, part of the Gulf Islands National Park in early December. This was a partnership between GICEL and Parks Canada. An enthusiastic group of all ages came out to pull out a large area of broom as a first step towards the restoration of the natural plant communities. Our next step is to replant some native species. We hope to involve some of our local students on Mayne to help participate and learn in this experience. We are looking forward to our 4th Annual Summer Earth Education Program taking place in the last week in July and the first week in August.

Upcoming programs

Pender Island: Spring Break Camp
March 21 - 24

Pender Island: Week-long Ecological Programs
May 14 to June 25

For more information about these programs please call #539-0619 or email gicel@gulfislands.com.

Check out our new temporary website:
www.sd64.bc.ca/~gicel

We are very excited about our upcoming Summer Earth Education Programs (SEEP) that will take place on Mayne Island, Pender Island, and Salt Spring Island this summer. All of the day programs are place-based explorations that combine hands-on, scientific learning with art, music, and drama. We have a number of "experts" who support our programs through the summer. This year the dates are:

July 18 - 22 Summer Camp on Pender
July 25 - 29 Summer Marine Program on
Mayne
Aug 1 - 5 Summer Forest Program on
Mayne
Aug 8 - 12 Summer Program at Burgoyne
Bay
 Salt Spring
Aug 15 - 19 Summer Program for 12 - 15
 (camp out)

We are very excited that we will be able to offer a camp for our older participants on the islands including those who help us out as youth leaders during our regular SEEP programs. This program will run as a camp out and will involve kids from all of the islands!

Upcoming events

Earth Day

Friday, April 22nd
Fulford Community Nature School,
Salt Spring Island

Restoration of Conconi Reef Park

No date has been set yet, but this will most likely happen in April or May, we will keep you posted!
Mayne Island

Please call us at #250-539-0619 or email gicel@gulfislands.com for further information on anything that appears in this newsletter.

From our gallery



We were very excited to have Tom Toynebee from the Salt Spring Foundation join us at our December 2nd board meeting late last year. Tom presented a cheque of \$5,000 to go towards GICEL's commitment of the Burgoyne Bay lands.



Looking forward to our upcoming summer earth education programs!

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