

Media Release: May 4, 2010

NALT Launches “Project NALT”

Over the past 15 years the Nanaimo & Area Land Trust (NALT) has carried out a wide range of projects in the Nanaimo area related to land protection and stewardship—from the 4-year long PROJECT 2000 that began in 1997 and focussed on promoting voluntary stewardship of 10 creeks in and around Nanaimo, to land acquisition campaigns such as the efforts to secure Mount Benson and the Linley Valley.

Now, NALT needs to take stock of its own well-being, and focus efforts on securing a greater degree of sustainability for the organization. The problem with project-based grants is that they start, then they end—and sometimes it is difficult to get the next one started. With various provincial and federal funding sources drying up over the past few months, NALT is now facing a financial “drought” that will see inevitable staff and program cuts in the coming weeks and months—unless we can build a broader, more sustainable financial infrastructure. At present, NALT’s *only* on-going funding sources are annual grants of \$30,000 from the City and the RDN, plus a handful of monthly donors and some revenues from merchandise sales. To continue to operate all services effectively, NALT needs about three times that much—about \$200,000 annually.

To this end, the NALT Board is launching “Project NALT” —a membership and fundraising drive to secure ongoing funding that will sustain NALT’s operations over the long term. To do this, NALT is turning to the community that has been so supportive when it comes to donating towards specific land campaigns.

NALT has never conducted a full-scale membership drive. For many years, NALT’s membership has hovered around the 200 mark; while donations towards land acquisitions and other one-time projects have been in the many thousands. Now, NALT needs its membership to expand ten-fold; and needs members to join as monthly donors. If 1,000 NALT members donate an average of \$10 a month, that would provide an ongoing income of \$120,000 for NALT operations. This sustainable source would allow NALT to assure the Nanaimo area community that the organization can continue to provide a flow and calibre of services that residents have come to expect and value—such as outreach and education programs, the native plant nursery, the Stewardship Centre, and development and ongoing management of Conservation Covenants. One-time project or acquisition money received could be directed *solely* toward that one-time project; and operational staff could focus on their main jobs instead of trying to juggle two or three roles at a time under the shadow of lay-off.

So, over the next weeks, NALT will be contacting present members who are not already monthly donors, and approaching others who have been donors in the past, asking folks to *please* sign up for a small, ongoing monthly donation (even \$5 a month helps) so that NALT can continue to provide quality land protection and stewardship services that we have come to be known for.

For more information, visit the NALT website at www.nalt.bc.ca and learn more. Or call the NALT Stewardship Centre, at 250-714-1990. You can also donate online (and set up a monthly donation) through CanadaHelps, linked to the NALT website.

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For more information, contact
Gail Adrienne at 250-714-1990, or Dale Lovick at 250-245-5222

Q&As About NALT

Q – You are calling this “PROJECT NALT”. What does that mean and how is it different from other projects and campaigns?

A – It is a project to ensure the long-term sustainability of NALT as an organization—not to save a creek or a mountain. Over the past 15 years, NALT has conducted a wide range of projects and campaigns to “*preserve and protect the natural values of land in Nanaimo*” (that is our mission). What we have neglected to do is ensure that the organization itself is truly sustainable. During good times, government funding for stewardship projects was enough to support the organization’s operations; now much of that has dried up, and we have to actively address this through PROJECT NALT.

Q – We understood that NALT receives annual funding from the City of Nanaimo and the RDN. Is that not enough?

A – Yes, we do receive a total of \$60,000 from the City and RDN annually (\$30,000 from each)—for which we are very appreciative. In the past, this has helped to leverage other grants from the Provincial and Federal governments and other granting agencies, such as Gaming—those are the sources that are now being cut. NALT’s total annual operating budget is about \$200,000, which has to cover 2 full-time and 3 part-time positions, plus rent, utilities and other expenses. In addition to the \$60,000 from our local governments, about \$10,000 from memberships and PACs, plus straight donations, merchandise sales and fundraising events, we can currently count on around \$100,000 without the grants we used to get. That’s about 50% of what we need to continue to operate at our current level of services.

Q – NALT is launching a membership campaign to increase memberships and encourage members to sign on to monthly pre-authorized contributions (PACs) to ensure a sustainable income of an additional \$100,000 annually. What if you don’t reach that goal?

A - We believe that NALT provides essential and valued services to the community. Early conversations with people attending our events over the past couple of weeks indicates that residents DO value our services. When NALT conducted major fundraising campaigns such as Mount Benson and Linley Valley, thousands of donors responded. We believe there are 1,000 people out there who will step up to the plate and find \$5 or \$10 a month to donate towards NALT’s operations on an ongoing basis. We think positive; we will keep going until we DO reach this goal!

Q - Why does NALT only have 200 members at present?

A – Good Question! The simple answer is that, in 15 years of operations, NALT has never launched a major membership campaign such as PROJECT NALT. Now is the time

Q - How important is NALT to the community?

A – When logging began to show up on the front face of Mount Benson, it was NALT who got the call and the demand that we “do something”. When Moorecroft was threatened with sale and closure of the camp, the Camp Society contacted NALT for help. When the word got out that property along the Nanaimo River may be sub-divided and sold, cutting off public access, NALT was again the agency that was called. We get calls, emails and other appeal at least once a month to investigate and hopefully protect one piece of threatened land or another in the Nanaimo region. We can’t save them all, but we try. When land protection organizations want to get started—such as the Gabriola Lands and Trails Trust, the Mudge Island Land Trust and the Friends of Hamilton Marsh—NALT is who they call for assistance and guidance. NALT is the only regional organization providing these kinds of services.

If NALT is able to maintain operations at the current level of funding, some of the next initiatives that we plan to engage in are: further negotiations about TimberWest properties on Mount Benson; a stewardship project for Departure Creek; developing a long-term strategy for the Nanaimo River; and working to increase protected land on the east coast of Vancouver Island from the current level of less than 3% to the provincial level of 12%.

Q - Is NALT in danger of shutting its doors?

A – No, but if we don’t find more funds for operations, we could be forced to make some serious cuts in staff – and in services to the community.

Q - What kind of cuts have you already made over the past year?

A – Since we already work on a lean budget (and count heavily on volunteers and in-kind donations), we really have no room to cut any dollars without resorting to lay-offs. While we have operated within the framework of the same basic budget (and wages) as we did years ago, the cost of *everything* has increased steadily – our rent, utilities, the price of coffee, etc. The Board has stated that staff cuts/layoffs will happen only as a last resort strategy. We need the staff we have to continue to respond to the community’s needs and provide consistent and quality land stewardship services.

Q - What about the Moorcroft Campaign?

A - That campaign will go ahead as planned. It will be funded from a different “pot” of funds, and if there have to be staff cuts, the campaign will rely more on volunteer resources. What could happen, however, is that NALT may have to focus ALL its resources on that campaign, to the detriment of all other land protection initiatives – such as the development of a Nanaimo River strategy, stream stewardship activities, the operation of our native plant nursery and other day-to-day responses to community requests.

Q – At this time, ALL non-profits and community groups seem to be in the same trouble Why are you asking people to donate to NALT instead of other groups?

A - We don't think it's a case of "either/or". We are just asking our supporters to stretch their giving. We know that it is hard times for many – not only for community organizations, but also for many donors. But if we don't ask, people will not realize our need

Q - Why do you need the money now? Why didn't you see it coming?

A - This is a pre-emptive strategy. We have been operating on a diminishing bank account for the past year and hoping things would turn around. Now we have just been told that some of our previous funding sources will continue to be reduced for the foreseeable future (into 2011 and possibly beyond). In hard times, the environment (especially land protection) is not high on the priority list.

Q - What other strategies is NALT working on to ensure better sustainability?

A – If we can increase our membership and get most members on a PAC system that will go a long way towards making the organization sustainable. In addition, we are also working to build an Endowment Fund that would allow NALT to use the annual interest for operations and projects. However, this would require a principal amount of at least \$1 million in the bank to realize annual earnings of \$30,000 to \$50,000 (depending on interest rates). We are a long way from that kind of number at present. It is a challenge to get donors to contribute to this kind of investment when they would rather see their names on a donor list for a mountain or a valley. We are also working to expand our native plant nursery and realize more revenues from that venture.

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