

## Saving a historic lighthouse



By Sooke News Mirror

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One of the surprising things society members found out back in 2003, was that people are really, really interested in lighthouses.

"It's well known that a lot of people have a real fascination with lighthouses," said Teri Alcock, Secretary/Treasurer for the Sheringham Point Lighthouse Preservation Society. "We had no idea."

On June 8, the Sheringham Point Lighthouse Preservation Society was informed that the lighthouse was designated as a Heritage Lighthouse by Federal Environment Minister Leona Aglukkaq.

The process was an arduous one and over the span of 12 years the members of the society worked tirelessly to preserve and protect the 100-year-old lighthouse. The members gathered over 4,000 signatures and letters to show support, they held fundraisers and generally pushed for the designation.

"It all came about because we heard the government was making a lot of lighthouses surplus," said Alcock. There was no guarantee that the land wouldn't be sold or the lighthouse itself.

Now they can relax a little and enjoy their accomplishments. With the designation come all of the protections afforded a heritage site under the Federal Heritage Lighthouse Protection Act. The lighthouse sits on five acres with another five

acres alongside. They are two separate parcels and the land attached to the lighthouse is part of the heritage site. On the other side is five acres which is of interest to the T'Sou-ke First Nation. The area has a big history before any lighthouse was built on land at Sheringham Point. Alcock said the First Nations used the area for gathering berries and fishing. They called the area around Sheringham Point p'aachiida, or "sea foam-on-the-rocks."

"We would be happy to have them as neighbors, and look forward to working with them" said Alcock.

The future is now more secure for the SPLPS and they have plans in the works. They are thinking of some kind of interpretive aspect, whether it is in signage or brochures.

"We would like to see it as a passive park and we want people to know its history. If we can open it up, then I think it will be something of importance to the community and visitors," said Alcock. "It's just such a beautiful building and structure."

The history of the Sheringham Point Lighthouse is a long one. The lighthouse was built in response to the tragedy of the SS Valencia, which struck a reef in 1906 with 126 lives lost. An enquiry determined more lighthouses were needed on the west coast of the Island. Built in 1912, it was reached only by ship and Eustace Arden was the first lighthouse keeper. At the time a large home was located on the hill above the lighthouse and supplies were ferried there by government tender.

More details are covered in "To the Lighthouse, An Explorer's Guide to the Island Lighthouses of Southwestern B.C." written by Peter Johnson and John Walls, a SPLPS member, and photographed by Richard Paddle, another society member.

The society, of course, would love new members who can help carry out the vision for the future. They need to get work parties together to cut broom, clear trails and do general maintenance.

But that's the thrill, said Alcock.

"With the designation it means it can't be altered, we can look after it and no one can take it down. It's a beautiful site," she said.

For more information: [www.sheringhamlighthouse.org](http://www.sheringhamlighthouse.org)

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