

Hurn Field Update

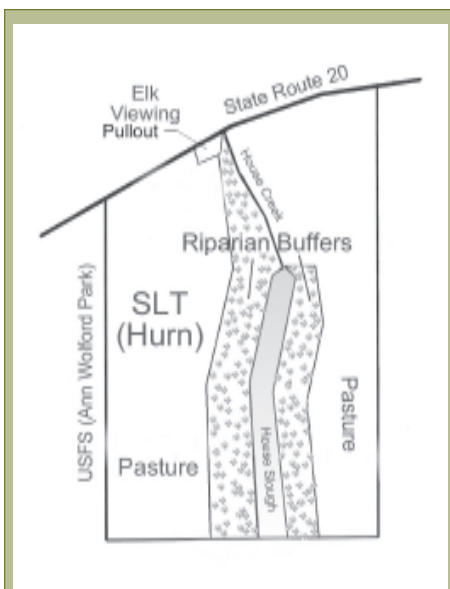
Skagit Land Trust to construct a pullout for travelers to stop and observe the elk.

Skagit Land Trust's property on State Route 20 near Concrete has long been known to locals as "the elk field". Over the years, sightings of elk grazing in the pasture just three miles west of town have increased from just a few months in the winter to nearly year round. At the Trust we call the property "Hurn Field" named after the previous owners. House Slough runs north to south through the property, named after a local family who once lived there.

This property has seen a number of changes in the past few years. In



Elk grazing at Hurn Field are now seen almost year round.



Skagit Land Trust's Hurn Field, Layout

2001 Skagit Land Trust entered into an agreement with Farm Service Agency to plant trees along House Slough, increasing the diversity of plants for wildlife and shading the waters of the slough for the benefit of salmon. The Trust has rented out the remaining pasture to local farmers for many years. They often harvest two cuttings of hay from about 20 acres at the site. As part of our challenge campaign to protect Hurn Field, the adjacent forest-land to the west was transferred from the county to the US Forest Service and Trillium Corporation donated 13 acres on the

hillside to the north to the Trust. Taken together, these properties protect over 125 acres of prime elk habitat.

This summer we plan to make a few more changes there for the benefit of our community. With assistance from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, the US Forest Service and the Norman Archibald Charitable Foundation, we will expand a pullout for travelers to stop and observe the elk without obstructing traffic on the highway. Because buses, RVs and trucks pulling trailers do stop at the site already, we will build this pullout

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Skagit Update

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Drawings by Brenda Cunningham

From the President

Dear Members,

It has been my pleasure to serve as your board President for the last three years. The combined efforts of staff and board and your support has led to more partnerships and more grants, leading to more protected lands. I'm proud to have done my share of "saving land for tomorrow".



Our financial position remains strong and conservative BUT some needs remain. Our long-term stewardship funds are sizable though less than we might need if we had to entertain more than one or two major court battles to preserve our easements. We are fortunate that we haven't yet had to incur such expenses but the experience of other land trusts is that it will happen to us. Hence a continuing need to build up our Stewardship Fund.

Our Land Trust Land Acquisition Fund goes up and down significantly depending upon recent land purchases and recent large donations. This fund while always the easiest to raise money for will always need more as we continue our efforts to preserve farmland, wildlife habitat and scenic open spaces.

Our new Founder's Fund is funded to assist with significant special projects and occasional shortfalls in the other funds. There will be on going efforts to build up this fund.

Due to our conservative economic philosophy, our operating fund is still operating at an annual loss. There are two reasons for this; one, we are too conservative to deduct much in the way of overhead from the other funds and two, operating expenses are the least sexy fund to obtain donations for. Hence, we can nearly always expect to need more unrestricted donations for operating expenses.

Finally, I would like you to be thinking ahead 6-12 months when we are likely to be announcing a capital campaign for two or three significant parcels that we are eager to purchase. When these exciting plans are formalized we will need your assistance. Thank you for all of your generous support and help to date.

Sincerely,

deep enough to accommodate large vehicles. The Trust has been reluctant to build the pullout on its pasture, both because of the loss of good farmland and elk habitat this would cause, and also because of the dramatic visual change it would make to this very familiar landmark. Skagit Land Trust has requested permission from the Washington State Department of Transportation to lease a portion of the highway right-of-way at this site for the construction of the pullout. If WSDOT grants this lease, the Trust will begin construction of the pullout in late spring, using a small portion of the pasture and the adjacent right-of-way. The work would be completed before the elk return in large numbers in the fall.

The Trust looks forward to making this site more accessible to people wanting to learn about elk. We hope it becomes a destination stop for both “locals” and visitors from out of town. Increased opportunities for wildlife viewing on our properties helps us to raise public awareness that preservation of wildlife habitat is important and worthy of support.

Photo by Phil Green



Status of Inventory and Assessments in Nookachamps and Middle Skagit Flood Plain

In 2005 Skagit Land Trust was awarded a grant from Pacific Coast Joint Venture to identify important wetlands east of Sedro-Woolley. The goal is to identify and contact owners of properties with significant wetlands for waterfowl and amphibian habitat and work with willing landowners to place permanent protections on these lands. The initial mapping and GIS (geographical information system) analysis of the area's wetlands has been completed and soon Skagit Land Trust staff will begin contacting landowners.



In addition, in 2005 Skagit Land Trust was contracted by Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group (SFEG) to complete a similar inventory and assessment of private lands along streams in the Nookachamps watershed. This is in partial fulfillment of a grant SFEG received from the Department of Ecology to reduce water temperature in the Nookachamps. The assessment has been completed and the Trust with its partners, the Skagit Conservation District and SFEG, is entering the next stage of contacting willing landowners who may wish to voluntarily protect or enhance their property's riparian acres.

Just Announced!

New Land Trust Project on Skagit River Funded by Salmon Recovery Funding Board

The Washington State Salmon Recovery Funding Board made its 2006 decisions this January – and a new Skagit Land Trust project has been awarded \$293,000. This project proposes to purchase a Conservation Easement on one of the largest remaining unprotected floodplain tracts in the Middle Skagit area. The easement will permanently extinguish residential development rights on more than 100 acres, while keeping the land in private ownership and allowing ongoing agriculture. In addition, important shoreline and sensitive floodplain areas will be restored with native vegetation in partnership with Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group.

The property is still a working farm, and has an existing farmhouse, but was slated for residential development. The previous landowners subdivided it, creating five new house sites and separate lots, and listed each of the lots for sale. The current landowners purchased all of the lots with the hope of keeping the land intact and in agriculture. They now plan to donate a significant portion of the Conservation Easement value to the Trust's protection project.

The Skagit River supports almost 50% of the naturally spawning Puget Sound Chinook – a species listed as ‘threatened’ and the focus of salmon recovery funds. Despite this, less money was recommended for Skagit Watershed projects this year than in the past. The Skagit Watershed Council and The Nature Conservancy along with our SRFB grant officer, Marc Duboiski, worked very hard to highlight to the Salmon Recovery Funding Board the significance of the Skagit River to Chinook recovery. Thanks to the efforts of these important conservation partners and the significance of the Skagit Watershed itself, the property was funded in a highly competitive process.

Shannon Property Another 24 acres purchased in Middle Skagit Area

The Trust has protected 14 miles of shoreline
in the Middle Skagit area.

In December the Trust has purchased 24 acres of land in the Middle Skagit Area. It includes approximately 800 feet of Skagit River shoreline. The new parcel is located on the south side of the river across from the town of Hamilton, and downstream from the mouth of Cumberland Creek. The property is forested with a healthy mix of second growth native forest including some large cedar and cottonwood trees.

This area is especially important to migrating and spawning Chinook salmon. The acquisition was funded through a grant from the Washington State Salmon Recovery Funding Board, matched by Skagit Land Trust funds. The property was purchased from the estate of the late William J. Shannon of Seattle. Mr. Shannon's relatives say that he would have been very pleased to see the land protected in its natural state for future generations.

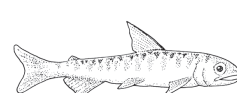
This is a dynamic part of Skagit floodplain and the river channel has the potential to move and shift across the floodplain. Nevertheless, a portion of the land is high enough to be mapped as '100-year floodplain' where county code allows

residential building (as opposed to areas mapped as "floodway"—where permanent building is not allowed). By purchasing this land, the Trust prevents future development, and the natural flood processes can continue to occur without conflicting with private development. Due to its importance, the Trust intends to protect additional land in this part of the floodplain system.

To date the Trust has protected more than 1300 acres and 14 miles of shoreline and side channel habitat in the Middle Skagit area. Through collaborative efforts, our conservation partners have protected additional lands. Together we are preserving this important ecosystem for fish, wildlife, continued agriculture and our community.



Executive Director Molly Doran and son Mehari, join board member Glenn Bordner on a visit to the newly acquired "Shannon" property in the Skagit floodplain.



Additional Slough Habitat Protected At Day Creek

Skagit Land Trust purchased a small parcel of land in the Day Creek area at public auction. (The property cost of \$1 was donated by Skagit Land Trust's president, John Milnor). Although the parcel is only a ½ acre in size without building rights, it has almost 300 feet of Skagit River side-slough shoreline. Importantly, it is one side to a crossing of an access road into the Trust's Day Creek property. At this crossing there are blocked culverts inhibiting fish passage to what could be an excellent area for Chinook spawning. Now with Skagit Land Trust as one of the landowners, Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group is working to gain other landowner's approval so that the blocked culverts can be replaced with a fish-friendly solution such as a bridge, and thus open up almost a half mile of salmon habitat.



Jim Johnson & Brenda Cunningham putting up duck nest boxes at Day Creek.



Volunteers erecting an experimental "elk scratching post" at Hurn Field. The Skagit Conservation District provided the post with the hope that elk will use it rather than young trees for a good back scratch.



Hurn Field Photos by Peter Haase

Election of Board Members at Skagit Land Trust's Annual Meeting

**The following people are seeking election or re-election for
3-year terms. Trust members will elect board members
at the Annual Meeting in March.**

Patsy Martin

Property Development Manager for Port of Skagit County. Board member of Padilla Bay Foundation, Past President Burlington Chamber of Commerce. Chair of the Stewardship Committee. Board member since 1998.

Keith Wiggers

One of three Skagit Land Trust founders. Former president of Skagit Audubon Society. Member of Skagit County Conservation Futures Committee (Farmland Legacy Program). Veterinarian. Board member since 1992.

Ron Feld

An RN, employed in healthcare for 30 years. Certified mediator and immediate past Director of Skagit County Mediation Services. Graduated from Leadership Skagit, serving as the co-facilitator for the 2006 program.

Mark Hitchcock

Owner of Fairweather Forestry, a forestry consulting business. Associate of Skagit Conservation District. Has served on various Skagit County Citizen Advisory Committees.

Rusty Kuntze

Lawyer, retired chief judge for the Swinomish Tribe Court System. Taught at Skagit Valley College. Founding member, first Director of Common Ground.

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In Memory of Earl Stearns and Claudia Stearns Foster

Margaret R. Finlayson-Bean

March's Point Heron Nest Numbers Keep on Growing!



Levy & Jim Scheltens, March's Point Heronry Land Stewards, and volunteers Carol & Trevor Kyle participated in a heronry tour and tree planting. More than 25 members volunteered in this event.

Once again, volunteers have counted more nests

on Skagit Land Trust property at March's Point. The Trust received 3.5 acres in donation from Vera and Bud Kinney in 1994. This comprises about one third of the area the Great Blue Heron nest in. The number of Great Blue Heron nests on the property has grown tremendously ever since. In November the volunteers counted 198 nests, compared to 159 nests in the Skagit Land Trust area the year before. We estimate the heronry as a whole holds over 600 nests! Many people who attended a heronry tour in December stayed after the tour to plant trees for use by future herons in the area. With the help of a donation from Shell Oil Products grand fir trees were purchased at a reduced rate from Sky Nursery. John Allen kindly donated many big-leaf maple saplings, a tree species preferred by the herons. Thank you all.



Photo by Phil Green



Volunteers getting instructions on where to plant future heron nesting trees.

Thank You for Your Support

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Saving Land for Tomorrow

Upcoming Events:

Skagit Land Trust's 14th Annual Meeting



You are invited to
Skagit Land Trust's Annual Meeting
to be held at
Skyline Beach Club, Anacortes
Friday, March 24th / 6 - 9pm

Please join us for a social evening of fun and
the fellowship of like-minded individuals in celebrating another year of
Skagit Land Trust achievements.

Enjoy a captivating speaker (to be announced)
finger food, desserts and refreshments.

Also a colorful pictorial presentation
of land you have helped protect and steward.

Bring your family and friends to share in the vision your membership makes possible.

Mark your calendars and look for an invitation in the mail.