



Winter 2013

SKAGIT UPDATE

NEWSLETTER OF THE SKAGIT LAND TRUST

Skagit's Remarkable Great Blue Herons

In February and March, the Great Blue Herons glide in gracefully on S-curved necks, making noises you would expect to hear from someone with the stomach flu. They congregate in colonies called heronries to build their big, untidy stick nests and lay pale blue eggs. Come May, the heronries will be a cacophony of nestlings click-clacking their beaks to be heard above their siblings.

Puget Sound has the highest concentration of Great Blue Herons on the West Coast. Because they bridge marine, freshwater and upland habitats, the species is an excellent indicator of near-shore ecosystem health. Great Blue Herons depend on estuaries, eelgrass meadows, coastal meadows, riparian and upland forest for food, water and shelter.

Every December, a group of ten to twelve dedicated volunteers meet on a cold, wet day to count the nests at two of Skagit Land Trust's protected heronries – our March Point Conservation Area and the Samish Island - Squires Conservation Easement. For hours, they crane their necks skyward to count the nests in each tree. This year's Samish Island total was 326; March Point 398 and more nests nearby make over 500! Volunteers also keep an eye out for eggshells, heron carcasses and fallen nests. Citizen science efforts like the nest count provide us with long-term baseline data, useful for biologists who study larger patterns of Great Blue Heron behavior and conservation.

Wildlife biologists Don Norman, Ann Eissinger and Brenda Cunningham



Photo Pete Haase

These smiling volunteers just completed inventoring 326 heron nests on a Samish Island Land Trust protected property. This is one of the largest colonies in Puget Sound.

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From the President

Dear Members and Partners,

2012 was a very good year for Skagit Land Trust. We continued to acquire and protect important properties throughout Skagit County. I'm very happy, as I am sure you are, with our greatly expanded protection of Barney Lake. It was many years in coming and took tremendous staff, board, partner and member collaboration.



Last year we also grew and improved as an organization. The Trust has a new home - a home that we own and we have a rental attached to help with income. We have a new investment advisor (Empirical Wealth Management) and a bolstered investment committee. We made progress on our Conservation Strategy which is an impressive undertaking of data collection and strategic thinking. There is more work to be done - but it will get done thanks to our volunteers, staff and partners. We ventured into a stewardship partnership with The Nature Conservancy and expanded our collaboration with local municipalities by partnering with the City of Mount Vernon.

Our staff has expanded with talented, energetic young people. Our revenues have increased and we are meeting our obligations. We have amazing fantastic support from our members and sponsors. We have a hard working, talented, intelligent board that works well together.

Challenges remain. Funding sources, particularly at the state and federal level that have served us well in the past may be changing. We have compiled considerable data on the environment but have not yet pinned down how to prioritize and then fund our future conservation efforts when so much still needs to be done. We have a professional, high standard stewardship program but ensuring we can steward our lands in perpetuity, no matter what comes our way, remains a challenge we constantly face.

Four years ago we adopted our fourth Strategic Plan. It is time for an update and so our board and staff recently met to discuss some of the critical issues facing the Trust. Funding our future was the number one topic, followed by how and when the Trust should engage in regional planning and public policy and what audiences are missing that should be part of the Trust. In the next year we will be reaching out to our members, partners and communities to ask their opinion on the future direction of the Trust on these and other issues.

As I end my term as the Trust's president, it is clearer to me than ever that to achieve our mission we need to protect and preserve the Trust itself. No other organization in Skagit County can protect and preserve our local natural heritage for present and future generations as well as the Trust can. Thank you for joining with us in this effort.

Sincerely,

Bob Boudinot
President

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Robert C. Boudinot". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Continued from page one

counted the heron nests periodically in the 1990s; Trust volunteers began helping with yearly nest counts in 1999. In 2012, with funding from the Wildlife Conservation Trust, Eissinger created a formal protocol to guide the Trust and other citizen scientist groups in expanding our monitoring efforts. The winter nest count is an essential component of the heron monitoring program. With training and materials provided by Eissinger in November, stewards and other committed volunteers will now do more extensive monitoring throughout the season. This will include identifying forage areas and percent of nests currently in use, as well as observing bird behavior during the nesting season.

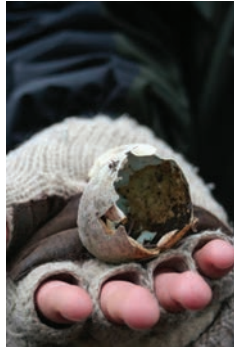


Photo Becky Rosencrans

Comparing our data with other citizen scientists' and biologists' data will help us follow the trajectory of heron populations throughout the region. Overall, Great Blue Heron populations remain stable, but recent (2004) estimates indicate that 35% of breeding birds have congregated into five mega-colonies, including the two on Trust protected properties. Smaller heronries, like the one we recently discovered at our newly acquired Barney Lake property, are becoming less prevalent. Being so concentrated could put the herons in jeopardy if development, oil spills, increased predation or other factors disturb nesting sites or feeding areas. Continued citizen scientist monitoring will ensure we keep careful watch on the populations, and do all we can to keep the Great Blue Heron an important part of the Puget Sound ecosystem.



"Would you like to get involved with citizen science projects on Trust properties? Contact mayacs@skagitlandstrust.org to inquire about upcoming trainings and volunteer opportunities.



ABOVE *Inventing heron nests at Skagit Land Trust's March Point Conservation Area.*

It can be surprisingly difficult to count the number of heron nests in a tree. Volunteers have counted 31 nests in a single maple tree at March Point, but it is far more common to find 1 or 2 nests in a tree. Several volunteers circle around the trunk, double checking each others numbers and recounting until they reach agreement. Heron nests are used from year to year, growing in size over time as herons add sticks to keep juveniles safely contained. Eventually, these nests are blown from the trees by strong winter winds.

Have Fun & Save Land on March 2nd at our Annual Auction & Dinner!

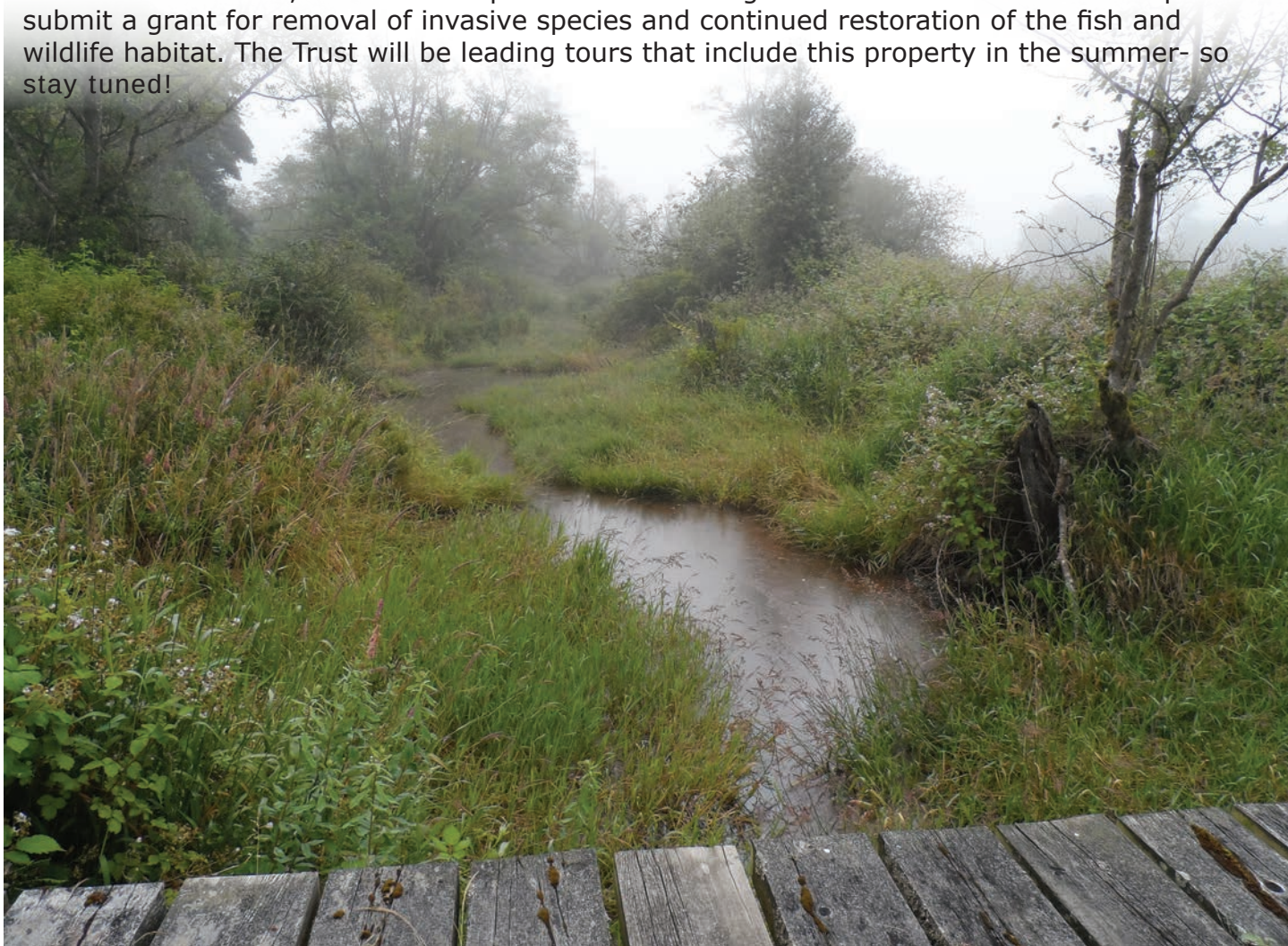
Join us for an evening of fun, fabulous auction items and great food. With over 200 items to bid on – such as a Panama birding tour for two, original works by local artists, island excursions, garden goods, and restaurant gift certificates – this is the party of the year! All proceeds directly benefit local land conservation. Visit skagitlandtrust.org to preview live items, buy tickets, and learn more.

FINDING UTOPIA IN SKAGIT VALLEY

Those of us living in the Skagit Valley often think we are in Utopia as snow-capped mountains dazzle our eyes and Trumpeter Swans blaze against the darkening skies. But did you know there is actually a road named Utopia in our county? The Trust recently purchased 44 acres along Utopia Road with the support of Skagit Watershed Council and the Salmon Recovery Funding Board-Recreation and Conservation Office and match from Seattle City Light.

The property is located just east of Sedro Woolley. It was acquired to protect the salmon habitat found in Black Slough which flows through the property. The Skagit River used to run through this land and old river channels and swales are found throughout the property. Elk and deer have been known to frequent this area.

Some restoration plantings of willow, alder and conifers have been done by the previous landowners through the National Resource Conservation's Wetland Reserve Program. To further these efforts, the Trust has partnered with Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group to submit a grant for removal of invasive species and continued restoration of the fish and wildlife habitat. The Trust will be leading tours that include this property in the summer- so stay tuned!



Leave it to nature, forever

Your gift is your legacy



THE CEDAR LEGACY CIRCLE



Charitable bequests and planned gifts help us reach farther in the future through a dependable base of support to conserve Skagit County's unique habitats, forests, farms, marine areas, and open space – and to steward these lands for future generations.

Those who have included Skagit Land Trust in their estate plans are encouraged to let us know so that we can thank you. You will receive the information you need to plan your gift for maximum impact, invitations to exclusive events, and acknowledgement in our Annual Report*. Learn more at estateplanning.skagitlandtrust.org or call us at (360) 428-7878.

*Please let us know if you would like to opt out of public recognition.

The Cedar Legacy Circle Brunch

Join us on Sunday, May 5 in Mount Vernon for brunch & conversation. The Trust will share how planned gifts further our mission and Skagit Law Group will present information on gift options and special considerations for estate planning. Call (360) 428-7878 or email lynnej@skagitlandtrust.org for more information and to RSVP.



Welcome Maya Our new Americorps Intern



I've loved the outdoors since I was a little kid. Hiking, biking, swimming and paddling my way through various beautiful parts of the U.S. made me realize, as a college student, that I had to work to protect these places. Here at the trust, I'm really enjoying getting to know all of you who make up the conservation community in Skagit County. What a lot of go-getters you are! Thank you for teaching me about everything from tree

procurement to watershed characterization.

Seems like everyone moves here, and then decides it's so beautiful they want to stay forever. Maybe I will too!

PLEASE JOIN US FOR OUR 21st ANNUAL MEETING

March 29th 2013, Shelter Bay Clubhouse, La Conner

5:30 pm Social hour, appetizers, refreshments

7:00 pm Trust year in review, elections and updates, awards

7:45 pm 'Blue Legacy: Glaciers, Climate Change, and Water in the Skagit Watershed'
Guest speaker: Jon L. Riedel, Ph.D

'Blue Legacy: Glaciers, Climate Change, and Water in the Skagit Watershed' - Jon L Riedel, Ph.D

Principal Investigator of the North Cascades Glacier Monitoring Program

Do you know that North Cascades National Park has over 300 glaciers, more than any other park in the lower 48 states. More than half of the glaciers in the 48 states are concentrated in this mountainous wilderness region. And because of that, we have some of the most important rivers and water resources on the west coast as well as a rich natural heritage. In the past 100 years glaciers in this area have been retreating, and approximately 50% of glacier cover has been lost. How has this affected the rest of the Skagit and what might the future hold?



Photo John Scurlock

The person in charge of tracking these glaciers is Dr Jon Riedel. His should be a household name as glaciers are one of the most important resources we have in the Skagit. What would the Skagit be without year-round water? Come and learn about the connection between glaciers and climate, and the importance of glaciers as a source of water for our aquatic ecosystems, hydroelectric industry, and our efforts to sustain endangered salmon and trout.

2013 Skagit Land Trust Board Member Elections

The following people are up for re- election to the Skagit Land Trust Board of Directors:
Curt Miller, Keith Wiggers, John Hunt , Janice Martin & Sara Young .

Their bios can be found at www.skagitlandtrust.org

Directions to Shelter Bay Clubhouse, 1000 Shelter Bay Drive, La Conner, WA 98257. Go to La Conner and continue over the bright orange Swinomish Channel bridge. Turn left into Shelter Bay. The Shelter Bay Clubhouse is directly ahead on Shelter Bay Drive.

Stewarding Barney Lake: *Plans for the future*

The protection of Barney Lake began in the 1990s with two donations and one acquisition of 95 acres of land along the lake's western and northern shores. In 2012, the Trust acquired an additional 255 acres of the most critical wetland and grassland areas through a community fundraising campaign and with the support of Ducks Unlimited and a North American Wetlands Conservation Act grant. At 350 acres, the Barney Lake Conservation Area has become the Trust's largest land holding and our focus is now turned to implementing a Stewardship Plan to guide the care and restoration of this important natural asset.

Since 2000, volunteers have planted several thousand trees in the eastern pastures above the lake, beginning the restoration of forested habitat around the wetland. In partnership with Ducks Unlimited, the Trust will now be pursuing opportunities to further protect the wetlands and restore Logan Creek to its natural state over the coming years. We are working on long-term plans for a wildlife viewing area and will continue to partner with community groups in citizen science and educational outings to the lake. In addition to protecting wildlife habitat, the Trust is working with Skagit County Parks to enable future recreational access along the eastern border of the property: The Centennial Trail is a regional trail system connecting Snohomish County with Whatcom County that is envisioned to be part of a non-motorized trail one day connecting British Columbia to Seattle.

Passages

George Mehler, longtime Trust friend and supporter passed away in June of 2012. George moved to Anacortes in 1955 and he not only loved it, he also helped to save Skagit's best natural areas. George and his wife Sue placed a conservation easement on their land in Anacortes in 1995 and then added to it in 2001. Over the years George planted hundred of trees from the Conservation District in the "back woods" and they thrive there today. On one easement visit he queried staff if they noticed anything unusual. He had spelled out MEHLER in trees in one grove. George's family continued to build on George's natural legacy by making a special memorial gift to the Barney Lake Protection campaign in his honor. We miss George and his thoughtfulness and kindness to our community and the earth.

In 2012 we lost **Charles Shaw**. Charles was introduced to the Trust by former board member Ray Taipale. He remained a supporter of Skagit Land Trust and many other local and national conservation groups for his lifetime. Charles donated a property on the Skagit River to Skagit Land Trust in 1996. This has since been called the Shaw-South Skagit Property and is part of the Trust's large Middle Skagit River conservation system.





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MISSION STATEMENT:

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

Upcoming Events

Saturday, February 23rd

Pressentin Ranch Planting, 10 AM - 1 PM

Saturday, March 2nd

Annual Auction & Dinner, 5 - 9 PM
St. Joseph Center, Mount Vernon

Sunday, March 24th

Day Creek Bergquist Planting, 10 AM - 12 PM

Friday, March 29th

Annual Member Meeting, 5:30 - 9 PM
Shelter Bay Clubhouse, La Conner

Thursday, May 9th

Skagit Community Foundation presents:
Skagit Day of Giving, 4 - 8 PM
Strengthen Your Community. Double Your Impact
at St. Joseph Center in Mount Vernon



Skagit Land Trust staff, from left: Regina Wandler, Jane Zillig, Martha Bray, Diane Bednarz, Maya Cough-Schulze, Molly Doran, Fonda Downs, Michael Kirshenbaum & Lynne Jordan.