



Spring 2012

SKAGIT UPDATE

NEWSLETTER OF THE SKAGIT LAND TRUST

The Call of the Skagit

Behold the majestic trumpeter, urged John James Audubon, "and you will feel, as I have felt, more happy and void of care than I can describe." – National Geographic, 1985

By Lynne Jordan

It was 1985, and Martha Jordan of The Trumpeter Swan Society was standing at Barney Lake sharing the story of the majestic Trumpeter Swan. National Geographic was here to report on the Trumpeter's resurgence after a century of hunting drastically reduced their population – swan skin, it seems, made sought-after powder puffs and their feathers were popular hat adornments. By the late 1800s, many believed the Trumpeter to be extinct. By the early 1900s, only 66 Trumpeters could be documented in Montana, Idaho and Wyoming and a small number survived in remote pockets of Alaska and Western Canada. It was here, at Barney Lake, in the late 1950s that scientists first documented the Trumpeters' migratory return to the lower 48 states.

The Trumpeter Swan is truly a sight to be seen – and heard. With an eight to nine foot wingspan, the Trumpeter ranks as the largest native waterfowl species in North America. And their resonant horn-like call, "the call of the Skagit", does indeed cause one to stop and take notice. Their now-common winter presence in the Skagit flats and at roosting sites such as Barney Lake, reminds us of what we almost lost forever and how the ongoing effort to protect its habitat and share the story of the return of the Trumpeter is of continued importance today.

Trumpeters usually maintain predictable movement and habitat use patterns unless faced with significant changes in available habitat. They teach these

Photo by Chuck Mell



It was here, in Skagit County at Barney Lake, in the late 1950s that scientists first documented the Trumpeters' migratory return to the lower 48 states.

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From the Executive Director

We've Moved And We're Owners!

Sometime last year as six staff were crowded in front of Diane's desk and visitors arrived and Diane tried to talk on the phone - all this happening within a 5 square foot area- it struck me that we were outgrowing our 10-year home at 325 Pine Square in Mt Vernon. It was a very sweet space, if somewhat slanted. By the time we left staff were beginning to double up on desks and Regina shared her small nook with all our appliances. President Bob Boudinot, reaching the same conclusion, formed a Relocation Team to assess our options. Our criteria included finding a place all inclusive of daily functions that could serve us for a decade or more, that had both good walkability and good parking for staff and visitors, that was a safe, quality and green work environment with the ability to store our records out of harm's way, and with easy access to I-5, Mt Vernon, and Hwy 20.

With real estate at a decade low, the team proposed we consider purchase as well as lease options. They produced reams of excel spread sheets, matrixes, and comps. Megan Scott O'Bryan, a realtor who had worked on Natural Skagit with us, helped us look. In the end, one place stood out - 1020 S 3rd Street in Mount Vernon. It was a 1930's home converted to offices with the bonus of a rental apartment (income!) attached to it. After in-depth financial analysis and inspections of all types, the Board decided the best long-term use of Trust resources was to purchase this property. We paid 55% in cash and will be paying 45% in a secure 2% line of credit agreement. We expect to pay down the line of credit in less than 10 years but have calculated payments for 20 years for a safety net. We also divert dollars each month to a maintenance fund for those large eventualities that come with ownership. With this move, we will save \$15,000 or more annually on our office costs. That's \$15,000 we can put into protecting more land... and we thought you'd approve of that.

The house is not only in great condition, but the next team we formed - the Facilities Team- worked magic renovating the space. Keith Wiggers who headed up this team and volunteer Hal Lee spent most of two months working on the house. Bob Boudinot, Hal and Keith completely renovated two bathrooms for pennies on the dollar. Fonda Downs found furniture deals and selected perfect colors and fixtures. Volunteers such as Ruth Heft, Beau MacGregor, Glenn Bordner, Rusty Kuntze and Brenda Cunningham and others gave their skills and time frequently. Brenda, Hella Lee, Janice Martin and Chris Farrow and their team of volunteers are now doing a natural scape on the yard, including a rain garden. It looks beautiful. Volunteers- you make the world go round! Thank you. To all our members who so generously support and help us in our conservation work, please stop by. You are always welcome, we love to see you and we now have both a kitchen table and a picnic table to share ideas around.





Photo by Christine Farrow

100 years from now, this open space at Barney Lake will remain a place for wildlife and for our children's children. Thanks to all of our supporters who are helping to save Barney Lake.

patterns to their young – known as “cygnets”. Ideal habitat includes large, shallow wetlands with a diverse mix of emergent vegetation and open water. These areas support a rich variety of underwater plants used for food. Barney Lake, with hidden wetlands expanding to almost 800 acres in the winter, offers an ideal location for the swans to rest at night after spending the daytime feeding on tasty treats such as potatoes and corn in the nearby farm fields.

After gaining flight in the fall, cygnets follow their parents to their wintering area to learn of its resources, remaining with their parents through their first winter. Strong family bonds help cygnets learn key migration routes and

food resource locations from more experienced adults. When Trumpeters were reduced to near extinction, the damage was much greater than simply the great decline in numbers - the essential knowledge of traditional migration routes and winter food sources was also lost.

Through many years of concerted efforts to protect these swans and their prime habitat, the Trumpeter has returned to become a symbol of the seasons in Skagit County. It is of critical importance that they have this place – Barney Lake – to rest at night. 80 to 90% of wetlands of this type, once common in our region, have been lost and the remainder face imminent threats as our population continues to grow. From mid-November until early March, we stop and listen as they fly above us in the morning and evening. We sit and watch them feed in farm fields during the day. We hope that future generations will continue to experience the Trumpeter Swans’ magnificent migration story as well. Our Campaign to Save Barney Lake is now underway. Thank you to all who have joined our effort to protect this critical wildlife habitat and thank you to all who will steward this land, and this message of wonder and resilience, into the future.

For information on donating to the *Campaign to Save Barney Lake* visit our website at www.skagitlandtrust.org or call us at 360-428-7878.

References

- Publication G3647 of the University of Wisconsin - Extension, written by Sumner Matteson, Scott Craven and Donna Compton – 1985
- “The Triumphant Trumpeter Swan” by Charles Bergman. National Geographic, Vol 168, No. 4, October 1985
- The Trumpeter Swan Society website: <http://www.trumpeterswansociety.org>



Hurn Field Conservation Area Continues To Grow Thanks To Our Partner And Member Support

This spring, the Trust purchased 6.5 acres east of Hurn Field, bringing the total acreage within the Hurn Field Conservation Area to 81.5 acres. With this acquisition and the 11.4 acres bought in August, 2011, the Trust continues to knit this landscape back together, protecting a mosaic of



Over the past decade the Trust has been knitting back together a place for elk, salmon and songbirds at Hurn Field west of Concrete.

habitats. The Hurn Conservation Area's diverse ecosystem supports elk, salmon and other important species while also providing agricultural opportunities. Recently, an amphibian survey was conducted (see article in this newsletter). In early May, a bird survey was led by Tim Manns, a prime time for spring migration. The team identified Bullock's orioles, common yellowthroat, black-throated gray warblers, Vaux's swift and many more species. These neo-tropical migrating birds winter as far away as Central America, and the varied habitat found in the Hurn Field Conservation area provides them with good breeding and feeding habitat.

Our thanks to Lin Skardahl and Steffany Raynes, our volunteer land stewards, who graciously accept the additional responsibilities of stewarding the expanding Hurn Conservation Area.



This recent acquisition was purchased with grant money from Washington State's Recreation and Conservation Office-Salmon Recovery Funding Board with the support of Skagit Watershed Council, Seattle City Light and with donations from many of our supporters and members. Thank you!

6th Annual Auction Beats all expectations

On Saturday, February 25, \$123,000 was raised for local land conservation during Skagit Land Trust's 6th Annual Have Fun, Save Land Dinner and Auction. 300 guests enjoyed the evening and bid on entertaining experiences and items generously donated by local businesses and individuals. Under the guidance of Auction Director Fonda Downs and the support of our sponsors, this event was the most successful – ever! And it was Fun!

During the evening, we announced the Save Barney Lake Campaign to permanently preserve 255 acres of cherished freshwater wetlands on the edge of Mount Vernon. With a generous 1:1 challenge match from The Clarence Stewart Fund for the Environment and other Charitable Programs of the Skagit Community Foundation, \$78,600 was raised to save Barney Lake in just 10 minutes. Thank you to all the people who gave talent, time and treasure to make our auction a huge success.

Save the date for our **7th Annual Dinner and Auction** scheduled for Saturday, March 2, 2013 at the St Joseph Center. If you would like to help the committee plan for another successful event, contact Fonda at fondad@skagitlandtrust.org or call us at 360-428-7878.

CUMBERLAND PENINSULA CONSERVED!

In 2005, the Trust began acquiring land in the Cumberland Peninsula, an area off the South Skagit Highway that is frequently inundated by high waters and laced with significant old river channels and swales. At one time Cumberland Creek also flowed across this land. The Trust's hopes were to protect enough of this peninsula to allow for natural floodplain processes to occur while also providing recreational opportunities for the public.

Jump forward 7 years and the Trust is close to realizing its goals. In June of this year, the Trust acquired 5.1 acres of land that contained the only structure on the peninsula. A tributary originally flowed right next to this building. Removal of this structure, which had been elevated in an effort to protect it from flood waters, is an important step in keeping people out of harm's way and expanding the habitat values of the peninsula.

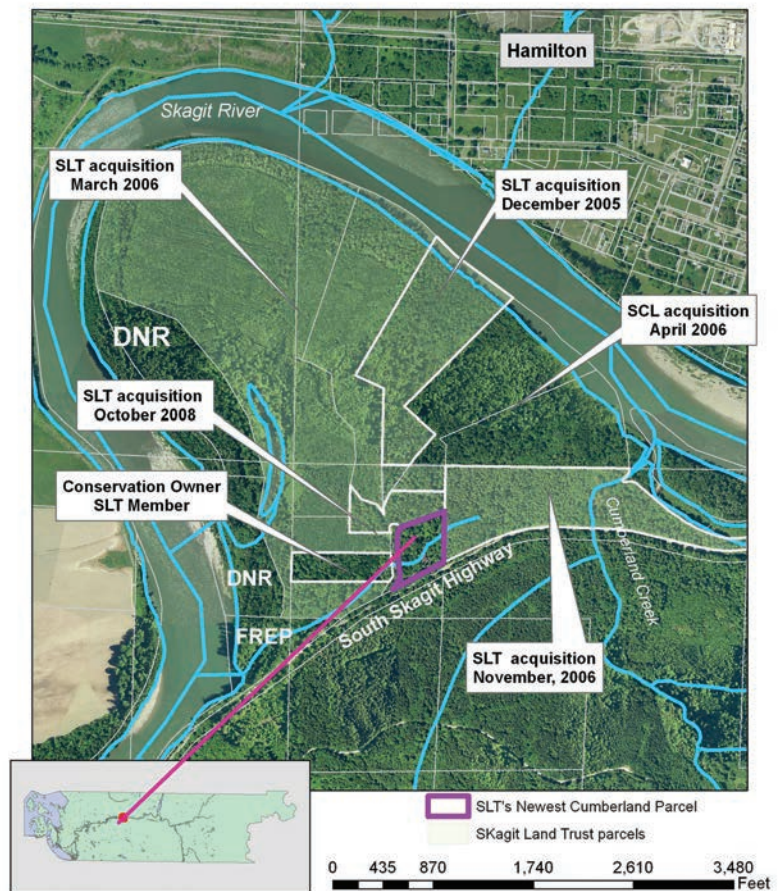
With this recent 5.1 acre acquisition, over 245 acres are now protected on the peninsula through four previous Trust transactions and one by the Trust's conservation partner, Seattle City Light (see map). In addition, over 30 acres are owned by WA Department of Natural Resources (DNR) on the west side of the peninsula. Two small parcels remain privately held in the peninsula. One is owned by a supportive conservation owner and one is protected by a Forestry Riparian Easement held by DNR.

The Trust invites you to visit the Cumberland Peninsula. Enjoy the trail, maintained by Trust volunteers, that meanders through the woods. Explore the old oxbow pond and have lunch along the banks of the Skagit River. If you are lucky, you may run in to Jim Johnson, a retired schoolteacher who is the volunteer land steward for this conservation area. He will share his wealth of knowledge with a smile.



One of our youngest members takes a well deserved juice break on a log at Cumberland Creek.

Cumberland Peninsula SLT's 5th Acquisition



This most recent Cumberland acquisition, as well as the majority of acquisitions on the peninsula, was purchased with grant money from Washington State's Recreation and Conservation Office-Salmon Recovery Funding Board with the support of Skagit Watershed Council and Seattle City Light. Membership contributions allowed us to seek and secure these grant funds. Thank you!

New Partnership with The Nature Conservancy

Skagit Land Trust has entered into a partnership with The Nature Conservancy (the Conservancy) to steward 14 of the Conservancy's nature preserves located in the upper Skagit area. For many years, the Trust and the Conservancy have worked in close partnership on a number of important conservation issues, including protection of salmon habitat along the Skagit and its main tributaries. While the land trust has focused its salmon conservation work on the "middle Skagit" area between Sedro Woolley and Concrete, the Conservancy has focused on the "upper Skagit" east of Concrete and down the Sauk River. These the Conservancy preserves, along with many that had been acquired to protect wintering Bald Eagle habitat, represent critically important wildlife habitat.

Last year, the Conservancy approached the land trust to inquire as to whether SLT would be interested in applying its stewardship model, which follows nationally accredited standards, to the Conservancy's preserves. After careful consideration, the land trust determined that the opportunity to partner with the Conservancy on this project represented a tremendous opportunity to expand our stewardship efforts and to increase our capacity to take care of our own lands long-term.

The current two-year contract with the Conservancy has allowed the land trust to expand our staff and become further involved with using community-based stewardship to take care of important Skagit lands. During the first year of the project, we will become familiar with the Conservancy preserves, collect data and compile important documentation critical to long-term stewardship efficacy. Next year, we will begin to write full management plans for the property to create a vision for how these important lands should be cared for. At the end of the two years, the Conservancy and SLT will evaluate the partnership and determine next steps.

SLT is excited to get to know these wonderful Conservancy preserves in the upper Skagit area and looks forward to the deepening partnership between the two organizations in the service of conservation in the Skagit Valley.



Photo by Steve Philbrick

Welcome Kari!



We are pleased to welcome Kari Odden aboard as part time staff to assist with the update of Skagit Land Trust's Conservation Strategy. Kari has been volunteering for the Trust for many years, first on the Stewardship Committee and then representing the Trust on the County's Marine Resources Committee. Most recently she volunteered to serve on our Conservation Strategy Committee, authoring a white paper on conservation priorities for Skagit's marine resources. Kari's academic background combined with her experience at the Trust proves a perfect fit. Kari will work on a short-term basis in the capacity of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Specialist/Conservation Planner. She will be compiling, analyzing and mapping available environmental data for Skagit County; this is a key step to identifying the most important lands for the Trust to conserve in the future. Kari lives in Mount Vernon with her husband Bob Carey and their two sons, Grant and Leif.

Kari Odden is working to compile and map environmental data to help us ensure we continue to protect the best, most at-risk lands first.

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April 1, 2011 - March 31, 2012

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Lost River Winery	Through the Back Door		
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Laurie Lundgren	River and Main		
Linda & Mac MacGregor	River Gallery		

Every effort was made to ensure that this list of donors is accurate. If there is an error, please accept our apologies and notify our office so that our records can be corrected.

Upcoming Events

August 11 - 10:00am Tour of Barney Lake
noon Annual picnic @ Skagit Valley Playfields

November 13 - 11:30am - 1:00pm Conservation Lunch @ Majestic Inn, Anacortes
Celebrate 20 years of conservation successes in western Skagit County. This is a wonderful opportunity for community members both new to the Trust's work and long-time supporters to learn about the past, present, and future of our community's unwavering commitment to protecting special lands for wildlife and people. We encourage our members and supporters to invite a friend or business associate who would like to learn more about local land conservation. Thanks to generous business sponsors, this is a free event. Attendees will be asked to make a contribution in support of Skagit Land Trust's work. Learn more by visiting our website or by sending an email to lynnej@skagitlandtrust.org. Space is limited so reserve now.

December 6 - 4:00 - 7:00pm Holiday Open House @ Hillcrest Lodge



Join us this year for good food & laughter at Skagit Valley Playfields for our annual picnic.



PO Box 1017
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www.skagitlandtrust.org

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*Skagit Land Trust conserves wildlife habitat,
wetlands, agricultural and forest lands,
scenic open space and shorelines
for the benefit of our community and as a
legacy for future generations.*



SAVING LAND FOR TOMORROW

In Memory of Gene Murphy

Gene Murphy, one of the three founders of Skagit Land Trust passed away June 9 2012. Gene and his wife, Ginny, moved to Anacortes in 1980 for their “retirement”. Gene fell in love with Skagit County and for the next 32 years put his many talents into conserving its special lands. He helped found Skagit Land Trust and was an ardent and effective advocate for the creation of the conservation easement program on the Anacortes Community Forest Lands. Gene had a keen and practical business sense coupled with a warm twinkle in his eyes. Famously, at Trust meetings when new initiatives were proposed he would ask “How many new members will we need to afford that?”

Co-founder Keith Wiggers reminisces, “Gene was a real dynamo in the formation of the Trust. In the beginning, he was the secretary, treasurer and publisher, as well as the most active of us at obtaining memberships.” Gene was a true servant leader, contributing tirelessly to the well-being of our community and future generations. We will miss him greatly and are honored that he helped to give us our foundation, strong values and focus.



Photo by Suzanne Fogarty

Gene Murphy 1922 - 2012