



Protecting A Wild Place at the Edge of Our Urban Life **Knitting Together a Place for Wildlife One Conservation Project at a Time**



This spring the Barney Lake Conservation Area grew to 371 acres, thanks to a partnership with two families who understand the importance of protecting this rare wildlife sanctuary for all generations. Linda & Beau Loughlin and Cathy & Walter Pfahl have lived at their homes on the north side of Barney Lake since the 1970's. For a long time they have thought about how to protect the wetland portions of their property that become part of the lake each winter.

"Barney Lake is one of the most beautiful and unique spots in Skagit County, which is blessed with so many beautiful areas. We feel that it would be almost a crime against humanity, and certainly against Mother Earth, to do anything but take the best possible care of this incredibly special place," said Cathy Pfahl, one of the property owners. "We hope that one day Skagit Land Trust will become the steward for the entire Barney Lake area."

Since the beginning of the Trust in 1992, Barney Lake has been an area the Trust has worked to conserve. The wildlife habitat found at Barney Lake provides important side channels for salmon and other fish, as well as feeding, roosting, and nesting habitat for Trumpeter swans, bald eagles, great blue herons, and migrating waterfowl. This area is so special, the Trust's first employee, Martha Bray, was hired just to focus on reaching out to landowners around the lake about ways to protect their critical wildlife habitat.

Linda Loughlin standing next to one of the ancient poplars found at Barney Lake

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ED LETTER TO MEMBERS



Dear Members and Supporters

It's our 30th Anniversary! What a difference you have made in protecting our natural home. Below are just two examples of how your help has conserved Skagit's special places and natural areas over the past three decades. The next 30 years starts today. We are so honored to have your partnership.

With gratitude - Molly Doran, Executive Director

Barney Lake

On the left is a map showing no conserved lands at **Barney Lake 30 years ago**. The site was once consider as a location for the County dump.

Thanks to members and partners, the map on the right shows conserved land at **Barney Lake today**.



The Middle Skagit River

30 years ago some of the only lands on the Skagit River that were conserved were parks.



Today, Skagit Land Trust and a long list of partners are working together to conserve land and restore wildlife habitat along the Skagit River.



Michael Kirshenbaum, on a site visit to Barney Lake with Martha Bray in 2014. Over 30 years, the Trust has completed nine different property projects at Barney Lake to conserve a total of 371 acres.

“Working with Skagit Land Trust has been a 40 year relationship of education and mentoring over time,” said Linda and Beau Loughlin. “John Munn, a local naturalist, educated us about this unique parcel of land, and over a period of several more years introduced us to Keith Wiggers and Martha Bray from Skagit Land Trust.”

When funding became available in 2019 from Washington State’s Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB) to protect salmon habitat at Barney Lake, Jane Zillig one of the Trust’s Conservation Project Managers, reached out to the Pfahls and Loughlins to see if they would be interested in selling the wetland portions of their properties to the Trust, while retaining their homesite. This creative solution of selling a portion of land that connects to existing Trust conservation land has been a win-win for both homeowners and local conservation efforts.

“For 30 years, landowners like the Loughlins and Pfahls, along with trust members, and important public agency partners like SRFB and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, have come together to ensure that Barney Lake’s wildlife habitat and clean water will be there for future generations.” said Conservation Director Michael Kirshenbaum. “The unwavering commitment of both the Loughlin and Pfahl families to work with the Trust to protect more of Barney Lake exemplifies how individuals can come together to make a difference.”

The waves of tall grass that fill Barney Lake during the summer can leave you wondering where the lake went. As a seasonal lake, Barney fills each fall, playing a vital role in absorbing flood waters from the Skagit and Nookachamps. As development expands towards the edges of Barney Lake, protection of this natural area has become even more important for the health



of wildlife and people. The floods in November 2021 brought the waters of the Skagit River right to the edge of College Way. The Barney Lake Conservation Area was able to hold enormous amounts of flood waters, lessening neighborhood flooding.

Left to right: A sea of green grass in the summer hides the true role Barney Lake plays each winter -becoming one of the largest wetlands in our region.

“Barney Lake is such a wonderful wildlife spectacle. And it’s so unique because it’s on the edge of Mount Vernon,” said Molly Doran, Executive Director of the Trust. “In the next 30 years we’re really trying to figure out how we can maintain this pristine wildlife sanctuary as the city grows around it. We want to find opportunities for the community to strengthen their connection to the land so that they can help protect this special place and the wildlife that rely on it.”



Swans taking off from Barney Lake on a misty winter morning.

In the year ahead, Skagit Land Trust will continue to work with landowners around Barney Lake and in the Nookachamps on ways they can partner with the Trust to protect this rare wetland and wildlife sanctuary.



“Our children, who had the privilege of growing up here, are delighted and grateful that we have sold this acreage to Skagit Land Trust,” said both the Loughlin and Pfahls. “They are deeply passionate, as we are, to preserve Barney Lake for Salmon Recovery, aquatic health, and habitat protection. We want others to be able to enjoy this multi-faceted wetland as we have but under the care and on-going stewardship of Skagit Land Trust.”

Left to right: Conservation Director Michael Kirshenbaum, Trust Co-founder Keith Wiggers, landowner Linda Loughlin, retired Conservation Project Manager Jane Zillig, landowner Cathy Pfahl, Executive Director Molly Doran, landowner Walter Pfahl, on the Pfahl property.

The Trails at the Marblemount Conservation Area Beckon!



The Marblemount Conservation Area is now open for you to walk a beautiful 1.25 mile forest and river trail along the Skagit River. This trail was originally put in by the former landowners Steve and Nancy Johnson, and has been refined and enhanced with the help of volunteers.

Thanks to their work, visitors can walk the trails year-round and connect with the forest as it changes throughout the seasons. A path that shows its colors through shade tolerant wildflowers and flashes of rufous hummingbirds in the spring, also spoils visitors with berries and access to fishing on the bank of the Skagit River in the summer. In the fall the smell of decay is ripe as fungi decompose the wood and litter that are essential to forest processes, and birds of prey feast on salmon carcasses.

Winter envelops the forest in a quiet hush, perfect for the introspection that the short days often bring. With so much to offer, we are grateful to share this place with our community.

How to access: The Marblemount Conservation Area is located two miles west of the town of Marblemount on Highway 20. Look for the private road labeled Ponderroses on the Skagit River side of the road. Visitors can park at the gravel area just before the gate. Walk down the driveway behind the gate, and take the first left. Pass a tall metal shed on your right and continue on until you see the trail split. This is the beginning of the loop; either direction will take you to the river.

This trail is open to pedestrians. Visit our website for more information on what activities are allowed on Trust properties. Please note that site cleanup is ongoing and visitors may encounter heavy equipment in the area of the former home site throughout the summer.



Above: A section of trail through native bleeding hearts;
Left to right: Volunteers clearing logs from the path; raking leaf litter from the trails; Terry Armstrong clearing the path for the winter river shortcut; AmeriCorps Jonathan Worley helping clear a tree on the trail.

Marblemount Conservation Area “Open House on the Land” on July 23rd

We are excited to welcome our community together on the land this summer for an in-person Open House. Mark your calendar for Saturday, July 23rd, and join us at the Marblemount Conservation Area.

Activities will include walks through the forest and along the river, a story trail at Barr Creek, the chance to catch up with Skagit Land Trust staff and board members, and opportunities to learn about birds, plants, and more. Guests are encouraged to bring a picnic to enjoy on the property during our Open House.

Visit skagitlandtrust.org to learn more and RSVP.



Forging a New Path



What does it take to build a new trail? Over the last six months, Skagit Land Trust has hosted nearly a dozen volunteer events dedicated to the creation of a new loop trail at our Barr Creek Conservation Area. Here are just a few of the steps Trust staff and volunteers took to create a quarter-mile trail:

Trail construction begins with the “pioneering” stage. This stage entails walking through the woods to identify a nicely sloped route with interesting features, like groves or snags.

Once the route is identified, volunteers trim back vegetation and remove obstacles such as sword ferns. Don’t worry, these sword ferns transplant well and were re-planted nearby!

Once major obstacles are out of the way, the trail can begin to take shape. Volunteers remove organic matter, like leaf litter, from the surface of the trail. Large rocks are used to fill in holes and create stabilizing walls that prevent erosion. Soil is cut from the higher edge of the trail and used to fill in the lower edge of the trail, resulting in a level walking surface.

Once the trail has been levelled and smoothed, the only thing it is missing is you! The Trust welcomes you to visit this new trail and see for yourself the benefits of spending some time in nature. Thank you to all of the volunteers who made this new trail a reality!



Pictures from top to bottom: Volunteer Land Steward Russ Dalton explains the use of a clinometer, a device that measures the degree of incline between two points;

Volunteer Kat Klass hoists a sword fern before re-planting it off-trail;

Volunteers work on the upper part of the trail. From left to right: Loren Schmidt, Sarah Zabel, Keith Saar;

A completed stretch of the new trail at Barr Creek Conservation Area.

Once Upon A Forest...

Participants in the Upper Skagit Library’s Summer Reading Program will have a chance to stretch their legs while enjoying a book in nature. The Trust and the Library have partnered to install a Story Trail at the Barr Creek Conservation Area for July and August. Readers will get to use all their senses while following the book’s characters on their journey to find ‘Wild’.

Pages from the book will be on display along the recently expanded loop trail at Barr Creek. This new trail will allow visitors to explore a portion of the Conservation Area added in 2017.

On Saturday, July 23rd, Upper Skagit Librarians will lead walks at 10:30am and 2pm to read the story, *Finding Wild*, and to check out the new trail. The 2pm walk will include a reading of the story in Spanish. Copies of the book in English and Spanish will also be available at the Upper Skagit Library.



Upper Skagit Library Children's Librarian Emily Fowler holding the book, 'Finding Wild,' at the Barr Creek trailhead.

Planting the Seeds of Caring for Nature & Growing Future Stewards of the Land

"There's a sea star!" one of the kids exclaims as they turn over a rock on the beach of James Island. Other families gather around to peer at the bright red starfish.

The excited chatter is a welcome sound as fieldtrips finally return for the Kulshan Creek Neighborhood Youth Program(KCNYP). Skagit Land Trust has been a lead partner in the program for many years. Focused on fostering connections with nature, KCNYP brings youth and families from the Kushan Creek, Casa de San Jose, and Villa Santa Maria housing developments out on monthly fieldtrips.



"I feel these nature field trips are very important in helping the kids develop an ethic of caring because a lot of our kids don't have access to learning about nature and our environment, other than school," said Yesenia Lopez Gama, Resident Services Coordinator. "I have noticed that when we go on these nature field trips the students come back to me and ask me how they can help animals from becoming extinct, or how can they help with pollution. You can see the care in their eyes and willingness to help better our planet."



All the fieldtrips are free for participants, thanks to funding from the U.S. Forest Service and staffing from other program partners including Skagit Land Trust, Mount Baker/Snoqualmie National Forest, Mount Vernon Police Department, Catholic Housing Services, North Cascades Institute, Glacier Peak Institute, and Skagit Audubon Society.

In addition to the June boat trip with the Salish Sea School to James Island, families took a bike ride along the Kulshan Trail in April, and explored nearby Barney Lake in May. While visiting this Trust Conservation Area just minutes from their homes, the kids learned about beaver and other wildlife, explored along the Nookachamps, and helped steward the property by pulling thistle.



The Trust is excited to continue this partnership to get more community members out on the land to appreciate the nature treasures we have just beyond our backyards.

Investigation Stations Return with Oohs and Aahs from Sedro-Woolley Students



After a two-year break, our Utopia Conservation Area rang out with the calls of excited second-graders exploring the sights and sounds. In May, 172 students and 45 adults from Lyman ES, Big Lake ES, Clearlake ES and Samish ES, visited six different Investigation Stations during their two hour field trip.

"I was so grateful for your trip to be their first field trip back," said Shannon Fath, a teacher at Lyman Elementary. "The kids came back with lots of knowledge about Utopia. Trust staff and volunteers did such a wonderful job teaching about the diversity of life at Utopia. We loved our trip so much."

Trust volunteers shared their knowledge and enthusiasm about beaver, elk, owls & nature clues, amphibians, plants & restoration, macroinvertebrates, and birds. A big thanks to Ellen Anderson, King Dahl, Debbie Honan, Tracy Oulette, Richard Raisler, Kent Turner, Holli Watne, and Sarah Zabel for their many hours of help. Special thanks to Barbara Brock and Cama Beach State Park for letting us borrow "Beav"

for the beaver investigation station!



In Due Time - Miles Legacy Crafted Over Decades



Gary Miles and his wife, Betty first met with Skagit Land Trust in 1999 to discuss leaving their 10-acre forested property on Samish Island to the Trust. Their dream was that the house would come down and the land would be a home for wildlife, forever.

"We love the wildlife", Betty remarked during a meeting with staff. She laughed, "We started by putting out bowls of water for them and ended up digging a pond!"

"We want the critters to have a place to live when we are gone," Gary noted. "And keep those snags as so many birds and other animals use them."

Over the years Gary and Betty worked with their lawyer and the Trust to ensure their vision and legacy was articulated and understood. They hoped that their gift and story would inspire others to protect their own forests.

Betty passed in 2019 and Gary in 2020. The property came to the Trust this month along with a stewardship bequest to manage the land. The executor, Janet Stewart, worked with the Trust to ensure a conservation covenant placed on the property's deed captures the Miles' wishes. The property will be managed for wildlife with occasional compatible use by Skagit Land Trust. Stay tuned for stewardship work parties and tours.

Not only is the land already a wildlife sanctuary, but it is also within the "alternative heron nesting habitat" range for the abandoned Samish Island Heronry. Herons, bald eagles, raptors and owls are often seen on the property's large trees or at the pond along with numerous other wildlife - just as Gary and Betty hoped. We are honored to be entrusted with stewarding the Miles' natural legacy.



Giving Back to the Place She Calls Home



Volunteers get involved with Skagit Land Trust for different reasons -- some enjoy certain types of projects, like trail construction, while others are looking to learn about new outdoor spaces. For Rowena Watson, it's all about protecting the place she calls home.

"I've lived in Upper Skagit for 45 years," said Rowena. "I love hiking and think of Mt Baker as my backyard, my happy place."

One of her favorite things about Skagit County is the ability to reach a beach, forest, or quiet place in nature within a few minutes' walk or drive. Rowena also appreciates the abundance of working farms and forests that remain in the county.

When she began volunteering with the Trust, Rowena was no stranger to working outside. As an employee of the US Forest Service, Rowena regularly planted trees and worked on trails – activities that she continues to enjoy while volunteering with the Trust. Rowena also worked at North Cascades National Park, where she developed a deeper appreciation of the beauty of the Skagit and a greater understanding of the challenges facing the region.

Rowena appreciates that Trust properties often provide access to the Skagit River or Puget Sound, so it's not a surprise that she especially enjoys visiting the Samish Island Conservation Area. Rowena gives back in other ways too – she loves engaging with youth and volunteers occasionally at the Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve Interpretive Center.

"I'm retired and so, more recently, have time on my hands, love being outdoors, working hard, meeting new people and giving back a little to this amazing place I call home."

At Skagit Land Trust, we rely heavily on dedicated volunteers, like Rowena, to help us meet our stewardship goals. We're very grateful for their time and effort. If you'd like to learn more about volunteering with the Trust, please visit our website or contact Stacy Dahl, our Volunteer and Education Programs Coordinator, stacyd@skagitlandtrust.org. See you out there!

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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.

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Join Us For An Upcoming Event!

Learn more & RSVP Online - www.skagitlandtrust.org

July 12 - Samish Island Trail Work Party from 1pm-4pm

July 23 - "Open House on the Land" at Marblemount Conservation Area 11am-2pm

July 23rd - Raft Trip on the Skagit 2:30pm-5pm

August 19 - Cedar Legacy Appreciation Event 3pm-6pm

*Invitations coming soon to Cedar Legacy Members who have let us know they are leaving a gift to Skagit Land Trust in their will or estate plans. Please check with us if you don't receive an invitation so we know to include you in this membership group. Thank you for creating a legacy of conservation here in the Skagit!

The lands conserved and protected by Skagit Land Trust have been inhabited and stewarded by numerous tribes and Indigenous peoples since time immemorial. We recognize and respect the inherent, indigenous, and treaty rights of the Coast Salish People, who continue to have a deep and abiding connection to this place. We seek to partner with local tribes to continue to steward these lands and waters.