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Mack Laing Society
Re: Request for Letter of support – Personal Open Letter Response

The protection of our heritage is important to me. Heritage sites and objects form a part of who we are as a society. They describe our past and show others in the world where we have come from and what we have achieved over time (both good things and bad). Heritage is a part of our societal history and is essential to understanding our communities and bringing people together over common causes.

In BC, there are different forms of heritage sites and objects that form this collective societal history. Many are the stories, sites, and artifacts of First Nations peoples who have lived on this Coast since time immemorial. Some are more recent within the last few hundred years. History, by its nature, contains both dark memories and positive ones. I think our treatment of First Nations people during European expansion agendas is a dark part of our collective past which still, to this day, holds social trauma which requires healing and reconciliation.

As a social scientist, and as an individual who has both BC First Nations and Metis within my close family, I am always looking for bridge building opportunities between the worlds of our present time and our social past. I find one of these opportunities within natural history. One thing that natural history shares in common with First Nations history is a deep understanding of the natural world, its life forms and its environments.

The Shakesides property, in my view, is a precious place for two reasons.

1. It reminds us that the study of nature is a noble pursuit and that we are still learning, even now.
2. It sits atop a historical shell midden which is protected under the BC Heritage Conservation Act and a reminder of our need to reconcile with our First Nations brothers and sisters.

I am concerned with the manner in which the Mack Laing trust was accepted by the Town of Comox and subsequently administered over the years. I believe that Shakesides could be a great opportunity for local First Nations, the general public, and the Town of Comox to have a place of community gathering where the study of nature can be a focus. Where elders can gather and teach our young the stories of our past, where our community can gather to hear, listen, and feel the natural world around us and have the stories of our ancestors told and shared for the collective betterment and healing of all.

To destroy such potential would be to tear at the soul of our community.

We have an opportunity to build something great. We have an opportunity to cross the paths of time between our worlds. We have an opportunity to fulfill the last wish and dying vision of a man who dedicated his life to the study and preservation of the natural world and its dichotic histories – Mack Laing.

It would be easy to reduce this vision to the mere parts of its makeup – some timber, some plaster, some shingles. But it is the lingering vision that is greater than the sum of these parts – A vision of a natural gathering place for all.

I am concerned that we have lost touch with our collective heritage on this issue. While I will stop short in this letter of officially endorsing or supporting a specific group or agenda, I am committed to the preservation of our collective heritage (First Nations and non-First Nations) and I will be following this situation closely. I sincerely hope that the terms of the original agreement are honoured and that we find a solution to begin moving forward and achieving the vision set forth 30 years ago.

I consider this an open letter of response. You may disseminate it however you see fit and at your own discretion. I wish you well in your endeavors and pursuits to protect the Shakesides property.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Bryce Casavant". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "B" and a long, sweeping tail.

Bryce Casavant