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MEDIA RELEASE: NALT Joins With Trail User Groups To Promote Acquisition of Westwood Ridges Properties and Expansion of Mount Benson Park

NALT Media Release: Friday, August 12th, 2022.

The Nanaimo & Area Land Trust recognizes that the land that is the subject of this announcement, including existing parkland, is located in the territory of the Snuneymuxw First Nation.

The Nanaimo and Area Land Trust (NALT) and trail user groups are applauding a land purchase which will link Mount Benson with Westwood Lake.

Officials with the City of Nanaimo and the Regional District of Nanaimo (RDN) announced the land purchase on August 12th. The purchase of three parcels of land from Mosaic Forest Management will create an area of connected parkland with a total area of 500 hectares.

NALT and the trail user groups had approached the City and the RDN early in 2019 to promote a parks linkage between an expanded Mount Benson Regional Park and the green corridor surrounding Westwood Lake.

A legacy of the original coalition which came together to lead the successful acquisition of Mount Benson Regional Park in 2005, the Save Westwood Ridges – Mount Benson Acquisition Phase II group was first alerted to flagging and marking for road building, in preparation for logging, through an area of informal trails existing on private forestry lands.

Those trails had developed over time as user groups added to what became an important but informal connector for hikers, runners, mountain bikers and others who recreate in nature. The appearance of flagging tape to mark road building and timber harvest sent ripples of concern through the community.

“People became aware, as is increasingly the case, that as a result of the E&N Land Grant, so many of the places where we walk, run, ride and hold dear are on private lands and subject to timber harvest or development,” says NALT Executive Director Paul Chapman.

Chapman recalls the early meetings with the City and RDN, “It became clear, very early on, that there was a general willingness to try to secure the land as park. The coalition also had constructive, frank discussions with Mosaic Forest Management staff. I think everyone involved recognized the opportunity to create a real benefit for the community.”

NALT and the Coalition congratulate all those involved for recognizing an opportunity, not being derailed by the COVID pandemic, and realizing this parkland inclusion that connects and expands two of the most popular parks in the area.

“COVID-19 has shown us how much we rely on our parks for physical and mental health. Adding to our parks provides critical infrastructure for community well-being.” says Dean Gaudry, NALT Board Co-Chair. He notes that NALT continues to work to protect more of Mount Benson along with other lands that have natural heritage value in the Nanaimo area.

“Only about 3 percent of lands in the Nanaimo area are protected from development, agriculture and timber harvest,” he says. “That compares to 15 percent of lands in the Province of British Columbia and national objectives to protect 17 percent of Canada’s lands.”

“Protecting our natural heritage not only preserves recreational opportunities but also helps ensure the maintenance of vital wildlife habitat, which is particularly important as we deal with the impacts of climate change.”

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The Coalition to Save the Westwood Ridges - Mount Benson Phase II:

The Nanaimo & Area Land Trust

The Runners of Compassion

The Wild Women

The Tuesday Hikers

The Thursday Hikers

Norm Thibault; Frontrunners & New Balance Nanaimo

members of the mountain biking community

member of the running community

members of the hiking community