



Experience the Gulf Islands

CONCEPT PLAN Final October 2016

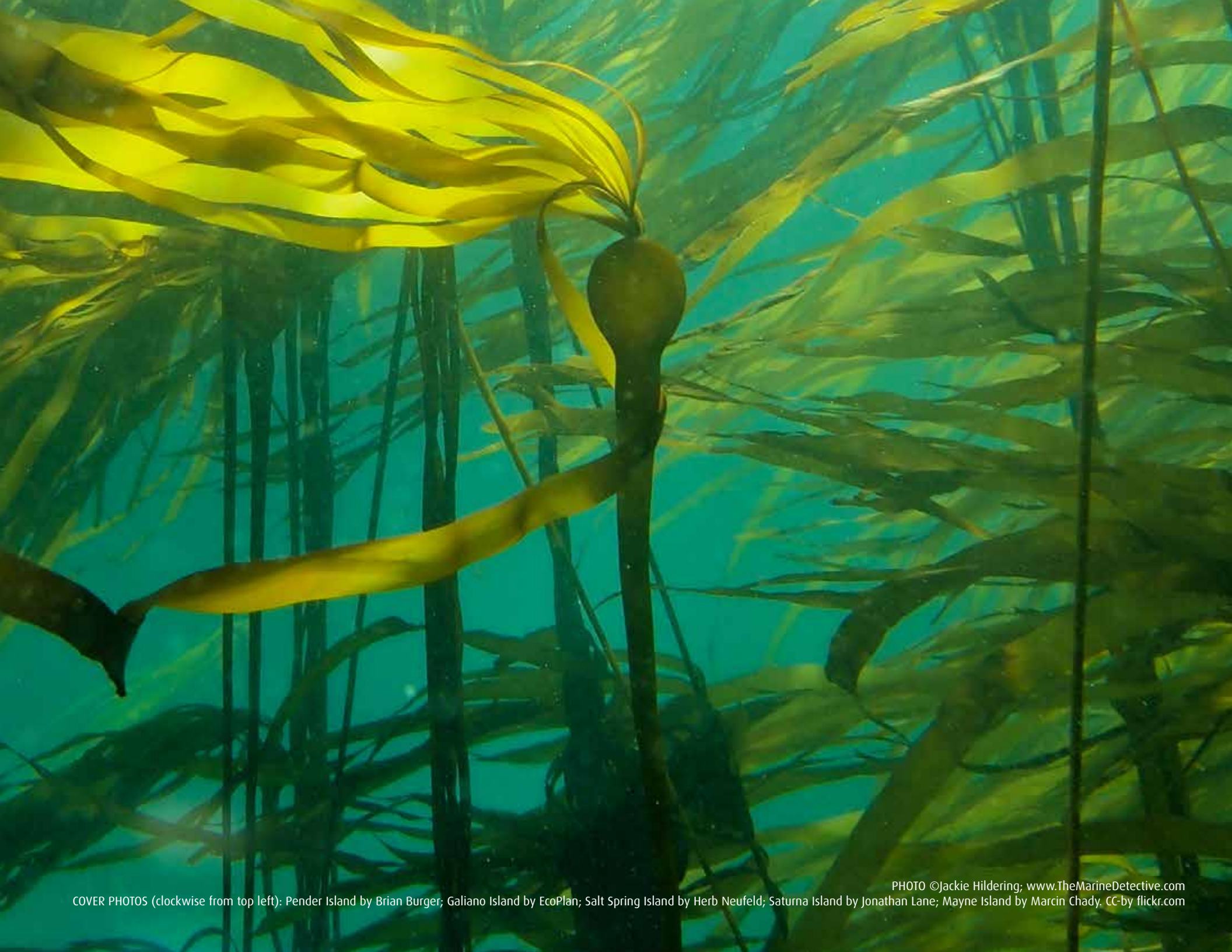


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1. Executive Summary

Experience the Gulf Islands is a unique inter-island community tourism initiative for the Southern Gulf Islands (Galiano, Mayne, North and South Pender, Salt Spring, Saturna), to develop and promote experiences for residents and visitors to the area. The project is supported by parallel processes to improve mobility to and between the islands (CRD Regional Trails Strategy, Integrated Service Review [community bus & inter-island passenger ferry]), as well as studies that support more detailed development of existing and potential experiences (e.g. Southern Gulf Islands Educational Assessment).

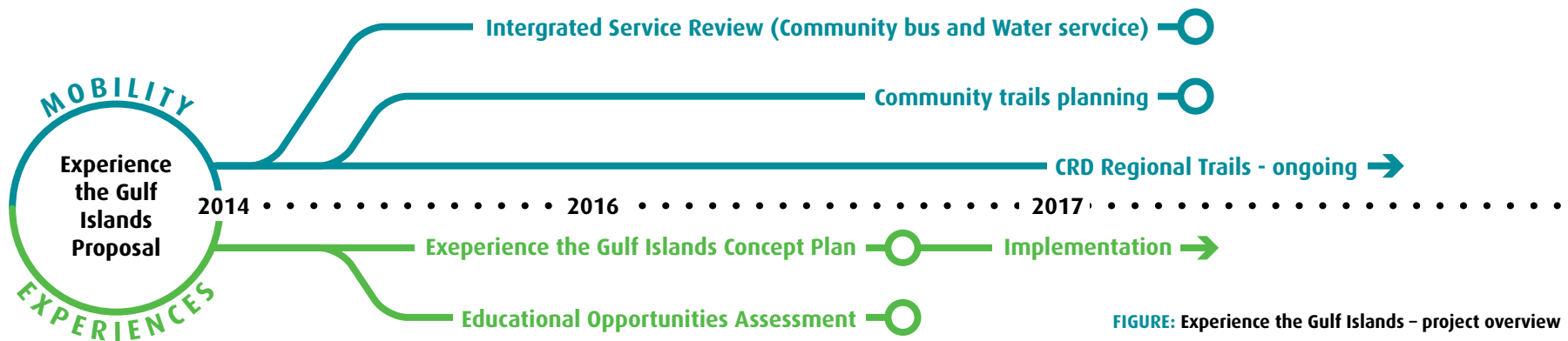


FIGURE: Experience the Gulf Islands – project overview

This Concept Plan marks the second step in a three-step initiative to develop *Experience the Gulf Islands*. The first piece of work was completed in 2014 when an initial *Experience the Gulf Islands Proposal* document was completed. The second step—this plan—refines the Proposal based on expanded community, partner and stakeholder input to create a more structured and strategic plan. The third step will involve putting the medium-term projects this Concept Plan identifies into action.

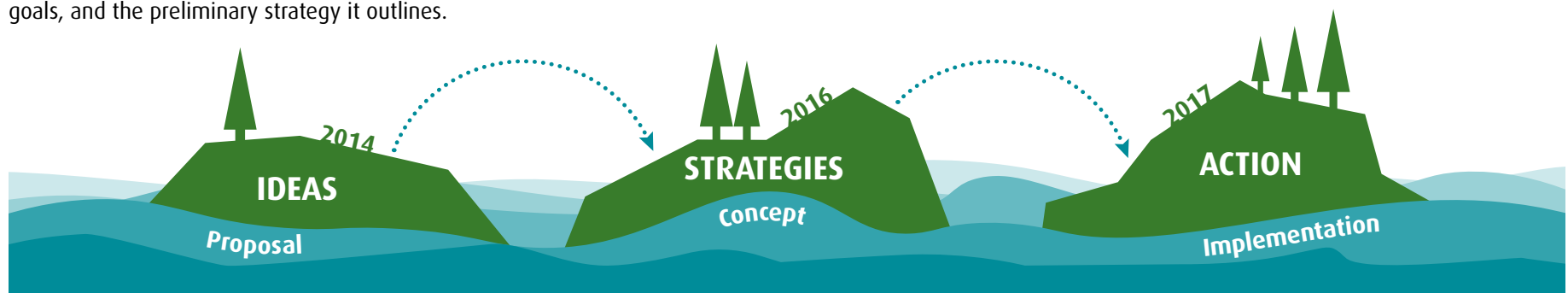
Designed to build from and support existing island tourism and community development initiatives, *Experience the Gulf Islands Concept Plan* represents an innovative, broader strategy that looks to coordinate and enhance community tourism planning across the region as whole (i.e., both the Salt Spring and Southern Gulf Islands Electoral Areas); explicitly recognizes and seeks to realize the larger social, environmental and economic contributions of community tourism; and looks to build an archipelago-wide mobility network and organization for developing the unique experience that is the Southern Gulf Islands.

Its development also provided an opportunity to further build and enrich the relationships and partnerships that are necessary to achieve this Plan’s vision, goals, and the preliminary strategy it outlines.

This Concept Plan provides:

- ✓ A **summary profile** of the Southern Gulf Islands and existing community tourism in the area.
- ✓ A **guiding, shared, inter-island vision** for the future of community tourism in the area.
- ✓ **Community-defined and prioritized** tourism development goals to help guide activities to achieve the inter-island tourism vision.
- ✓ A preliminary community tourism **strategy**, with short-, medium- and long-term actions identified.
- ✓ A “long-list” of preliminary **community tourism opportunities** identified by participants through the project that could be implemented or further developed in the longer-term.
- ✓ An overview of **next steps** required to move the Concept Plan towards implementation.

FIGURE: Experience the Gulf Islands – a three-step process





WHAT'S COMMUNITY TOURISM?

Sometimes called ecotourism, geotourism, or even sustainable tourism, community tourism emphasizes the development of local communities, and works to engage local residents in its development and management. The general goals of community tourism align well with existing island plans and policies and include:

- *Minimizing negative social, economic and environmental impacts*
- *Generating greater economic benefits for local people and enhancing the well-being of communities*
- *Making positive contributions to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage*



VISION

Experience the Gulf Islands presents a shared and attainable vision of the future. While not explicitly stated, the Vision maintains the environmental conservation and protection ethic that is the foundation of all planning on the islands, and the prime operational directive of the Islands Trust.

GOALS

Supporting the vision are five core community goals developed and prioritized by project stakeholders and participants. The goals were first developed through the *Experience the Gulf Islands Proposal* and refined during the Concept Plan process. They were also influenced by, and closely align with, existing planning and development objectives found in plans and strategies from area governments (Islands Trust, Capital Regional District, Official Community Plans) and other community strategies and initiatives (e.g., community economic development strategies).

The goals were used to evaluate and organize community tourism opportunities and ideas into a more structured and phased timeline. In time, they can be used to monitor the implementation of *Experience the Gulf Islands* as measures are identified to track them.

An accessible, interconnected archipelago of living, working communities in the Salish Sea, so close to major urban centres and yet worlds apart. A special place in every season where residents and visitors alike continue to learn about and experience the diverse places, people, arts & culture, histories and conservation ethic that makes the islands unique.

- ★ *Increase local economic diversity and year-round employment opportunities*
- ★ *Build sustainable, low-carbon, inter-island and on-island transportation connections and linkages that limit or lower on-island car traffic*
- ★ *Enhance and expand inter-community, organizational and government partnerships*
- ★ *Expand enriching experiences of our island communities, histories, cultures, food, arts, and natural environment*
- ★ *Support and promote inter-island and on-island environmental stewardship and protection initiatives*



SUMMARY FINDINGS

Overarching findings on existing community tourism in the Southern Gulf Islands were central to the development of the *Experience the Gulf Islands Concept Plan* strategy. The findings are based on feedback from *Experience the Gulf Islands* local island teams and other project organizers, stakeholders and rights holders (First Nations).

- **There are many organizations and initiatives, but coordination between them is still relatively limited and ad hoc.** *While there has been some recent collaboration and coordination through the Southern Gulf Islands Consortium (a Destination Management Organization, or DMO, involving Galiano, Mayne, Pender and Salt Spring Island Chambers of Commerce and the Saturna Island Tourism Association), there are a large number of other organizations, websites, marketing programs and tourism initiatives (including Experience the Gulf Islands) that has resulted in some missed opportunities, duplication of work, a lack of meaningful action, competition over limited resources and funding, and some sensitivities around “turf”.*
- **There are many existing products, but few are packaged, organized into itineraries, or cross-promoted with one another.** *The islands boast literally hundreds of products and places for visitors and residents to experience. There are also some unique businesses and organizations that are attracting a growing number of visitor trips throughout the year (e.g., pilgrimme restaurant, Gulf Islands Film and Television School). But despite the existing opportunities, there is limited packaging or cross promotion of them.*
- **Community tourism marketing, communications and branding is not consistent.** *While its varied attractions, beautiful natural environment and easy access from both the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island make the Southern Gulf Islands a popular destination, there are multiple online portals, each offering a different “story”, brand and message to visitors and residents alike.*
- **Community capacity required for new events is limited.** *The achievement of hard working volunteers on the islands is remarkable, but this is a limited resource; only so much demand can be placed on them. While there is a core of active volunteers on the islands and considerable internal capacity with the number of skilled year-round and seasonal residents, there are limits on what this group can contribute. Developing major new initiatives will be constrained by the limited ability of these volunteers to take on more work.*
- **The shoulder and off-seasons should be the focus of new product development and/or expansion of existing products.** *During the summer months, the Southern Gulf Islands are busy: occupancy is over 90%, ferries are crowded and require advance bookings, and the event calendar is full. The shoulder seasons and winter months are far less busy and provide significant opportunities to expand existing businesses and services, extend tourism-related employment across the seasons, and support island livelihoods during the “quiet months”.*
- **A shared, inter-island strategy must incorporate individual island interests and priorities: Each island is different and unique in their own ways.** *They range considerably in size, level of development, visitor numbers, and recent growth trends. As such, they have different goals for community tourism that must be considered and accounted for in archipelago-wide community tourism planning.*
- **On-islands and inter-islands transportation is a key challenge, and opportunity: Getting to and moving around the islands using low carbon, more active transportation options (cycling, walking), remains a challenge.** *With BC Ferries likely to remain the principal means of transportation to the islands, the increasing costs, peak travel reservations requirements, and long-wait times associated with them will likely support new alternatives to the use of private vehicles to access the islands. Trail infrastructure, a key part of the visitor experience and resident transportation, is in various stages of planning and development with progress being made on community trails, but there is still a need for discussion about regional trails and appropriate standards on the islands.*



PHOTO: Lighthouse, Mayne Island. CC-by-sa, Steve Voght, flickr.com

STRATEGY

Based on these summary findings, additional feedback and guidance from the *Experience the Gulf Islands* project teams, and input from other project stakeholders, including stakeholders who would be involved in implementing identified actions, a set of community tourism strategies was developed.

The strategies considered existing resources (constraints and opportunities), and current community tourism planning and implementation capacity. They also considered coordination with other ongoing and concurrent planning activities (e.g., Southern Gulf Islands DMO, CRD Regional Trails Plan, Southern Gulf Islands Agriculture Plan) and existing, guiding policy documents (e.g., Official Community Plans, tourism and economic development strategies).

As a whole, the strategies are designed to address overarching organizational issues, to support Gulf Islands tourism stakeholders to “get on the same page” and work toward a common goal using limited resources more effectively and efficiently. They are also designed to continue building on the initiatives, products and opportunities underway through better coordination, packaging (itineraries) and cross-promotion, with new experiences being developed to fill gaps over the longer-term.

Six interrelated strategy areas were identified with a series of supporting actions highlighted under each. The actions are phased and prioritized

according to when they should commence: 🕒 Quick Start (1 to 6 months), 🕒 Short-term (6 to 18 months), and 🕒 Medium-term (18+ months) identified. Quick Start Opportunities are foundational opportunities that will help support future projects and help build community momentum for future initiatives. As the scale and scope of the actions vary, the phasing indicates when action implementation should commence, not the timeframe to complete them (i.e., it is not expected to complete all Quick Start actions within six months).

The actions identified on the following “Plan-on-a-page” are more fully described and detailed in *Section 5 - How We’ll Get There*.

LONGER-TERM OPPORTUNITY AREAS AND EXPERIENCES

Experience the Gulf Islands Teams from each of the islands contributed dozens of ideas and opportunities for new and expanded community tourism products that would support community tourism goals. These opportunities were organized into general thematic groupings. The opportunities are summarized in *Section 5 - How We’ll Get There*. Longer-term product opportunities are organized into four general theme areas: *Feasts of Field, Forest & Ocean*; *Learning & Living the Island Life*; *Plants, Animals & Play*; and *Foot, Water & Wheel*.

Actions

STRATEGIES	🕒 QUICK START (1-6 MONTHS)	🕒 SHORT TERM (6-18 MONTHS)	🕒 MEDIUM TERM (18+)	LEGEND
ESTABLISH THE FOUNDATIONS	<div>1-A. Establish an inter-island ETGI Committee</div> <div>1-B. Hire dedicated staff to support implementation of ETGI strategies</div>			<div>— One-time action</div> <div>- - - Ongoing action</div>
GROW COMMUNITY CAPACITY	<div>2-A. Develop and share community events calendar</div> <div>2-B. Coordinate volunteer time</div>	<div>2-C. Consolidate volunteer base (succession planning/mentoring/recruitment)</div> <div>2-D. Develop paid positions to support community event planning</div>		
EXPAND THE SEASON		<div>3-A. Conduct visitor survey <i>(Note: winter, spring shoulder seasons could be pilot Quick Start)</i></div> <div>3-B. Consolidate and leverage existing attractions</div>		
BUILD ITINERARIES AND AWARENESS	<div>4-A. Develop visitor itineraries</div>	<div>4-B. Develop Brand Blueprint</div>	<div>4-C. Establish a central web portal for visitors</div> <div>4-D. Develop welcome portals and signage at principal entry points</div>	
ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE			<div>5-A. Monitor ETGI brand and experiences</div> <div>5-B. Evaluate ETGI brand and experiences</div> <div>5-C. Identify new experiences</div>	
IMPROVE TRANSPORTATION		<div>6-A. Coordinate with parallel planning initiatives (e.g., <i>Regional Trails Plan</i> and <i>Transportation Service Study</i>)</div>	<div>6-B. Continue developing local trail network and connections to regional trail network</div> <div>6-C. Prepare an "ETGI Trail Network Map" for use in communications and promotions</div> <div>6-D. Continue to explore passenger only small craft linkages between the islands</div>	

2. Islands in the Salish Sea – Where we live

An island archipelago located off the south-east coast of Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland, the Southern Gulf Islands are widely regarded as a recreational paradise and ecological wonder. Made up of six major islands interspersed with a multitude of islets, the area is a popular tourist destination and home to about 15,000 year-round residents and a much larger seasonal resident population.

A Salish Sea

The Salish Sea encompasses the coastal waterways between Vancouver and Vancouver Island, including the Strait of Georgia, the Strait of Juan de Fuca and Puget Sound. At the heart of the Salish Sea, lie the Southern Gulf Islands.

The name honours the Coast Salish people, a large group of ethnically and linguistically related First Nations. Their territories span the entire coast, from Puget Sound and the Olympic Peninsula up the waterways between Southern Vancouver Island and the BC mainland to the Northern Gulf Islands (Denman, Hornby, Cortes, Quadra).

FIRST NATIONS

With its temperate climate and rich natural resources, the area now known as the Southern Gulf Islands has been home to First Nations for thousands of years. The archaeological record is still incomplete, but it is clear that people lived, fished, hunted, and worked on multiple islands in the region at least 5,000 years ago and likely much longer. Seasonal and permanent village sites dotted the islands, with great surges in population following the cycles of the salmon and their journey up the mighty Fraser River. The W̱SÁNEĆ First Nations (Tsartlip, Pauquachin, Tseycum, Tsawout) of Vancouver Island's Saanich Peninsula have particularly strong connections to the Gulf Islands.

While the number of First Nations now living on the islands is a shadow of what it once was, the signs of this great activity and sensitive heritage places remain, including burial sites, outlines of ancient clam gardens and fishing weirs, shell middens and pictographs. There are even depressions in the forests of Galiano at Dionisio Point Provincial Park, marking where great longhouses once stood. The stories and traditional knowledge of the places also remain, along with the stories of the land and sea, some waiting to be retold and shared, as First Nations begin to reconnect with the islands.

First Nations remain rights holders to the larger Southern Gulf Islands area. Today, there are several unpopulated reserves scattered throughout the islands and a single community, Penelakut, on Penelakut Island. Other reserves include several W̱SÁNEĆ First Nations reserves, including a Tsartlip First Nation reserve on Mayne, a Tsawout First Nation reserve on Salt Spring, a Penelakut First Nation reserve on Galiano, and two shared Tsawout / Tseycum reserves on Saturna and Pender.

Cowichan Tribes, BC's most populous First Nation located across from Salt Spring Island around Duncan and Cowichan Bay, have also been active in the Burgoyne Bay (Xwaaq'wum) area of Salt Spring Island. Youth culture camps have been organized in the area and a traditional welcome pole was recently raised on site.

PENELAKUT ISLAND

Penelakut Island, formerly Kuper Island, belongs to the Hul'q'umi'um people, and is the only occupied First Nations reserve in the Southern Gulf Islands. With a present population of approximately 300, the island was historically home to three permanent winter villages at Penelakut Spit, Telegraph Harbour, and Lamalchi Bay. Penelakut comes from the Hul'qumi'num name for this place, Pune'laxutth', which means 'log buried on the beach'.

Though located in the Southern Gulf Islands, Penelakut Island falls within the Cowichan Valley Regional District, not the Capital Regional District.



PHOTO: Penelakut Island in the early 1900's
(Royal British Columbia Museum archives)



THETIS

Penelakut First Nation

PENELAKUT

GALIANO

Salish Sea

MAYNE

Tsartlip First Nation

SATURNA

**Tsawout First Nation &
Tseycum First Nation**

NORTH & SOUTH PENDER

SALT SPRING

Tsawout First Nation

Xwaaqw'um

Grace Islet

Vancouver Island

Duncan

HWY.1



The Southern Gulf Islands Today

A RECENT HISTORY

Beginning in the 18th century, as many of the island names indicate, the Southern Gulf Islands were mapped by Spanish and English explorers. Of all the Southern Gulf Islands, Salt Spring is the only one not named for an explorer or his ship.

Miner's Bay on Mayne was one of the first settlements on the islands, earning its name as a convenient stopover for those seeking gold in the Cariboo gold rush and traveling along the Fraser River.

In the years that followed, pioneers and immigrants from around the world began settling the surrounding islands, establishing farms and small businesses. Resource industries like forestry and fishing were the dominant pursuits throughout the early and mid-1900s, as the islands developed as hard-working, rural communities.

As resource activities declined, they have been replaced by smaller businesses, arts and crafts, tourism and recreation, with seasonal vacation homes and residents swelling the local population every summer. Agriculture remains an important part of the islands, with a growing emphasis placed on food-focused tourism.



PHOTO: Agricultural Hall at Miners Bay, Mayne Island. CC-by, David Stanley, flickr.com







ISLAND COMMUNITIES

Galiano Island

- **Population:** 1,138 (2011 Census)
- **Size:** 57 square kilometers
- **Ferry Terminal:** Sturdies Bay
- **Interesting Fact:** Historically, Dionisio Point, Montague Harbour and Sturdies Bay were all First Nation village sites.

Mayne Island

- **Population:** 1,071 (2011 Census)
- **Size:** 21 square kilometers
- **Ferry Terminal:** Village Bay
- **Principal community:** Miners Bay
- **Interesting Fact:** In the 1930s, a third of Mayne's population was Japanese, growing 50 tonnes of tomatoes a year. During WWII, the Japanese community was forcibly removed and placed in camps in the interior of B.C.

North and South Pender Islands

- **Population:** 2,236 (2011 Census)
- **Size:** 36 square kilometers
- **Ferry Terminal:** Otter Bay
- **Interesting fact:** An isthmus once joined the Penders. The isthmus was dredged in 1902 to make a canal large enough for the steamship Iroquois to travel from the North Pender to Sidney.

Salt Spring Island

- **Population:** 10,320 (2011 Census)
- **Size:** 182 square kilometers
- **Ferry Terminals:** Fulford Harbour, Long Harbour, Vesuvius Bay
- **Principal communities:** Ganges, Fulford Harbour
- **Interesting Fact:** Settlers to Salt Spring Island arrived in 1859, many of which were African Americans from California escaping slavery.

Saturna Island

- **Population:** 335 (2011 Census)
- **Size:** 31 square kilometers
- **Ferry Terminal:** Lyall Harbour
- **Interesting Fact:** The Gulf Islands National Park Reserve protects nearly half of Saturna Island.

VISITING THE ISLANDS

With recent coverage in the New York Times as one of top destinations (#50) to visit in 2016, the Southern Gulf Islands' appeal and awareness is growing well beyond the Cascadia region. Even without the recent prestigious media coverage, tourism is one the archipelago's major economic drivers.

While more recent studies are lacking, past research found that almost a quarter million visitors visit the islands every year. Whether visitors stay for one or two nights, the summer, or make regular weekend trips through the year, their collective contribution to the local economy is significant. It's estimated that over 20% of working age adults are employed in 'direct' tourism jobs, while visitor-related employment generates about \$20 million in pre-tax income¹.

Of course, along with the visitors come many challenges, particularly as the majority of visits are squeezed into the summer months. It's estimated the visitor traffic generates over 250,000 vehicle trips to the islands annually, a number many islanders would like to see decreased through lower carbon travel options, including bicycle and transit (public and private).

¹ *Southern Gulf Islands Community Tourism Study*. Capital Regional District, EcoPlan International, 2008.



THETIS

PENELAKUT

Chemainus

Vancouver Island

Duncan

Hwy. 1

GALIANO

Ganges

SALT SPRING

Fulford Harbour

Salish Sea

Sturdies Bay

Miners Bay

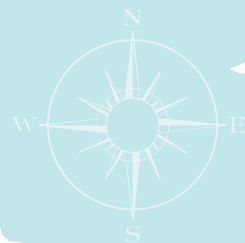
MAYNE

SATURNA

Lyall Harbour

Driftwood Centre

NORTH & SOUTH PENDER



A Unique and Special Place

CONSERVATION AND STEWARDSHIP

The Islands Trust is a unique federation of local governments serving islands in the Salish Sea, including Galiano, Mayne, Pender, Salt Spring and Saturna. Created in 1974, they are guided by a mandate to “*preserve and protect the trust area and its unique amenities and environment for the benefit of residents of the trust area and of the province generally.*” This conservation and stewardship ethic still guides the organization today, providing the foundation for all island land use planning (i.e., Official Community Plans), as well as all other planning work, including *Experience the Gulf Islands*.

ECOSYSTEMS AND SPECIES

One reason for the overarching “preserve and protect” planning ethic is because of the archipelago’s unique and special ecosystems and species. A truly special and rare place, the Southern Gulf is the smallest of BC’s 14 biogeoclimatic zones. Its cool Mediterranean climate drives a distinct ecosystem with a rich habitat and diverse wildlife.

Along the rocky shores of the islands, migratory and sea birds, sea lions, otters, and harbour seals are easily spotted, while orcas and porpoises can be found in the surrounding waters of the Salish Sea. Garry oaks, the only oak trees native to BC, and gnarled, orange barked arbutus trees, dot the shorelines and are emblematic of the region.

The Southern Resident Orcas, perhaps the best known of the threatened species in the area, are among 15 endangered species, ten threatened species and 13 species of special concern that call the Southern Gulf Islands home.

A 1,400 square kilometres National Marine Conservation Area is also in development for the area, which would encompass the entire Southern Gulf Islands area. It would help protect the larger marine ecosystems and the 3,000 marine species that call it home, including seals, otters, rockfish, ancient glass sponges, octopus, seabirds, and many commercially valuable species such as prawns, herring, salmon and lingcod.

GULF ISLANDS NATIONAL PARK RESERVE

Formally established in 2003, the Gulf Islands National Park Reserve seeks to protect and preserve the unique features of the islands. With land on 15 islands, the park encompasses 36 square kilometres of land and is a well-loved destination for many. In recognition of First Nations strong and current cultural and historic ties to the area, Parks Canada has three Cooperative Planning and Management Committees with representatives from 10 Coast Salish First Nations, including:

- **Hul’qumi’num Treaty Group** – Cowichan Tribes, Halalt First Nation, Lake Cowichan First Nation, Lyackson First Nation, Penelakut First Nation and Stz’uminus First Nation
- **WSÁNEĆ First Nations** – Pauquichan, Tsartlip, Tseycum and Tsawout First Nations

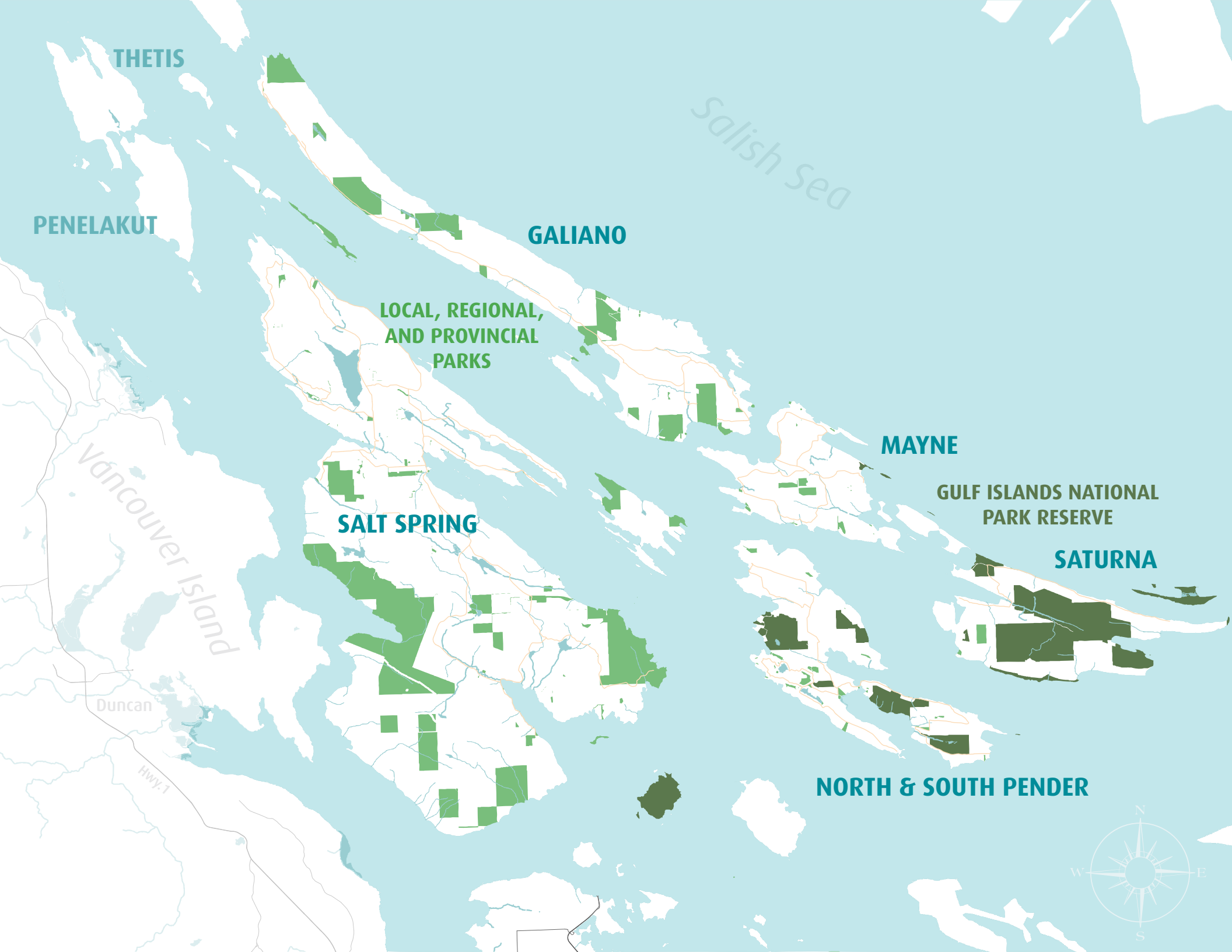
Parks Canada also works with local First Nations through their Coast Salish Traditions program, offering programs and activities that are co-delivered by both First Nations and Parks Canada interpreters.

*Parks Canada is a major community tourism partner who will likely be involved in some Experience the Gulf Islands implementation activities, while the park itself is significant local economic contributor. A recent study of National Parks in BC estimated that the Gulf Islands National Park Reserve could be generating up to 700 direct and indirect jobs and \$60 million in annual visitor spending.**

Within the Southern Gulf Islands, Parks Canada offers a variety of programs for visitors, including:

- *Regularly scheduled interpretive programming on Saturna Island - sunset wildlife watches, drop-in family programming and whale watching*
- *Parks Day - a collaborative event between the Saturna Island Marine Research and Education Society (SIMRES) and Parks Canada*
- *Year round self-guided programs including geocaching, a trail guide app and an explorers’ activities booklet*

* Source: Economic Impact of Parks Canada - B.C. National Park Highlights. The Outspan Group, 2011.



THETIS

PENELAKUT

GALIANO

LOCAL, REGIONAL,
AND PROVINCIAL
PARKS

SALT SPRING

MAYNE

GULF ISLANDS NATIONAL
PARK RESERVE

SATURNA

NORTH & SOUTH PENDER



Navigating the Islands

GETTING HERE

The Southern Gulf Islands are most commonly accessed by BC Ferries routes from Swartz Bay on Vancouver Island and Tsawwassen on the Mainland, with connections between all the islands and smaller links to Vancouver Island (Vesuvius – Crofton). While over 90% of visitors get to the Southern Gulf Islands by BC Ferries, the islands can also be reached by water taxi and private boat, and scheduled floatplane service. There are several marinas and government docks spread throughout the islands.

MOVING AROUND AND BETWEEN THE ISLANDS

Once on the islands, cars are still the dominant form of transportation, but efforts are continuously being made to improve conditions for bicycle and pedestrian options and connections.

As the largest and most populated island, BC Transit services Salt Spring Island, providing buses in the Ganges area running to Fulford Harbour, Vesuvius, Long Harbour, Fernwood and Walker's Hook.

The less populated of the Southern Gulf Islands have had to be creative in their approach to shared transit. For example, Mayne and Saturna operate volunteer operated community shuttle and buses, an approach being actively pursued by Pender and Galiano, while most islands have a Car Stop Program, where drivers are encouraged to share rides with those waiting at designated 'Car Stops'. Other options to improve on-island transportation are also being explored, including the use of mini-buses.

Moving between islands has also been a challenge, especially as a result of BC Ferries' schedule changes and fee increases. As a result, the Southern Gulf Islands Economic Sustainability Commission is working on plans to improve inter-island modes of transportation, looking to re-establish historical connections between the islands using water taxi services and existing CRD docks.



TOURS DE ILES

Tours de Iles is a free, three-day event offering boat service between the Southern Gulf Islands and featuring a variety of special events. The initiative is organized by island residents as way to showcase the Southern Gulf Islands while encouraging interconnectivity and creativity in the ways in which people move to and between the islands.

Heading into its third year, the festival continues to grow in popularity and provides some valuable lessons on the possible development of smaller-scale, year-round alternative boat connections between the islands.

TRAILS – REGIONAL AND LOCAL

CRD Regional Parks is developing a regional trails plan for Galiano, Mayne, Saturna, North and South Pender, and Salt Spring. It will identify a conceptual route for a regional trail on each island and will provide policies regarding establishment and management of these. It is expected that this planning work will begin in 2017.

On the local level, trail groups across the islands are working on local trails, some of which will connect to the regional trail network.

Once a trail system is in place, the goal is to have the trail system marketed as a destination trail loop or be designated as an alternate route for the Trans Canada Trail.

On-going coordination between the two levels of trail planning is needed. Coordinating policies and action ideas are highlighted in the Concept Plan's Strategy section.





THETIS

Tsawwassen

Salish Sea

GALIANO

PENELAKUT

Vesuvius

Crofton

Long Harbour

Sturdies Bay

MAYNE

Village Bay

SALT SPRING

Otter Bay

Fulford Harbour

SATURNA

Lyall Harbour

NORTH & SOUTH PENDER

Swartz Bay



3. What we're doing

Designed to build from and support existing island tourism and community development initiatives, *Experience the Gulf Islands Concept Plan* represents an innovative, broader strategy that looks to coordinate and enhance community tourism planning across the region as whole (i.e., both the Salt Spring and Southern Gulf Islands Electoral Areas); explicitly recognizes and seeks to realize the larger social, environmental and economic contributions of community tourism; and looks to build an archipelago-wide mobility network and organization for developing the unique experience that is the Southern Gulf Islands.

The project marks the second step in a three-step initiative. The first piece of work was completed in 2014 when an initial *Experience the Gulf Islands Proposal* document was completed. The *Proposal* introduced the *experience* tourism concept (which had been used to support a similar project in the Lower Mainland called *Experience the Fraser*) and established *Experience the Gulf Islands* planning teams on each island who were involved in its creation. The second step—this plan—refines the *Proposal* based on expanded community, partner and stakeholder input, to create a more structured and strategic plan. The third step will involve putting the medium-term projects this Concept Plan identifies into action.

As a cohesive, “made on the islands” community tourism concept for the Southern Gulf Islands, its development, and the development of the initial *Experience the Gulf Islands Proposal*, also provided an opportunity to further build and enrich the relationships and partnerships that are necessary to achieve this Plan’s vision, its shared, inter-island community tourism goals, and some of the new tourism products, promotions and events it imagines.



PHOTO: Fulford Harbour dock, Salt Spring Island. CC-by, Jess Sloss, flickr.com

Experience the Gulf Islands is an island-driven, island-based initiative. With funding from Capital Regional District and the support of a consulting team led by EcoPlan (www.ecoplan.ca), the project was led by local residents who were organized into *Experience the Gulf Islands Teams* on each of the islands. Galiano resident and coordinator of the *Experience the Gulf Islands Proposal*, Ed Andrusiak, was a key organizer in the process.



FIGURE: Experience the Gulf Islands – a three-step process

Why we're doing it

With so much already going on and with so many different players involved (e.g., local Chambers and economic development commissions, Capital Regional District, First Nations, Islands Trust, residents, businesses), *Experience the Gulf Islands* is meant to provide a platform to help integrate larger initiatives and create a cohesive community tourism concept for the archipelago.

By being part of a larger vision, individual activities and initiatives can have more clout in terms of marketing and funding opportunities. The process of developing the Concept Plan also helped to further build and expand the government, public and private stakeholders' relationships and partnerships so necessary to implement the plan.

Experience the Gulf Islands also supports ongoing work by both the Salt Spring and Southern Gulf Islands Economic Development Commissions and Chambers of Commerce on tourism by identifying some strategic communications and planning actions these organizations and islands tourism associations could collaboratively undertake to better coordinate marketing and communications, improve packaging of existing products, and lay the groundwork for future new product development and implementation.



PHOTO: Sandwich board signs, Galiano Island. © EcoPlan

PLANS, PLANNING AND RELATED INITIATIVES

Experience the Gulf Islands Concept Plan was only one of many planning initiatives underway in the area when it was developed over the summer and fall of 2016.

Other linked and associated planning initiatives underway or planned include:

- *CRD Regional Trails Plan*
- *Southern Gulf Islands Economic Development Framework*
- *Southern Gulf Islands Agriculture Plan*
- *Integrated Service Review (Community Bus & Inter-Island Ferry)*
- *Southern Gulf Islands Educational Assessment (Salish Sea Registry)*
- *CRD dock improvements (Pender, Mayne, Galiano)*

Ongoing coordination between these planning processes was a major and ongoing concern for local stakeholders. Coordinating and collaborative policies and action ideas are highlighted in this Concept Plan's Strategy section.



PHOTO: Dock at Miners Bay, Mayne Island. CC-by, David Stanley, flickr.com

4. Where we're going

A Shared Vision

Experience the Gulf Islands presents a shared and attainable vision of the future. While not explicitly stated, the Vision maintains the environmental conservation and protection ethic that is the foundation of all planning on the islands, and is an operational directive of Islands Trust governance.

Shared goals

Supporting the vision, are five core community goals developed and prioritized by project stakeholders and participants. The goals were first developed through the *Experience the Gulf Islands Proposal* and refined during the Concept Plan process. They were also influenced by, and closely align with, existing planning and development objectives found in government (Islands Trust, Capital Regional District) plans and strategies (e.g., Official Community Plans) and other community strategies and initiatives (e.g., community economic development strategies).

The goals were used to evaluate and organize community tourism opportunities and ideas into a more structured and phased timeline. In time, they can be used to monitor the implementation of *Experience the Gulf Islands* as measures are identified to track them.

- ★ *Increase local economic diversity and year-round employment opportunities*
- ★ *Build sustainable, low-carbon, inter-island and on-island transportation connections and linkages that limit or lower on-island car traffic*
- ★ *Enhance and expand inter-community, organizational and government partnerships*
- ★ *Expand enriching experiences of our island communities, histories, cultures, food, arts, and natural environment*
- ★ *Support and promote inter-island and on-island environmental stewardship and protection initiatives*

An accessible, interconnected archipelago of living, working communities in the Salish Sea, so close to major urban centres and yet worlds apart. A special place in every season where residents and visitors alike continue to learn about and experience the diverse places, people, arts & culture, histories and conservation ethic that makes the islands unique.



PHOTO: Kayaks on dock, Saturna Island. © EcoPlan

5. How we'll get there

The following section provides a community tourism strategy for the Southern Gulf Islands and identifies overarching summary findings that informed the strategy development process.

Summary Findings

Overarching findings on existing community tourism in the Southern Gulf Islands were central to the development of the *Experience the Gulf Islands Concept Plan* strategy. The findings are based on feedback from individual *Experience the Gulf Islands* local island teams and other project organizers and stakeholders.

- **There are many organizations and initiatives, but coordination between them is still relatively limited and ad hoc.** While there has been some recent collaboration and coordination through the Southern Gulf Islands Consortium (a Destination Management Organization, or DMO, involving Galiano, Mayne, Pender and Salt Spring Island Chambers of Commerce and the Saturna Island Tourism Association), there are a large number of other organizations, websites, marketing programs and tourism initiatives (including *Experience the Gulf Islands*) that has resulted in some missed opportunities, duplication of work, a lack of meaningful action, competition over limited resources and funding, and some sensitivities around “turf”.

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS:

- Establishing mechanisms for coordinating activities of the ETGI Concept Plan should be prioritized.
- **There are many existing products, but few are packaged, organized into itineraries, or cross-promoted with one another.** The islands boast literally hundreds of products and places for visitors and residents to experience. There are also some unique businesses and organizations that are attracting a growing number of visitor trips throughout the year (e.g., pilgrim restaurant, Gulf Islands Film and Television School). But despite the existing opportunities, there is limited packaging or cross promotion of them.

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS:

- With limited resources (time, financial, human resources), new product development efforts should focus on linking and building awareness around existing opportunities.
- Updating marketing materials and websites to support themed



PHOTO: Galiano Island. © EcoPlan.

itineraries, or groupings of existing activities and attractions is an area where potentially significant gains can be made.

- **Community tourism marketing, communications and branding is not consistent.** While its varied attractions, beautiful natural environment and easy access from both the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island make the Southern Gulf Islands a popular destination, there are multiple online portals, each offering a different “story”, brand and message to visitors and residents alike.

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS:

- A single, coordinated portal could be developed – or an existing one improved – that unifies and consolidates marketing and communications, facilitates easier travel planning, supports the development of travel itineraries, and provides other resources for visitors and residents alike (e.g., event listings).



- **Community capacity required for new events is limited.** *The achievement of hard working volunteers on the islands is remarkable, but this is a limited resource; only so much demand can be placed on them. While there is a core of active volunteers on the islands and considerable internal capacity with the number of skilled year-round and seasonal residents, there are limits on what this group can contribute. Developing major new initiatives will be constrained by the limited ability of these volunteers to take on more work.*

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS:

- Retention, expansion and consolidation of existing events should be prioritized over developing new ones. This can be accomplished by:
 - Packaging existing opportunities in themed and suggested itineraries for visitors;
 - Better integrating concurrent and complementary events;
 - Helping local businesses take better advantage of the major events;
 - Expanding events to include other groups and/or islands; and
 - Expanding events to run longer or more frequently.
- Leverage and better develop partnerships with existing organizations that have capacity and dedicated staff (e.g. Parks Canada).
- **The shoulder and off-seasons should be the focus of new product development and/or expansion of existing products.** *During the summer months, the Southern Gulf Islands are busy: occupancy is over 90%, ferries are crowded and require advance bookings, and the event calendar is full. The shoulder seasons and winter months are far less busy and provide significant opportunities to expand existing businesses and services, extend tourism-related employment across the seasons, and support island livelihoods during the “quiet months”.*

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS:

- Prioritize expanding/developing opportunities that take place outside of peak summer season. Strong candidates are educational opportunities, as they can draw targeted groups during specified times independent of typical tourism considerations (i.e. weather and vacation periods); and food and agriculture related events, as some of them occur in the spring and fall.

- **A shared, inter-island strategy must incorporate individual island interests and priorities: Each island is different and unique in their own ways.** *They range considerably in size, level of development, visitor numbers, and recent growth trends. As such, they have different goals for community tourism that must be considered and accounted for in archipelago-wide community tourism planning.*

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS:

- Strategies need to consider island specific interests in developing inter-island actions.
- **On-islands and inter-islands transportation is a key challenge, and opportunity: Getting to and moving around the islands using low carbon, more active transportation options (cycling, walking), remains a challenge.** *With BC Ferries likely to remain the principal means of transportation to the islands, the increasing costs, peak travel reservations requirements, and long-wait times associated with them will likely support new alternatives to the use of private vehicles to access the islands. Trail infrastructure, a key part of the visitor experience and resident transportation, is in various stages of planning and development with progress being made on community trails, but there is still a need for discussion about regional trails and appropriate standards on the islands.*

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS:

- Early strategies (quick starts and short-term) should focus on opportunities that work with the existing infrastructure and ferry services, while supporting car-free mobility options (e.g., bike rentals, electric bike and scooter rental, inter-island pick-up and drop-off, bike and walking tours).

THE SHARING ECONOMY EXPERIENCE

As young adults in urban areas increasingly choose car-free options in their daily life, they are looking for similar options on their vacations. With the right packaging and marketing, this could be a key group to target for car-free getaways. There are also opportunities to coordinate with existing car sharing programs (e.g., Modo) to explore on island opportunities.



SAN JUAN ISLANDS – NEIGHBOURS IN THE SALISH SEA

The southern Gulf Islands share the Salish Sea with an archipelago of four main islands on the US side of the border. Lopez, San Juan, Shaw and Orcas Islands are each served by Washington State Ferries and share a similar climate, sustainability ethos, island experience and lifestyle. Much like the southern Gulf Islands, tourism is a key sector in the islands' economy, drawing visitors from nearby major urban centres and beyond.

Tourism for the islands is managed by a collaborative umbrella marketing initiative, the San Juan Islands Visitor Bureau. Launched in 2003, the organization is funded by a 2% lodging tax collected on the islands.

Strategies

Based on these summary findings, additional feedback and guidance from the *Experience the Gulf Islands* project teams, and input from other project stakeholders the following set of six interrelated strategy areas were developed:

1. **ESTABLISH THE FOUNDATION**
2. **GROW COMMUNITY CAPACITY**
3. **EXPAND THE SEASON**
4. **BUILD ITINERARIES AND AWARENESS**
5. **ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE**
6. **IMPROVE TRANSPORTATION**

The first two strategies focus on improving the way the groups involved in community tourism related activities get organized and work together effectively. With these strategies accomplished, an improved ability to make decisions and coordinate work should make for effective implementation of the remaining strategy areas (3 through 6).

Each strategy area is made up of two to five actions, which are phased and prioritized according to when they commence: 🟢 Quick Start (1 to 6 months), 🟡 Short-term (6 to 18 months), and 🔵 Medium-term (18+ months). Quick Start Opportunities are foundational opportunities that will help support future projects and help build community momentum for future initiatives. As previously noted, the phasing indicates when the action implementation should commence. Given the range and scope of actions identified, the time to complete them will vary; it is not expected that actions should be completed within the timing phasing.



PHOTO: Salt Spring Island. © EcoPlan.

The following section provides detailed information on ETGI Concept Plan's 17 actions including:

- **Rationale:** A short description of why the action is being pursued
- **Overview:** A summary description of the action
- **Timing:** Action phasing (i.e., Quick Start, Short-term, Medium-term)
- **Lead:** An overview of action implementation responsibilities and roles
- **Details:** An overview of initial implementation activities and funding potentials (*How will we do it?*)

Actions

STRATEGIES	🕒 QUICK START (1-6 MONTHS)	🕒 SHORT TERM (6-18 MONTHS)	🕒 MEDIUM TERM (18+)	LEGEND
ESTABLISH THE FOUNDATIONS	<div>1-A. Establish an inter-island ETGI Committee</div> <div>1-B. Hire dedicated staff to support implementation of ETGI strategies</div>			<div>— One-time action</div> <div>- - - Ongoing action</div>
GROW COMMUNITY CAPACITY	<div>2-A. Develop and share community events calendar</div> <div>2-B. Coordinate volunteer time</div>	<div>2-C. Consolidate volunteer base (succession planning/mentoring/recruitment)</div> <div>2-D. Develop paid positions to support community event planning</div>		
EXPAND THE SEASON		<div>3-A. Conduct visitor survey <i>(Note: winter, spring shoulder seasons could be pilot Quick Start)</i></div> <div>3-B. Consolidate and leverage existing attractions</div>		
BUILD ITINERARIES AND AWARENESS	<div>4-A. Develop visitor itineraries</div>	<div>4-B. Develop Brand Blueprint</div>	<div>4-C. Establish a central web portal for visitors</div> <div>4-D. Develop welcome portals and signage at principal entry points</div>	
ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE			<div>5-A. Monitor ETGI brand and experiences</div> <div>5-B. Evaluate ETGI brand and experiences</div> <div>5-C. Identify new experiences</div>	
IMPROVE TRANSPORTATION		<div>6-A. Coordinate with parallel planning initiatives (e.g., <i>Regional Trails Plan</i> and <i>Transportation Service Study</i>)</div>	<div>6-B. Continue developing local trail network and connections to regional trail network</div> <div>6-C. Prepare an "ETGI Trail Network Map" for use in communications and promotions</div> <div>6-D. Continue to explore passenger only small craft linkages between the islands</div>	

Strategy Area 1: ESTABLISH THE FOUNDATION

There are many organizations and initiatives, but coordination between them is relatively limited and ad hoc, which can result in missed opportunities, duplication of work, wasted resources, a misalignment of priorities, and competition for limited funding. This strategy area aims to better coordinate the groups and organizations working on community tourism initiatives in the Southern Gulf Islands, both in terms of decision-making and implementation. It also looks to better engage and involve groups and organizations who may have not been fully involved in earlier ETGI work or destination planning work, but whose role in this area will likely expand in the future. This includes First Nations and educational programs and initiatives (e.g., Gulf Islands Film School, Saturna Island Marine Research Education Society, etc.).

1-A. Establish an inter-island ETGI Committee to support coordination and ongoing direction setting and ETGI implementation

Rationale: As the ETGI initiative ranges across multiple jurisdictions and calls for the involvement of numerous organizations and every island in the archipelago, a means of efficiently and effectively collaborating on ETGI actions and collective decision-making is critical. One means of accomplishing this is by establishing a representative committee to coordinate ETGI action implementation, support ongoing planning, and provide a venue for ongoing community tourism collaboration across the Gulf Islands.

Overview: A committee with representation from all of the islands and the key groups and organizations with an interest in ETGI and community tourism. Membership could include:

- Salt Spring and Southern Gulf Islands Economic Development Commissions
- Salt Spring, Mayne, Pender and Galiano Chambers of Commerce
- Saturna Tourism Association, Salt Spring Tourism
- Area First Nations, including Tsawout, Penelakut, Tsartlip, Tseycum, Pauquachin First Nations and Cowichan Tribes
- Other sector and tourism business representatives (hoteliers, agriculture, local artists, educational, etc.)
- Local government representatives (CRD, Islands Trust) – Note: this could include Local Trust Committee representatives
- Local Trails Groups
- BC Parks, Parks Canada

The committee would meet at least semi-annually to support ETGI implementation, monitor inter-island community tourism trends and issues, and provide a venue for ongoing community tourism development in the Southern Gulf Islands.

Lead: Leadership group of core Southern Gulf Island community representatives with an interest in ETGI and current experience with community tourism. Here, it is imagined that the core leadership group would involve Salt Spring Island Economic Development Commission and the Southern Gulf Islands Economic Development Commission. While this leadership team would eventually themselves become members of the ETGI Committee, a team is required to first initiate this action.

Timing:  Quick Start

Details: This core foundational activity can be supported by existing leadership group representatives. No additional funding is required for start-up meetings, but funding for future meetings (travel, meeting costs, incidentals) should be explored, with cost-sharing the initial meetings by foundation organizations to be explored. Alternative, low-cost, non-travel meeting methods should also be explored (e.g., Google Hangouts, GoToMeeting). Initial implementation tasks include:

- Determine membership (i.e., community tourism leadership groups, organizations, governments, agencies, and businesses that should be represented on the ETGI Committee)
- Determine organizational structure (e.g., one islands-wide committee, or individual island sub-committees with an islands-wide executive committee)
- Develop a Terms of Reference to clarify scope of activities, decision-making and dispute resolution processes, and other administrative details (e.g., frequency and location of meetings)

1-B. Hire dedicated staff to support coordination/implementation of ETGI (i.e., ETGI Coordinator)

Rationale: The coordination of the ETGI Committee (Action 1-A) and implementation of other ETGI Concept Plan actions will be far more efficient and effective with a dedicated staff person tasked with the responsibility. An ETGI Coordinator can also manage and support the fundraising, coordination, and project management activities that the ETGI actions will require.

Overview: The dedicated staff-person will carry out ETGI action implementation tasks as directed by the inter-island ETGI Committee and as required by the Concept Plan. The ETGI Coordinator will coordinate with community tourism stakeholder and work with external partners on specific ETGI actions, along with broader inter-island community tourism projects and initiatives as they arise. Their work will include grant writing (e.g., Rural Development Fund, Destination BC grant), sourcing additional funds, supporting volunteer coordination activities for larger inter-island events and activities (which could include sourcing funding for a part-time ETGI Special Event Coordinator position to support and help provide organizational assistance to volunteer run community events), and coordinating the ETGI Committee. The Coordinator will also provide regular (monthly) updates to the ETGI Committee on ETGI actions and other community tourism activities in and around the Gulf Islands.

Lead: ETGI Committee will hire the ETGI Coordinator and agree to a funding mechanism and work plan.

Timing:  Quick Start

Details: This core foundational activity will require funding over the short-term and development of ongoing funding mechanism over the longer term. In the short term, several potential funding avenues exist, including:

- Provincial Rural Dividend Fund (although the action would likely need to be combined with other ETGI Concept Plan Actions)
- Destination BC’s Co-operative Marketing Partnerships Program Open Pool. This fund has already supported related ETGI program work, including the initial development of the www.sgislands.com website (see Action 4-B)

Initial implementation tasks include:

- Determine job funding
- Determine potential scope of work for ETGI coordinator
- Write a job description
- Select candidate

Strategy Area 2: GROW COMMUNITY CAPACITY

A core group of active and involved volunteers play a vital role in the organization, implementation and success of most events and festivals in the Gulf Islands. The achievements of these hard-working volunteers on the islands is remarkable, however their time is a limited and precious resource. Based on feedback from some of these volunteers during ETGI Concept Plan engagement, many are feeling maxed-out and there is some concern that core group is aging and not able to take on additional work, especially for new events. As a result, there is a need to more effectively coordinate volunteer time and grow future volunteer capacity.

2-A. Develop a shared community events calendar

Rationale: Examining all of the islands’ events together will allow organizers to determine if events on different islands overlap, are scheduled close together, or are clustered during particular months. When these things happen, it can be difficult for the islands to share volunteer resources; it can also mean that the summer months, when many of the islands’ events are scheduled, are taxing for volunteers, many of whom will travel between islands to support events. A shared community events calendar will provide an overview of all of the events and will allow for consideration of how to most effectively allocate scarce volunteer resources.

A shared calendar of events can also help event organizers optimize scheduling, both for volunteers, but also for the events themselves. For example, some events might conflict with one another and compete for visitors, while others may complement one another and, jointly, help attract more visitors for a longer period and/or encourage them to visit other islands on their trip.

Overview: The events calendar will be an internal resource for the Southern Gulf Island community tourism volunteers, outlining all of the events scheduled (recurring and annual) for the current year. A preliminary events calendar has already been drafted during the development of this Concept Plan, which is now awaiting review from the Southern Gulf Island project teams. The calendar can be modified for use on community tourism websites, including a coordinated, primary portal that is described in Action 4-C.

Lead: ETGI Committee with ETGI Coordinator.

Timing:  Quick Start

Details: This action will be an early ETGI Committee project coordinated by the ETGI Coordinator. No significant costs are anticipated for this action. Some initial implementation tasks include:

- Volunteer groups to review preliminary calendar
- Finalize and distribute calendar and/or host on relevant websites (e.g., economic development commissions)
- Develop public events calendar for hosting on Southern Gulf Island community tourism-related websites (e.g., Island Chambers and Tourism Associations)

2-B. Coordinate volunteer time

Rationale: Much like the need for a community events calendar, there is a need to coordinate volunteers in a way that is effective and most practically utilizes their time.

Overview: Coordinating volunteer time could be done using a number of different on-line collaborative tools and approaches (e.g., Google Docs, GoToMeeting) that are either free or low cost. Some coordination would be required for whatever tool or approach is used. Local island-level and inter-island coordination and collaboration would also be required. The shared community calendar (Action 2-A) will support this activity.

Lead: ETGI Committee with ETGI Coordinator.

Timing:  Quick Start

Details: This action will be an early ETGI Committee project coordinated by the ETGI Coordinator. No significant costs are anticipated for this action. Some initial implementation tasks include:

- Select and organize coordination method
- Develop a set of guidelines to support coordination and decision-making

2-C. Consolidate volunteer base

Rationale: The Gulf Islands currently share a very active, but small volunteer base. Many volunteers, including those who volunteer for events and activities on different islands, have committed large amounts of their spare time to community initiatives over the years, and, for various reasons may not be able to sustain their level involvement long-term. There is a need to take stock of the assets, strengths and needs of the current volunteer base, while also growing the volunteer base and preparing the next generation of core volunteers. The next generation of volunteers is particularly important given the number of long-term volunteers associated with some island events; ensuring their knowledge is passed along to new volunteers through some kind of succession planning or mentoring will be important going forward.

Overview: This action involves several discrete planning tasks, which may require the support of an outside agency like Volunteer Victoria or Volunteer Vancouver. The first task in this action would be a volunteer asset inventory to identify the skills and strengths of current volunteers and determine how these can be utilized moving forward. The inventory would also help identify if there are any specific event and activity development/marketing skills gaps that could be filled through training and mentoring. Other action activities include:

- Succession planning framework – to determine how to fill key leadership roles in future years
- Mentoring plan – integrated with the succession planning framework to ensure that the wealth of experience in running community events is shared with less experienced volunteers
- Recruitment strategy – to identify new volunteers and expand the base

Lead: ETGI Coordinator with ETGI Committee oversight and external support/volunteer consultant (e.g., Volunteer Victoria).

Timing:  Short-term

Details: This action will require the development of more detailed Action Plan, as it will likely occur in phases over a longer time period. The ETGI Coordinator will lead the project, but some external support from an organization like Volunteer Victoria or Volunteer Vancouver will likely be required (both provide volunteer advising services). In the short term, several potential funding avenues exist, including:

- Local government (CRD, Islands Trust)
- Victoria Foundation Community Grants Program

Some initial implementation tasks include:

- Reach out to Volunteer Vancouver and/or Volunteer Victoria
- Working group with event organizers of volunteer-heavy events and festivals, to discuss issue

2-D. Develop paid positions to support community event planning

Rationale: While demands on volunteers can be partially offset by increasing the overall capacity of the volunteer base (Actions 2-A, 2-B, and 2-C), as events grow and become more successful, the responsibility for their execution should be shifted to dedicated, paid personnel. This will not only alleviate pressure from volunteers, but also bring more off-season and shoulder season employment to the islands.


Overview: This action could unfold in several different ways, but will likely begin with short, fee-for-service contracts to island residents with skills in event planning and implementation (e.g., wedding planners, caterers) for some of the more established events (e.g., Tour des Iles, Festival Active Pass). Overtime, as enough events need these services, it may make sense to hire more permanent staff, or expand the ETGI implementation team to include special event planning services (see Action 1-B).

The business community will also need to play a role -- as partners, funders, donors, mentees -- in supporting these paid positions. Given the benefits that primarily volunteer run events and activities provide the local business community, particularly during the slower shoulder and off-seasons, their support can be fairly requested.

The challenge will be to demonstrate the model successfully for the first time so that businesses can see the return on investment possible from supporting a community event.

As an alternative to the incremental approach, it may be possible to apply for funding to have part-time, special event planners to provide services through a pilot period to provide 'proof of concept' to local businesses. Should the first years prove successful, the rationale for business community involvement will be more easily demonstrated.

Lead: Community event organizers with support from the ETGI Coordinator

Timing:  Short-term /  Medium-term

Details: As this action will need to be piloted with one of the more established community events, it could begin as a short-term action; however, it will likely take time to demonstrate success and spread to more events, and ultimately a more permanent position. As such, the project will be lead by the organizers of an event that has reached a stage (size and with some demonstrated economic benefits) that would warrant contributions from businesses. The ETGI Coordinator could support scoping the needed services and working with local businesses to participate.

The alternative model, employing grant funding to employ permanent special events coordination staff during a pilot period, would be led by the ETGI Coordinator. In the short term, the Rural Dividends Fund is a potential funding opportunity that may fund a position for one or two years, but it would require some amount of matching financial and in-kind contribution.

Some initial implementation tasks include:

- Identify candidate events/volunteer organizers
- Scope planning services required and estimate a budget
- Working to solicit contributions from business

Strategy Area 3: EXPAND THE SEASON

While the Gulf Islands are at near capacity during the summer high-season, spreading the visitor load and attracting visitors in the shoulder and low-seasons remains a challenge and a key objective of this Concept Plan. Fortunately, the Southern Gulf Islands already boast many successful attractions that draw visitors throughout the year. By expanding on these strengths, the Southern Gulf Islands can build on attractions that have a proven track record of succeeding in the off-season. Furthermore, by building off of, or leveraging, existing attractions there is a higher level of control over the timing of increased visitation, allowing efforts and resources to be focused on increasing visitation during slower periods.


3-A. Conduct visitor survey

Rationale: The last broad based visitor study was conducted in 2008 as part of the Southern Gulf Islands Community Tourism Study. As a result, current quality of visitor data is poor and limited, making identification of product and service gaps and opportunities difficult. In addition, the 2008 work did not include a visitor survey component. Up-to-date visitor data would support more refined product opportunity gap analysis and development, including shoulder and off-season visitor trends and opportunities. In addition to visitor data, the survey could gather information relevant to other island initiatives and studies, while also providing a marketing opportunity for ETGI (surveyors could hand out information and provide links to a new website).

Overview: A visitor survey could be conducted through intercept surveying at ferry terminals and/or on-board BC ferries. While summer visitor surveys are important, the same survey could be delivered at different times through the season, including shoulder and winter season. Specific information it could collect, includes:

- Travel mode (car, passenger, bike)
- Visit purpose
- Quality of events/attractions; interest in other events/attractions
- Visitor demographics/profile (age, income, home)
- Trip planning
- Spending

Lead: The Department of Recreation and Tourism Management at Vancouver Island University (VIU) has conducted similar surveys and studies in the past and, through ETGI Concept Plan engagement, has expressed interest in supporting this initiative either as a project for students as part of class and/or as a research project led by program faculty. Other potential partners for implementation of a visitor survey includes the Islands Trust, BC Ferries, Destination BC, island chambers and economic development commissions (Southern Gulf Islands and Salt Spring Island).

Timing:  Short-term
(Quick Start potential for a winter/shoulder season survey)

Details: This action will first require establishing an agreement with VIU and/or other partners. Depending on the agreement some additional funding may need to be secured to support student participation. Potential funding avenues include local government (CRD, Islands Trust) and, potentially, economic development commissions, particularly if the survey includes questions provided by them. Initial implementation tasks include:

- Formalize partnership with VIU and/or other delivery partners
- Coordinate with other survey initiatives (e.g., Salish Sea Registry)
- Coordinate with economic development commissions and other community tourism partners on survey questions
- Develop survey instrument and methodology

3-B. Consolidate and leverage existing attractions and events

Rationale: While the Gulf Islands boast many attractions and events, they tend to operate in isolation with little connection to other activities or businesses. While some recent festivals, like Festival Active Pass, are taking a different approach and building an event by profiling and linking existing events, there are also opportunities to broaden this approach. In particular, there are opportunities to improve and consolidate events and enhance their marketing and promotions. There are also opportunities to leverage existing events and attractions to support other ETGI Concept Plan objectives, specifically extending attractions into off-season and shoulder seasons. There are also opportunities to more actively involve the business community in helping support, expand and leverage what are predominantly volunteer-run events and activities.

Overview: Depending on the event, consolidation and leveraging may mean a number of things, including expanded event promotion and marketing, rescheduling events to better “fit” with other events, looking for off-season and shoulder season opportunities, linking events to businesses, destinations or other related events (e.g., developing trip itineraries with event, cross-promoting event with other attractions).

Lead: ETGI Committee with support from ETGI Coordinator.

Timing: ① Short-term

Details: Using the event inventory developed in 2-A, the list of events can be examined in order to determine how existing events and attractions could be improved and to identify opportunities for expansion in the off-season and shoulder-season. As the events and attractions are primarily volunteer-run, there would be limited anticipated costs for this action, save some additional promotional or marketing costs for targeted events.

Some early implementation tasks include:

- Prioritization activity to choose events that could bring the most gains (i.e. shoulder and off season events)
- Strategizing how to build on prioritized events

Strategy Area 4: BUILD ITINERARIES AND AWARENESS

There are many existing products, experiences and attractions on the Gulf Islands, but few are marketed, packaged, organized into itineraries, or cross promoted with one another. This strategy area aims to develop more unified branding for the Gulf Islands (Experience the Gulf Islands), create linkages, increase and enhance communications, and develop themed trip itineraries for visitors (e.g., culinary and agri-tourism [Feasts of Field, Forest & Ocean]; educational and lifestyle [Learning & Living the Island Life]; nature watching and recreation [Plants, Animals & Play]; hiking, walking and cycling [Foot, Water & Wheel], etc.).

4-A. Develop visitor itineraries

Rationale: While most Gulf Island tourism websites offer basic “what to do” information, the suggestions are island specific and function more as business listings than experience itineraries of grouped attractions, events and other highlights. Developing itineraries will make it possible for visitors to more easily plan their trips based on their interests and the islands they are planning to visit. Itineraries will also serve as a way to cross-promote local businesses and attractions, promote inter-island travel and longer stays, and support the growth of tourism in the shoulder and off-seasons. Thematic itineraries can also help emphasize and achieve some of the community goals identified in this Concept Plan (e.g., appreciation of Gulf Island communities’ histories, food, cultures, and arts; promote environmental stewardship and protection).

Overview: Itineraries can be organized a number of different ways.

- Time-based itineraries can be developed so people can find the activities and events, festivals and attractions available to them during the time of their visit. These itineraries can be developed based around seasonal attractions, including farm harvests or wildlife migrations. They can also be organized around the amount of time visitors have (e.g., a winter weekend getaway).
- Thematic itineraries can be developed around an areas of interest, or particular island features, such as local food and eating, marine recreation, or natural history (e.g., tafoni rock formations, historic First Nation clam beds). Less time-dependant, these itineraries could be available for people visiting throughout the year. See *Section 6 - Future Opportunities* for more ideas around different themes around which itineraries could be developed.

Developing itineraries can start small (e.g., PDF attachments on the ETGI website) and become more sophisticated as the ETGI initiative advances (e.g., mobile apps for visitors).

Lead: ETGI Committee with support from ETGI Coordinator.

Timing:  Quick Start

Details: As a Quick Start, the first itineraries can build on the basic “things to do” business listings available on most existing Gulf Island websites. Itinerary development is an inexpensive undertaking beyond the meeting time required. Some preliminary implementation activities include:

- Establish process for itinerary development, including who will be involved in creating them and how they will be developed
- Identify themes, possibly with ETGI Committee (Note: www.visitsanjuans.com provides a good example of trip itineraries)
- Develop format and style for itineraries (print and web)
- Write and publish itineraries

4-B. Develop a Brand Blueprint

Rationale: Visual branding is a cornerstone of effective communication, awareness building and marketing, and is critical to community place branding of any kind. While there is an existing project logo, its development was not part of a more comprehensive branding exercise and there are no usage guidelines or an accompanying style guide for ETGI communications (i.e., print and digital). While the existing project logo could be maintained or refined, it could also be re-imagined, incorporating brand structure and target audience insights. Currently, there is no cohesive visual identity for the ETGI initiative.

Overview: A Brand Blueprint and Usage Guide would establish a clear visual identity for Experience the Southern Gulf Islands and outline its positioning, promise, key messages and brand story (i.e., the 'elevator pitch'). The Brand Blueprint would be a 'living document' that evolves over time along with ETGI initiative and provide a cornerstone document for communicating about the ETGI brand, building a visual identity and outlining marketing planning. The Brand Blueprint would include guidelines for maintaining brand consistency and instructions for use of a set of core brand applications (toolkit) could include designs for brochure/rack card, posters and/or print ads, and on-line components. The Brand Blueprint will support the updating of the ETGI website and signage and wayfinding at points of entry and on-island.

Lead: Project consultant (branding, communication and digital design firm) under direction of ETGI Coordinator.

Timing: 🕒 Short-term

Details: As a consultant-driven undertaking, the Brand Blueprint action would require project funding. Destination BC's Co-operative Marketing Partnerships Program Open Pool is a good source of potential funding, particularly if grouped with other market development actions like Action 4-C and 4-D.

Initial action activities include:

- Engage a branding, communication and digital design firm
- Undertake Brand Blueprint project with ETGI Committee engagement

4-C. Expand and establish existing Experience the Southern Gulf Islands as the central web portal for visitors, trip planning and promotions

Rationale: There are a relatively large number websites representing the Southern Gulf Islands. Most offer valuable information, and the five Gulf Island tourism sites accessed through the recently launched Experience the Southern Gulf Islands webpage (www.sgislands.com) are all high quality. Still, there are challenges for visitors seeking on-line guidance. In addition to the large number of sites (and the hard to find www.sgiislands.com site), some sites are better maintained and more current than others, while some also present conflicting information (e.g., event timing and names, ferry schedules, etc.). Although some future upgrades are planned on the new sgislands site, a single, unified site is recommended.

Overview: An enhanced ETGI website could be developed on the existing www.sgislands.com foundation. As imagined, the enhanced site would function as a full tourism website system (CMS) that includes events listings, marketing and promotional information, accommodations support, and general visitor information organized around themed itineraries for individual islands and inter-island adventures. Following leading edge industry standards, the website would be interactive, allowing for user input. The site would also be designed so that specific content areas are easily updated by the site operator. When updating the site, a more intuitive domain name should be sought and site design should follow ETGI Brand Blueprint guidelines. Some features that the enhanced site could feature include:

- “Things to do”, “Places to see”, “Plan your visit” content
- User provided content (e.g., reviews, photos, recommendations)
- Visitor information on the archipelago’s overarching conservation and protection ethic

- Maps
- Calendar of events site operator can update
- Travel planner, including low-carbon travel information (e.g., foot, bicycle)
- Live weather widget
- Blog

Timing: 🟢 Short-term / 🟢 Medium-term

Lead: Project consultant (web and digital design firm) under direction of ETGI Coordinator.

Details: Web development and upkeep can be expensive. Even with some foundation pieces in place, a full CMS website can cost \$50,000+, while upkeep and maintenance could cost \$8,000 to \$14,000 annually. In the short term, several potential funding avenues exist, including Destination BC’s Co-operative Marketing Partnerships Program. This fund has already supported related ETGI program work, including the initial development of the www.sgislands.com website. Some early implementation activities include:

- Update interface and style of site based on Brand Blueprint
- Improve experience and search engine optimization of current website
- Research and select tourism website system
- Develop and collect content for website

4-D. Develop welcome portals and signage at principal entry points (Tsawwassen, Swartz Bay and on-island)

Rationale: Existing signage at principal entry points (i.e., Tsawwassen, Swartz Bay) is poor and does not do enough to communicate key visitor information. This includes higher level information on the Gulf Islands conserve and protect ethic that is so crucial for both visitors and residents alike. Improved signage at key entry points can serve as a way to “set the tone”, emphasizing the need for tourists to tread lightly and protect the Southern Gulf Island’s fragile eco-system, while also providing visitors and residents with important community and tourism information.

Overview: There is potential for signage at Tsawwassen and Swartz Bay ferry terminals, with smaller signage at island terminals (Fulford, Long Harbour, Village Bay, Sturdies Bay, Otter Bay and Lyall Harbour). On-board signage could also be considered for new BC Ferries that will be introduced to Southern Gulf Islands routes. Interpretive elements could include information on the islands, including the Islands Trust’s overarching conservation and protection ethic that encourages visitors to travel lightly on the land and sea. Wayfinding elements could include island maps, key communities and island attractions. For islands specific terminals, signage would include island specific community information (e.g. bike routes and trails, community facilities and emergency routes) and highlight key visitor opportunities. There could also be an opportunity for local notice boards to advertise events, lodging and activities. The first phase of this project would include placing signage at Tsawwassen and Swartz Bay, while the second phase would see expanding the signage to all Southern Gulf Island ferry terminals. Terminal signage sites also provide an opportunity to partner with local First Nations on art features (e.g., welcome post).

Timing: 🟢 Short-term / 🟡 Medium-term

Lead: ETGI Coordinator, working with BC Ferries and other action partners.

Details: Given the location of the welcome signage in BC Ferries terminals, they will be a key partner (design review, construction and maintenance). An agreement with CRD, the Island Trust and BC Ferries will also likely be required for this action. The cost of the signage will vary considerably based on scale, fabrication/ materials and siting. Signage design costs would also be incurred.

Funding partners would include CRD, Islands Trust and BC Ferries. BC Heritage offers a funding program for signage. Total costs would likely range between \$30,000 to \$50,000 for portal signage (two locations) and \$20,000 to \$40,000 for on-island signage (five locations).

Key implementation activities include:

- Pursue partnership with BC Ferries and other likely partner organizations (CRD, Islands Trust)
- Hire designer and develop sign content
- Design signage using Brand Blueprint



FIGURE: Welcome and interpretive signage at Swartz Bay

Strategy Area 5: ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE

Over time, as capacity continues to grow and tourism partners gain a better understanding of visitor needs and interests from ongoing visitor surveys, existing experiences (activities, events, attractions) can be further expanded and refined, and, should community capacity and market conditions allow, new experiences developed on and between islands. Enhancing the experience can also be driven by community interest in better addressing specific, or new, community tourism objectives.

5-A. Monitor ETGI brand and experiences

Rationale: Building and refining the ETGI brand and experience will be an ongoing activity and an important responsibility. From a community tourism perspective, monitoring and evaluation is a particularly important undertaking to ensure that tourism actions are helping support identified goals and the broader tourism vision for the ETGI area.

Overview: Monitoring will help ensure that lessons learned through collaboration programs, projects, and actions are not lost, but instead used to help grow and enhance community tourism efforts in the Gulf Islands. It will allow partners and stakeholders on the ETGI Committee to review outcomes (i.e., are the actions achieving desired results?) and to determine if changes or improvements need to be made. It also provides a good opportunity to assess the state of community tourism partner relationships and the ETGI Committee (i.e., is it effective?). Evaluation of monitoring data is addressed more fully in Action 5-B.

Timing: 🕒 Medium-term

Lead: ETGI Coordinator with CRD Planning and Protective Services and Islands Trust support (indicator development and data).

Details: Monitoring requires project partners to identify measures or indicators linked to community tourism goals that can be used to track outcomes. For example, for the goal, *increase local economic diversity and year-round employment opportunities*, a likely related measure might be taken from BC Stats/Census employment and job data (food and hospitality employment numbers or comparing the mix of job types over time using North American Industry Classification System [NAICS] for Canada). The indicators and measures can be developed by the ETGI Coordinator with CRD Planning and Protective Services support (indicator development and data) and presented to the ETGI Committee for review. There are no additional costs anticipated for this task, beyond those incurred by the ETGI Coordinator in carrying out the

monitoring program and the meeting costs of the ETGI Committee to review monitoring program findings.

Key implementation tasks include:

- Identifying measures/indicators for the community tourism goals and data sources
- Determining monitoring and reporting cycle (i.e., when will monitoring occur and who will be involved?)

5-B. Evaluate ETGI brand and experiences

Rationale: Building on the successes of previous actions in the Concept Plan (e.g., consolidating and growing the volunteer base, supporting and reinforcing existing events, developing thematic itineraries), this evaluation action asks those involved to check-in on what's worked well and what hasn't. Taking stock will mean that lessons-learned can be applied to different events and initiatives on different islands and successes can continue to be refined.

Overview: This action will be based on and grow from monitoring carried out in Action 5-A. Evaluation will involve analyzing the information gathered during Action 5-A to determine where, how, and if ETGI actions (and other community tourism initiatives) could be improved. Typically, a more formal evaluation will help ETGI partners and stakeholders answer questions like:

- Are ETGI partner and stakeholder needs being met through ETGI actions and the initiative in general?
- Are there opportunities to improve ETGI by refining actions, introducing new ones, or involving partners and stakeholders in different ways?
- Have internal and/or external circumstances changed enough to require ETGI Committee and Coordinator agreements and Terms of Reference to change?
- Have there been any missed opportunities to further build relationships, and if so, can these gaps be addressed (Note: here the critical, but ongoing relationship building with First Nations with reserves and initiatives on the Gulf Islands should be highlighted)?
- What kind of additional support do partners and stakeholders need to carry out previously agreed upon tasks that they may have had difficulty with or missed?

Timing: 🕒 Medium-term

Lead: ETGI Coordinator with ETGI Committee.

Details: Formal ETGI program evaluation should be carried on a regular basis, as agreed upon by the ETGI Committee. How often evaluations take place will depend on Committee direction, but a formal evaluation process at least once every three to five years is recommended. There are no additional costs anticipated for this task, beyond those incurred by the ETGI Coordinator in preparing for the evaluation and the meeting costs of the ETGI Committee to carry out the evaluation.

Key implementation tasks include:

- Determining the evaluation process (i.e., when will evaluation occur and who will be involved)

5-C. Identify new experiences

Rationale: The identification of new experiences, attractions and events can help address the gaps and needs identified in the ETGI monitoring and evaluation process (Action 5-A and 5-B). Here, this could mean enhancements to existing events and activities as well as identifying new experiences. While it is not the role of the ETGI Committee or ETGI Coordinator to develop and start-up new experiences, identifying opportunities for others to develop can be an important ETGI Committee task.

Overview: ETGI Island project teams and others consulted during the development of the Concept Plan provided a number of new experience (events, attractions, itineraries) which are captured in *Section 6 – Future Opportunities*. While some of these opportunities, particularly the itineraries, lend themselves to shorter term uptake, others will depend upon an individual or group willing to take on the opportunity as a business opportunity.

Timing: 🕒 Medium-term+

Lead: ETGI Committee.

Details: Identifying new, expanded and enhanced ETGI experiences will likely occur on an ad hoc and informal level going forward, with new ideas coming from ETGI Committee discussions and suggestions provided to the ETGI Coordinator. These ideas and suggestions should be captured by the ETGI Coordinator for review during ETGI monitoring and evaluation. There are no additional costs anticipated for this task, beyond those incurred by the ETGI Coordinator in tracking new experience ideas.

Key implementation tasks include:

- Setting up a system to capture new experience ideas as they arise or are presented by ETGI Committee members and other tourism partners and stakeholders
- Making the list available to Chamber of Commerce for new arrivals or investors seeking tourism opportunity ideas

Strategy Area 6: IMPROVE TRANSPORTATION

Accessible, sustainable and alternative transportation networks are key to ETGI, its vision and its goals. From the continued development of local-level trails, to bigger projects and challenges, like developing new passenger only, inter-island ferry connections, improving on-island and inter-island transportation networks and connections remains a key shared goal.

6-A. Ensure work in parallel planning initiatives (i.e., the CRD Regional Trails Plan and Integrated Service Review) are coordinated with each other and support the other work being conducted as part of ETGI)

Rationale: From a community tourism perspective, on-islands and inter-islands transportation is a key challenge, and opportunity, that was recognized as a core community tourism goal in this Concept Plan (*Build sustainable, low-carbon, inter-island and on-island transportation connections and linkages that limit or lower on-island car traffic*). Trail infrastructure, for pedestrians and cyclists, is also an important component of the visitor experience and residents on-island transportation network.

Overview: ETGI started as a transportation (trails) focused initiative that grew and evolved into a broader community tourism initiative, particularly as trails components were taken up through regional trails planning initiatives with the CRD. While this Concept Plan's focus is broader, improving on-island and inter-islands connections and supporting the projects, people, organizations and consultant teams engaged on key parallel planning initiatives (i.e., the CRD Regional Trails Plan and Integrated Service Review) remains an important focus. Coordination and collaboration with and between the ETGI Coordinator, ETGI Committee, CRD Regional Parks and local trail planning and development groups (some of whom may well be represented on the ETGI Committee) will be an important ongoing task.

Timing: 🕒 Quick Start / 🕒 Short-term

Lead: ETGI Coordinator with support from CRD Regional Parks, CRD Planning and Protective Services. BC Parks, Parks Canada and local First Nations should also be kept engaged and up-to-date given trails projects and potential linkages. Local trails and transportation organizations (e.g., MAP – Moving Around Pender, Mayne Island Pathways and Trails Association, Island Pathways [Salt Spring Island]) should also be kept engaged and up-to-date.

Details: Regional trail infrastructure and the supporting/connecting local trail is in various stages of planning and development with progress being made on community trails throughout the Gulf Islands. Keeping stakeholders and partners involved through the coordinating function of the ETGI Committee, can be achieved by making trails planning and development a standing item on Committee meetings and a regular information point in monthly updates to the Committee from the ETGI Coordinator. No additional costs are anticipated for this task.

Key implementation activities include:

- Establish monthly check-ins with CRD Regional Parks and local trails organizations

6-B. Continue developing local trail network and connections to regional trail network as it is developed, including through coordination of efforts by local trails organizations, BC Parks, Parks Canada, and relevant CRD departments.

Rationale: There are several groups on the islands working on local trail network improvements and extensions. These initiatives are important for visitors and residents alike and directly address Concept Plan community tourism goals. It is important that their efforts are linked to inter-island transportation networks, and they are connected to BC Parks, Parks Canada and relevant CRD departments so that everyone's efforts are aligned.

Overview: ETGI started as a transportation (trails) focused initiative that grew and evolved into a broader community tourism initiative since the release of the ETGI Proposal in 2014. While this Concept Plan's focus is broader, ETGI's on-island and inter-islands trail connections remain an important community tourism goal. It is also anticipated that local trail planning groups can leverage the ETGI Concept Plan for funding their trail development efforts and initiatives. Discussions with The Great Trail (Trans Canada Trail Foundation) should continue with the aim of developing a destination loop of the Great Trail as a component of ETGI.

Timing:  Medium-term

Lead: ETGI Coordinator working closely with local trails and transportation organizations, with support from The Great Trail (Trans Canada Trail), BC Recreation Sites and Trails BC, CRD Regional Parks, CRD Parks and Recreation Commissions, and CRD Planning and Protective Services. BC Parks, Parks Canada and local First Nations should also be kept engaged and up-to-date given trails projects and potential linkages. Local trails and transportation organizations should also be kept engaged and up-to-date.

Details: Local trail infrastructure, connections and network development are an ongoing project throughout the Gulf Islands involving local trails, stewardship and community groups. The ETGI Committee and ETGI Coordinator can support this work by working with local organizations to help secure funding for the planning, development, and upkeep of local trails. Local trails planning and development should be a standing item on Committee meetings and a regular information point in monthly updates to the Committee from the ETGI Coordinator. No additional costs are anticipated for this task.

Key implementation activities include:

- Establish monthly check-ins with local trails organizations

6-C. Prepare an “ETGI Trail Network Map” for use in communications and promotions, identifying existing trails ready for use by visitors and residents.

Rationale: Trail infrastructure, for pedestrians and cyclists, is an important component of the visitor experience and residents’ on-island transportation network. Providing trail information – locations, connections, trail etiquette – to both residents and visitors is an important component of any trails program.

Overview: An *Experience the Gulf Islands Trail Map* can be developed for the entire ETGI area. The map could include a number of features:

- Trail location and classification (i.e., walking, hiking, multi-use, cycling, wheelchair accessible)
- Trailheads and connection points (local and regional networks)
- Individual trail information (length, difficulty, points of interest)
- Trail etiquette (e.g., dogs, mountain bikes, garbage and recycling)
- Points of interest and destinations

The map should be developed according to Brand Blueprint guidelines and could be distributed on-island at tourist information centres and local businesses, on BC Ferries tourist information racks, at BC Ferries terminals, and on-line, including the ETGI principal website.

Timing: 🕒 Medium-term

Lead: ETGI Coordinator with support from CRD Regional Parks and local trails groups.

Details: The development of the trails map is identified as a medium-term activity given the status of the current regional trails network (and supporting Regional Trails Strategy which is scheduled to be completed by 2018) and the number of local trails and connections currently in development; the map should only show completed trails, not conceptual networks and connections. Development of the map could be funded through CRD Regional Parks with its focus on the regional network.

Key implementation activities include:

- Identify and map existing local and regional route network with support from CRD Regional Parks so the mapping can be incorporated as a layer on CRD digital mapping database
- Coordinate with local trails organizations and CRD Regional Parks on map development

6-D. Continue to explore passenger only small craft linkages between the islands

Rationale: A key longer-term objective of the ETGI initiative is reconnecting the islands as a way of rebuilding relationships that historically existed between Gulf Island communities. Limited ferry service has not only undermined inter-island relationships, but also the ability of communities to work together toward sustainable economic growth. Improving inter-island marine connections is seen as a critical aspect of re-establishing historical relationships, increasing inter-island commerce (i.e., “plugging the leaks” of the local economy), and integrating the entire archipelago as a single, larger tourism destination, allowing visitors to experience more and stay longer.

Overview: The CRD is commissioning an Integrated Service Review. To be completed 2017, the review will explore options for non-vehicle, inter-island marine connections (along with on-island transit options). Coordination of the Integrated Service Review with parallel initiatives is recommended as part of Action 6-A; this action focuses on how other community initiatives can work alongside this central planning study as ‘pilots’ of models for filling specific roles within a larger marine mobility network.

Specifically, Tour des Iles has demonstrated a high degree of interest in inter-island travel by small passenger-only watercraft and are considering ways to expand this ‘pilot’ initiative beyond the three days it currently operates. Over time, Tour des Iles could be expanded as funding permits and participation rises to operate for longer periods of time, or more weekends through the summer.

The BC Marine Trail Network Association is planning a kayaking link between Victoria and the Sunshine Coast with a portion of the trail traversing the Gulf islands. Closer links should be explored with this group and its counterpart in San Juan County to see how they could support the broader connectivity goals of the Southern Gulf Islands.

Timing:  Medium-term+

Lead: ETGI Coordinator with support from Tour des Iles Organizers, BC Marine Trail Network representatives, and CRD Planning and Protective Services staff as appropriate.

Details: Exploration and expansion of Tour des Iles and BC Marine Trail Network Association initiatives into broader marine transportation links will take some time. However, in the short-term, as part of the CRD’s Integrated Service Review, the ETGI Coordinator can work with community groups, CRD staff, and hired consultants to explore how these initiatives can be expanded in a way that builds on their strengths as tourist attractions. Costs of longer-term expansion of Tour des Iles and BC Marine Trail Network Association initiatives may vary considerably.

Key implementation activities include:

- Involvement of Tour des Iles organizers in the Transportation Service Study
- Inclusion of lessons-learned from Tour des Iles as a ‘pilot’ into options assessment, and feasibility calculations for expansion of the initiative into a viable transportation solution
- Establish closer links with BC Marine Trail Network Association and determine how their initiatives complement ETGI objectives

6. Future Opportunities



Longer-term Opportunity Areas and Experiences

Experience the Gulf Islands Teams from each of the islands contributed dozens of ideas and opportunities for community tourism products and events that would support community tourism goals. These opportunities were organized into general thematic groupings and are summarized below.

FEASTS OF FIELD, FOREST AND OCEAN

Local foods and culinary related products and events

With the recent arrival and success of field to plate restaurants like pilgrimme on Galiano Island and the long-standing success of venerable “locavore” focused restaurants like Hastings House, gastro tourism is taking off. Food-related tourism is also supported by a number of existing festivals, including the Salt Spring Garlic and Music Festival, Sip & Savour Salt Spring Festival, Galiano Mushroom Festival, Nettlefest, Galiano Blackberry Festival, Salt Spring Apple Festival, Saturna Island Lamb Barbeque, Galiano Wine and Beer Tasting Festival, among others.

Some of the opportunities imagined by *Experience the Gulf Islands* project teams, other stakeholders and project consultants included:

- Restaurant guide and promotional package
- Farm stay cooking classes
- Coordinated plan and branding
- “Field School” in partnership with restaurants and cooking schools (e.g., Dirty Apron, Pacific Institute of Culinary Arts, Vancouver Community College)
- Salish Savouries – First Nations foods and traditional harvests (e.g., camas, reef fishing, clam gardens) in partnership with WASANEC First Nations
- Links and packages (e.g., Galiano Literary Festival)
- New festivals (Indigenous Delights, Culinary classes, etc.)
- Forage 101 – field schools and potential partnerships with food focused travel companies



PHOTO: Top - pilgrimme on Galiano Island, nuvomagazine.com
Bottom - Cider tasting, Salt Spring Island, © EcoPlan

LEARNING AND LIVING THE ISLAND LIFE

Educational products and programs, including health, wellbeing and island lifestyle programs & products

There are a number of existing organizations, institutions and agencies with educational focus including the Gulf Islands Centre for Ecological Learning (Salt Spring), Gulf Island Film and Television School (Galiano), Saturna Island Marine Research and Education Society, Southern Gulf Island National Park Reserve (multiple islands and programs), Galiano Restorative Learning Centre, Salish S.E.E. Centre for Peace and Education (Saturna), TELANET Centre for Innovation and Peace (Pender), among others. Currently, the Southern Gulf Islands Education Assessment project is in the process of identifying and assessing environmental, Indigenous, social and economic learning opportunities on the islands that could be the focus of future educational programs and experiences. The project will also identify and describe island facilities that could support future educational programs.

Some of the opportunities imagined by *Experience the Gulf Islands* project teams, other stakeholders and project consultants included:

- Roads Scholar (formerly Elder Hostel) – linking to program and developing similar educational tour products as are currently offered on the San Juan Islands
- Multi-university – linking existing programs, schools and facilities to develop a coordinated and linked education program.
- Sustainable building courses – cob and straw bale construction, super water and energy efficient construction



PLANTS, ANIMALS AND PLAY

Land and marine-based outdoor recreation, nature viewing and skills development

A recreational paradise located in a unique, rich and diverse ecozone, the Southern Gulf Islands are already well known for their land and water-based recreational activities and nature watching opportunities.

Some of the opportunities imagined by *Experience the Gulf Islands* project teams, other stakeholders and project consultants included:

- Through Salish Eyes – natural and cultural history tours
- Family/“Soft” recreation
- Multi-island, linked kayak rentals – pick up on Galiano, drop-off on Mayne
- Car Free, Care Free – bike and kayak rental hubs at island ferry terminals with better marketing aimed at younger, car-free visitors
- Link camping, kayak, bike rental at Lyall Harbour, Saturna

