

CONSERVATION

Donor adds to Blackburn reserve

Habitat for endangered species extended

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The Blackburn Lake Nature Reserve has increased by nearly six acres, thanks to a donation of land by an anonymous benefactor.

The property managed by the Salt Spring Island Conservancy has grown from 32.6 acres to 38.4 acres, with the new parcel located along the reserve's former southern boundary. The forested upland, which had not been lived on, was a gift made in remembrance of the previous owner's deceased spouse.

In addition to protecting a larger corner of the island, conservancy biologist Laura Matthias said increasing the reserve's size is good news for conservation purposes.

"The reserve already has 16 spe-

cies at risk, so increasing the connectivity of habitat is really important. Connectivity is a real issue in biodiversity," Matthias said.

"One of the most important species that the new addition helps is the red-legged frog, because they require upland habitat to go to in the winter before they go to the wetlands to lay their eggs in the spring."

Having an upland buffer between Blackburn Lake and its wetland areas and developed areas further uphill also helps protect water quality from erosion. Blackburn Lake feeds into Cusheon Lake, which supplies over 200 households with drinking water. The buffer zone allows water to filter slowly down the hill instead of pouring into the lake.

Since taking ownership of the property, conservancy staff have removed one and a half tons of garbage stemming from illegal camping and dumping on the site. The haul included over 300

kilograms of glass and 136 kilograms of tins that were recycled plus three derelict vehicles.

Matthias said diapers dumped on the property and untreated sewage from the camps could easily have contaminated a creek that feeds into the lake, as could fluids leaching from the abandoned cars. Clearing away the trash will help improve the entire watershed over the years to come.

Conservancy staff have also mapped the property for invasive species and species at risk. They discovered one blue-listed species they hadn't found before on the Blackburn Lake Reserve: the Ozette coralroot, a rare forest-loving orchid.

Fencing is almost complete on the new addition, which is contiguous with the area where major wetland restoration work and replanting was done last month. The idea is to protect the area from deer so that native vegetation can regenerate.