



## City enters agreement to secure recreational use of Galbraith Mountain

**City, Whatcom Land Trust, and Galbraith Tree Farm reach purchase and sale agreement**

by Vanessa Blackburn, Mayor's Office / July 24, 2018 (Tuesday)



Photo by Eric Ashley, courtesy of Whatcom Mountain Bike Coalition

The City of Bellingham, Whatcom Land Trust, and Galbraith Tree Farm LLC have entered into a purchase and sale agreement that secures the public's recreational use of up to 65 miles of trails on Galbraith Mountain in perpetuity. Bellingham City Council voted to approve the agreement on Monday night, protecting the mountain from future development.

"We are so excited to have an agreement to protect this amazing community asset," Bellingham Mayor Kelli Linville said. "Securing the public's use of the mountain for recreation, protecting the mountain from development, and ensuring the landowner's continued growth and harvest of timber is a win-win for everyone."

The agreement includes both a recreational use easement and a conservation easement. Whatcom Land Trust contributed \$250,000 to the purchase and the City of Bellingham Greenway Funds contributed \$2.75 million for a total of \$3 million. The sale is expected to close later this summer, and a management plan will be developed that covers administration, operation and management of the recreational use granted through the easement.

Galbraith Mountain is located east of Bellingham between Lake Padden and Lake Whatcom and is approximately 1/8 the size of Bellingham, reaching an elevation of 1,785 feet. The total area of the easement is 2,182 acres, with 1,023 of those acres inside the Lake Whatcom watershed. The acquisition adjoins 4,250 acres of public land managed by Whatcom County.

Galbraith Tree Farm LLC purchased the land on Galbraith Mountain from the Paulus Estate in June 2017.

## Ensuring recreational use

Over the last two decades, Galbraith Mountain has been developed by mountain bikers into a nationally recognized mountain biking facility. Galbraith's trails also support family outings, runners, hikers, and walkers. Up to now, all of these recreational uses have been allowed by the property owners on a voluntary basis. The property is zoned for commercial forestry with ongoing managed timber harvesting occurring regularly, and both recreational use and logging have successfully coexisted for many years.

"Thousands of bikers, hikers and runners use the tree farm year-round," said Rob Janicki, principle owner of Galbraith Tree Farm. "We have worked cooperatively with the Whatcom Mountain Bike Coalition since 2010 to preserve and enhance the public's recreational use of the tree farm, and our excellent record of public safety is a hallmark of that outstanding cooperation."

Eric Brown, Trail Director for the Whatcom Mountain Bike Coalition, said their organization is thrilled to partner with the City, Whatcom Land Trust and Galbraith Tree Farm to secure this continued public access as well as continue the property's legacy as a working forest. Under the new agreement, it is anticipated that the trail network on Galbraith will continue to be maintained by Whatcom Mountain Bike Coalition.

"While our organization has built and maintained trails on Galbraith for 32 years, there has never been guaranteed public access for recreation," Brown said. "Over the past eight years, we've worked closely with Janicki Logging and formed a strong relationship that has allowed the trail network to flourish during timber harvest activity. Thanks to the City and Whatcom Land Trust, our new partnership is even more exciting. As the trail network manager, the WMBC will be able to expand our world-class trail network and host future events. With the ever-increasing popularity of our trails, trail users and the growth in Bellingham, securing access to Galbraith helps maintain this jewel of Whatcom County for all residents forever."

## Protecting Lake Whatcom

With approximately 1,023 acres located directly within the Lake Whatcom Watershed, this agreement provides important protection for Whatcom County's drinking water supply as well. The conservation easement prohibits commercial, residential and industrial development on the site, which will in turn protect Lake Whatcom's water quality.

"After a decade or more of effort, the Whatcom Land Trust is thrilled that the original goals of permanent recreation, public access, and protection from development have been accomplished," Whatcom Land Trust Executive Director Rich Bowers said. "Galbraith Mountain has long been a highly used and nationally recognized resource. Now Galbraith is guaranteed to forever provide these values to the Whatcom community."

## Economic development

Janicki said that Galbraith Mountain will remain a working tree farm, with Galbraith Tree Farm continuing to harvest timber in a sustainable fashion.

"GTF expects to harvest an average of 50 acres per year establishing a 40-year crop rotation, providing steady employment and goods that help support our local economy. Sustainable forestry practices ensure that the tree farm will provide a healthy forest for the foreseeable future and help sequester carbon dioxide," he said.

Recreational activity on the mountain also contributes to tourism and outdoor recreation businesses. According to the 2015 report Economic Contribution of Outdoor Recreation to Whatcom County prepared by Earth Economics for Recreation Northwest, the yearly total economic contribution of recreation in Whatcom County is \$585 million and consumer outdoor recreation spending supports a total of 6,502 jobs.

In the coming months, the parties to the agreement and WMBC will develop an operating plan to ensure that the public's recreational use of the tree farm safely coexists with sustainable timber harvest operations on the property. The City and Galbraith Tree Farm do not anticipate any disruptions in public access for non-motorized recreational use before or after the sale is completed.

"Galbraith is an amazing example of how a private landowner, commercial forestry, the City of Bellingham, and recreation, environmental and other interests can work together to protect a place so special for everyone," Bowers said.

## More information

For a map of Galbraith Mountain and its location in relation to Bellingham, click [here](#).

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