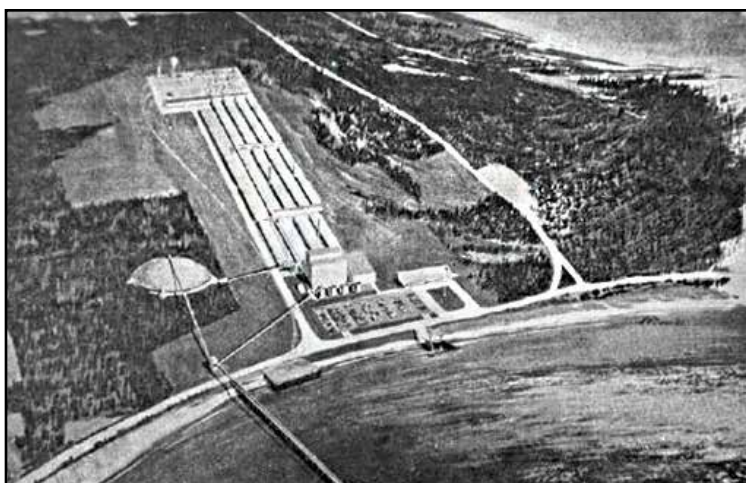




The Heart and Soul of an Island



Artist's rendition of the proposed smelter on Guemes, that appeared in the Anacortes American on September 22, 1966

Since then, Guemes Islanders and visitors have continued to work to preserve elements of the Island that are so important to the community, to visitors and to wildlife. Skagit Land Trust (the Trust) is honored to be part of that work.

In yet another example of the environmental ethics found on the Island, in November the Trust received a generous gift of valley and forest land totaling 77 acres. If you drive by this beautiful landscape today, you would be shocked to know that this property was part of the proposed aluminum smelter site.

In the 1960s, Guemes Island reached a fork in the road that would decide its future. A property recently donated to Skagit Land Trust was poised to play a major role. An aluminum smelter was proposed for a 700-acre area in Guemes Valley and the Island's southern shore.

Many Islanders and groups beyond fought this plan in order to preserve clean water, clean air and the rural nature of Guemes. They also wanted to halt heavy industrial creep into local islands' residential areas. Their challenge on re-zoning processes for this land went all the way to the WA Supreme Court. Due to their efforts, the company abandoned the Guemes site.



Site of the proposed smelter, now permanently conserved.

Continued on page 3...

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Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Members and Partners,

Skagit Land Trust has been awarded accreditation for a third time from the Land Trust Accreditation Commission. Once again, we renewed our accredited status for five years.

As Hannah Williams, who so ably oversaw our recent accreditation process knows, accreditation tests that an organization is consistently using the Land Trust Alliance's standards and practices. It looks at governance, finance, land conservation and stewardship. For you as a supporter, it tests whether your donation goes to the work you intended it to go to and meets charitable laws. If you are a landowner we work with, it tests that our conservation methods are legal, ethical, durable and responsible. It tests to see if our board follows best practices. Accreditation ensures that the land we conserve is monitored regularly, stewarded and protected in perpetuity.

Over thirty years ago, land trust work started at kitchen tables all over the USA. Accreditation began when it became apparent that not only were the more than 700 land trusts here to stay, but that they oversaw an enormous amount of land - currently more than is in all national parks in the Lower 48. Land trusts also have the ability to affect charitable tax deductions. Even though the vast majority of the historic work land trusts did was high quality conservation, in the early 2000's a few questionable projects were publicized. Some felt there was too little oversight on this booming movement. The Senate Finance Committee indicated that if land trusts did not hold themselves accountable to high standards, then government regulations on conservation, and the tax benefits of conserving land, could become much more restrictive.

In 2006, LTA created the Accreditation Commission as an independent body. The Commission has built a robust accreditation system. Accreditation has greatly increased accountability in the land trust community and strengthened land trusts. There are now more than 440 accredited land trusts. The Commission is governed by an experienced volunteer board from the land conservation and nonprofit world. In 2009, I was invited to serve on this board. At the end of this year I term off. It has been an amazing experience to review all sizes of land trusts across the nation and see what they do for their communities and for the land. I can assure you, the business of land conservation under accredited land trusts is something we should all be proud of.

Accreditation also helps us avoid traps set by a few bad actors. Donated conservation easements are 99.9% wonderful things. Yet in the past year you may have seen articles in the New York Times and Forbes about abusive tax shelter arrangements that use land conservation as a vehicle. Accredited land trusts have processes in place to review and decline to be involved in suspicious activities that may be associated with these tax shelters. You can be assured our work is solid and ethical. Upholding the public trust is an essential part of durable conservation. (You can also urge your federal congressional leadership to pass the Charitable Conservation Easement Program Integrity Act.)

Your confidence in our ability to do this work for you, is proudly backed by the Accreditation Seal.





This donation not only preserves the heart of Guemes Island but helps protect a local watershed on an island that has a sole source aquifer. This current gift of land will protect 39 acres of mature, conifer-dominated forest, about 21 acres of active agricultural land, as well as 17 acres of wetlands, open space and an iconic Guemes Valley barn.

The Guemes Mountain trail, which has become a popular recreation area, winds through the uplands of this property. It ensures the protection of views from the top of Guemes Mountain and will serve as a sanctuary for locals, visitors and wildlife for generations to come. San Juan Preservation Trust remains the Conservation Easement holder on this land, so there is dual protection.

This generous gift is now being managed as part of Skagit Land Trust's 284-acre Guemes Mountain and Valley Conservation Area.



Thank you to all those who cherish Guemes and who have worked hard through decades for clean healthy landscapes for all.

Wetlands found in the valley portion of the property help keep the valley green year round. The Guemes Mountain trail provides a magical walk through the mature forest to the mountain-top balds that are carpeted each spring with native wildflowers.

Saving the Skagit Shoreline

The Salmon Recovery Funding Board and your gifts helped us protect more than 3,300 feet of Skagit River shoreline this fall. Three properties totaling 44 acres were purchased near Day Creek and Lyman. This part of the Skagit has meandered more than almost any other location on the river in recent years. Our ownership will allow the river to continue to meander freely and support salmon spawning grounds as well as lower flood risk downstream. These wonderful riparian properties will be managed as part of the Trust's Day Creek – Kosbab Conservation Area.



This addition to the Conservation Area features large alders and cottonwoods as well as lots of sign of elk and other wildlife.

Although Conservation Areas Coordinator Hannah Williams isn't the tallest member on staff, this patch of invasive knotweed would tower over anyone! Tackling these non-native species and restoring a native riparian forest is why the Trust's stewardship of these critical lands is so important.

Escape the Covid Winter Blues by Volunteering with the Trust



Volunteer Cheryl Willis removing Ivy at Samish Flower Farm.

COVID makes volunteering in the field with us a little bit different this year. While our regular Saturday public work parties are on hold, we have plenty of volunteer opportunities. We will be hosting volunteer events with a total of five people led by a staff member....small but mighty!

To sign up for our new, smaller Trust volunteer events, you will need to register as a Land Steward Aide. This will create a group of pre-approved volunteers that we can call on for help with a variety of special projects on our properties throughout the county. We have extensive tree plantings scheduled from November through March at our Tope Ryan, Day Creek, and Samish Flower Farm conservation areas. There are also a number of projects where we could use your help with maintaining newly planted trees, removing invasive species, and more.

All volunteer events will follow the latest social distancing and Covid-19 safety protocols. If you are interested, please contact Stacy Dahl stacyd@skagitlandtrust.org. We cannot wait to see you out in the field (at least six feet away)!



Left to right: Land Steward Hal Lee and Land Steward Aide Mike Oras installing an entrance sign at Cumberland Creek. Hannah Swartos and Paul Johnson doing trail work on Guemes Mountain.

Coming Soon... Stretch Your Legs on New Trust Trails!

This winter, we're looking forward to beginning work on Phase 1 of a new trail in the upland forest at Samish Flower Farm.

Phase 1 will consist of a trail running along the west and south portions of the property, with access from both Roney and Samish Island roads. We have heard that a safe off-the-road trail is a Samish Island community priority. Trust staff is also beginning work on developing a small trailhead with signage, a bike rack and small parking area. It can take longer than you might expect to get through the planning phase of such a project, but we're hoping to have the trailhead in place for visitors to more easily access the beach and upland trails by fall of 2021.

This past summer, a Washington Conservation Corps crew spent several weeks helping to cut back and grub out extensive blackberry throughout a portion of the forest along Samish Island Rd, which both helped reduce noxious weeds on the site and opened up a previously inaccessible area for a trail.

We know a lot of people are looking for ways to stay involved with the Trust. We hope to have trail work parties in the new year. Please email stacyd@skagitlandtrust.org if you are interested in these future volunteer opportunities.

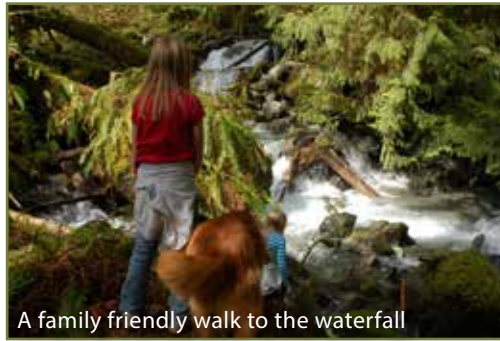


Five Ways to Take a Walk on the Wild Side

We know you love to get out into nature. Times outdoors can be so restorative. From the east to the west, here are five great Skagit Land Trust conservation areas to explore alone or with your family. Find directions to all of our properties at skagitlandtrust.org. Dogs on leash welcome!



Interpretive sign at Barr Creek



A family friendly walk to the waterfall



Winter on the trail

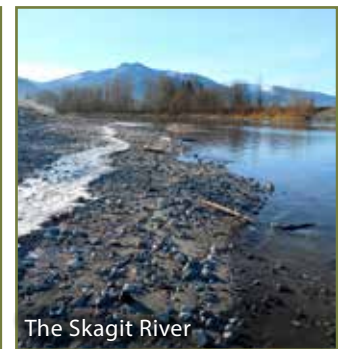
1. Barr Creek Hegg-Benson Trail: This is a short, magical trail through old forest. 1.5 miles east of the turnoff for Rockport on Hwy 20, turn onto Conrad Road. Look for the Barr Creek Conservation Area sign. The Hegg-Benson Trail wends its way a little over half a mile through the Conservation Area and connects to the Old Sauk Mountain Trail. Only adventurous hikers will explore beyond our property boundaries, but those who stay in the Conservation Area are just as rewarded. Barr Creek tumbles alongside the north end of the trail and a bench overlooking a waterfall awaits those who wish to pause and rest. This property was protected with birds in mind. As the forest matures it will provide potential habitat for roosting eagles, nesting marbled murrelets and northern spotted owls. In the meantime, look for evidence of red-breasted sapsucker and pileated woodpecker. Adjacent to thousands of acres of federal lands and wilderness, you never know what other wildlife you will encounter while walking this quiet trail! (Tip: winter is a splendid time for this hike as the falls are impressive.)



Cumberland Creek

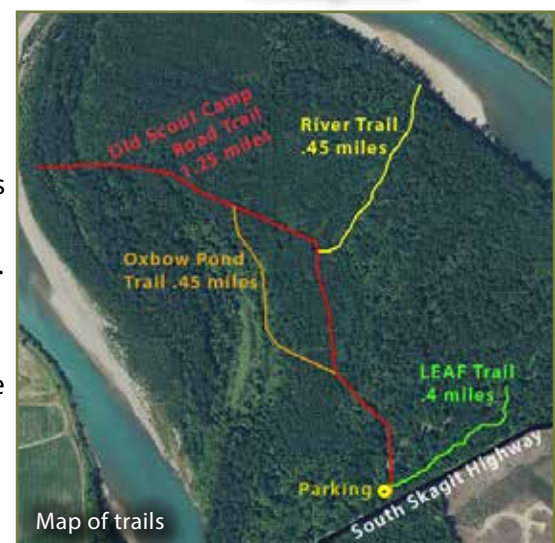


Oxbow Pond



The Skagit River

2. Cumberland Creek: This area has a well-developed system of flat trails open year round that access the Skagit River. A small parking lot with Trust signs is on the north side of South Skagit Highway just past mile 12. The Old Scout Camp Road Trail leads to the cobbled shores of the River (Tip: print out the map on our website). Look for gnawed branches. This is evidence of beaver in the area. Eagles perch in the trees hanging over the beach. The River Trail meanders past massive moss draped big-leaf maple. Listen for early springtime calls of ruffed grouse. From the beach look across the River to our Muddy Creek Conservation Area. Connectivity of Land Trust properties allows wildlife, such as elk, to move safely across the valley. At the old oxbow pond, elk have been spotted on the far shore as well as wood ducks floating on the calm water. The LEAF Trail has several overlooks of Cumberland Creek as it winds its way past an unusual line of western red-cedar. (Tip: In winter, wear boots for a few muddy spots.)



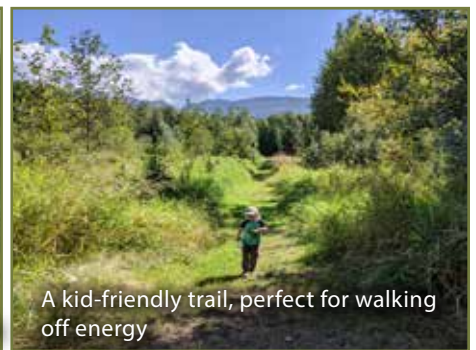
Map of trails



Looking for evidence of wildlife on a Kulshan Creek Neighborhood field trip



The view of the Skagit from the high bank at Utopia



A kid-friendly trail, perfect for walking off energy

3.Utopia: About 7 miles east of Sedro-Woolley, ¼ mile east of the intersection of Utopia and Hoehn Rd, there is a gate with Skagit Land Trust signs. Park in front of the gate or on the road shoulder. Although there isn't currently a developed trail through this 88-acre property, one of our kind neighbors keeps a path mowed to the Skagit River which is .6 miles from the gate. Follow the trail across Wiseman Creek and through several areas of restoration plantings. Look for evidence of wildlife that make their home here - beaver, elk, coyote. Small areas of mature conifers attract owls and spring wetlands provide great habitat for amphibians to lay their eggs. This is an ideal property for four season hiking. Look for eagles along the river in winter. Berries are abundant in spring and summer. Watch for migrating geese in the fall.



Boardwalk through the woods



The trail meets up with the city park and lookout opportunities

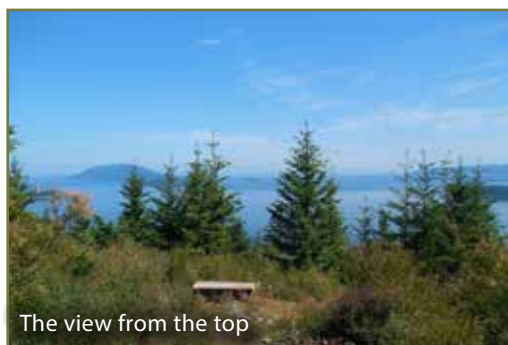


Students from Conway School repair a bridge on the trail.



Ghost flower

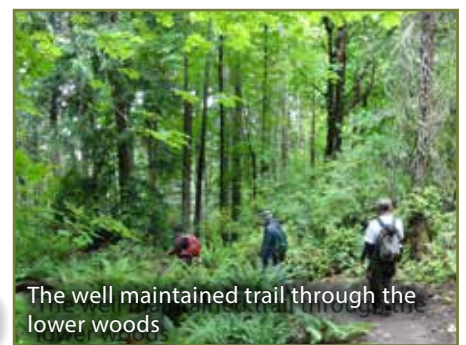
4.Little Mountain-South: Most people access Mount Vernon's Little Mountain Park via the northern summit parking lot. However, a nearly secret trail to the top starts at Skagit Land Trust's Little Mountain Darvill Conservation Easement off Hickox Road on the southern side of Little Mountain. Although this is a private property, the landowner generously maintains a publicly accessible trail. Park in a 2-car parking area. Expect solitude until reaching the city park, just over ½ mile up the trail. Look for a variety of fungi and fungi associated plants at your feet and birds and other wildlife making use of the many snags left standing. (Tip: this is a great hike for kids as many things to explore)



The view from the top



Overlook point along the trail



The well maintained trail through the lower woods

5.Guemes Mountain: After a ride on the Guemes Ferry from Anacortes (Tip: consider biking on), travel to a small parking area about a mile south of the intersection of South Shore Road and Edens Road. The Guemes Mountain Trail climbs from there, 550 feet over 1.2 miles to reach a beautiful, small meadow with views overlooking the San Juan Islands and towards Mount Baker. All year-round, hikers can walk up on a well-groomed trail through a mix of mature trees and shrubs. Spring is a popular time for wildflower viewing. Leashed dogs are welcome and Islanders are thoughtful enough to provide leashes and walking sticks for those who may have forgotten them.

Leaving a Legacy on the Lands - Protecting What Matters for Generations to Come

We have received questions from members who plan to leave a legacy to the lands they love in their will and estate plans. As more of our community looks for ways to care for nature and wildlife for decades to come, we wanted to share answers to some of the common questions we have received.

Where can I find more information on leaving a gift in my will?

At www.skagitlandtrust.org under the tab "Support Us" there is a link to our Planned Giving site. There is detailed information there and publications including a Guide to Planned Giving, and Gifting My Land.

Can you provide suggested language to leave a gift to SLT in my will or Trust?

Our Planned Giving website and publications have suggested language for simple bequests. For gifts of land or gifts via more complex trusts, we can provide suggested language on request. We strongly advise sharing any language we provide with your legal advisor.

Do you accept gifts of bank accounts, retirement accounts and insurance policies?

Yes, naming Skagit Land Trust as a beneficiary or contingent beneficiary is often straight forward. Please check that you have our name as Skagit Land Trust followed by our tax ID 91-1533402 when possible. Our address should be listed as 1020 S 3rd Street, Mount Vernon WA 98273

We would also be happy to talk or email with you personally or with your legal advisor or accountant. For more information contact mollyd@skagitlandtrust.org or call 360.428.7878 (ext. 202)

Cozying Up with a Good Book and the Trust



SLT Reads participants were treated to the sight of a starling named Carmen, perched on the head of Lyanda Lynn Haupt, during the a recent book discussion. We were gathered on Zoom to discuss Haupt's book, *Rare Encounters of Ordinary Birds*.

Carmen, the star of Haupt's book, *Mozart's Starling*, entertained by opening a container of applesauce and flying in and out of camera view. Our meeting interrupted her nightly routine and she vocally expressed her displeasure until tucked away for the night!

While we don't often have birds as guests, our conversations have covered subjects as varied as Pacific Northwest animals & plants (*Natural Grace* by Bill Dietrich), the engineering feats of beaver (*Eager* by Ben Goldblatt), and the differences between indigenous and western science (*Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer). We hope you will join us for our next SLT Reads on December 10th, as we discuss Adrienne Ross Scanlan's book *Turning Homeward: Restoring Hope and Nature in the Urban World*. Visit our website to sign up!



Thank You for Making the Lands We Love Auction a Success!



Trust Cofounder, Keith Wiggers, talking at the Trust's Utopia Conservation Area.

Inspired by the resilience of nature, and the support of our community, the 2020 auction was reworked into two online auctions, in June and in October. The fall auction culminated in a livestream event hosted by Executive Director Molly Doran, and Trust Board Member Therese Ogle. Thanks to all of you, we raised more than \$125,000(gross) for land conservation and stewardship here in Skagit County.

The show used videos to highlight local lands conserved with member support. It also showcased Trust program areas, staff, Trust co-founder Keith Wiggers, and a selection of auction experiences. You can find links to the videos at our wesbite, skagitlandtrust.org.

We are grateful to everyone who made the 2020 auction a success. This holiday season, we hope you will support the many businesses who donated to, and sponsored our auction. A full list is on our business supporters page.



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

Value Nature by Doubling Your Gift on Giving Tuesday

Mark your calendars for December 1st!

On Giving Tuesday (December 1st) the world unleashes the power of personal generosity to make a difference locally and globally. Your donation to Skagit Land Trust during Giving Tuesday will makes a positive impact on the nature of Skagit.

And your gift will go twice as far!

A generous member has provided a \$10,000 match for all Giving Tuesday gifts.

To participate, go to our website on or before Giving Tuesday and make a donation .

Consider a gift at one of the levels listed below and see the impact your support could make!

- \$25 - Installs and cares for a native plant or tree
- \$50 – Supports a day of wildlife monitoring of great blue herons and amphibians
- \$100 - Permanently removes 20 square feet of invasive blackberries
- \$250 - Conserves two feet of floodway habitat for salmon
- \$500 - Builds 60 feet of new trail
- \$1,000 -Creates and installs bilingual informational signs at a property
- \$2,500 – Permanently protects an acre of wetlands

