

Timber company rejects bid for marshland

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Hamilton Marsh near Qualicum Beach has been the subject of purchase negotiations since Island Timberlands indicated a few years ago it would log the area. Marsh enthusiasts and the Regional District of Nanaimo have been trying to obtain it for parkland.

Advocates seeking the preservation of Hamilton Marsh have suffered a bitter setback.

Land owner Island Timberlands has rejected a bid from the Regional District of Nanaimo in partnership with Ducks Unlimited Canada to purchase the land and turn it into a regional park.

"There's great disappointment," said Tom Osborne general manager of recreation and parks for the RDN. "Some of the funding that was assembled was time sensitive and will be lost."

The 90-acre marsh and 800 acres of forest surrounding it is located along Hilliers Road near Qualicum Beach. Advocates who have been seeking its protection for approximately 30 years say it is a crucial waterfowl breeding area and serves as an important maintainer of water quality for the French Creek watershed.

"People should be angry about this," said the chair of Friends of Hamilton Marsh, Ceri Peacey.

"We have over 2,000 signatures collected. We shouldn't be begging for scraps of ecosystem."

Peacey said she's frustrated with Island Timberlands' decision and believes they should return to the bargaining table.

The logging company has indicated they are conducting a land holdings review on all their property on the Island and will not be open to further offers until that review is complete.

"I don't know if this is the third or fifth attempt," said Peacey, "It's getting harder each time to resume interest from all the parties."

A Ducks Unlimited representative was not available before deadline but in a press release Dan Buffet, a regional planner and biologist with the wetlands preservation group said, "We will continue to work with the RDN and our conservation partners to secure key fresh water wetlands such as Hamilton Marsh."

Osborne said it could be a year or more before Island Timberlands will entertain offers again.

"It is our hope we can bring another proposal forward in the future," he said.

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