



The

Steward

Streams, Farms, Parks, Forests...Protecting Our Natural Heritage for Future Generations

Volume 14 Number 1

Summer/Fall 2004

Save-an-Acre: North Fork Island

Each year during the Annual Great Outdoors Auction a special section of the event called "Save-an-Acre" is dedicated to raising funds to purchase a specific property. This year we contacted owners of a small island in the North Fork of the Nooksack and began negotiating the purchase of the property for \$5,000. As arrangements for the Auction progressed, the excitement for "Save an Acre" began to build. Two weeks before the Auction a local family called us and announced that they would donate the entire purchase price for the island property! With this wonderful gift we quickly completed the acquisition of the property.

Save an Acre island is about 10 acres in size and is covered with a cottonwood and alder forest. Several small log jams



photo: Gordon Scott

along the island's shoreline provide excellent pools and habitat for migrating fish. Located in the prime winter bald eagle

feeding area of the North Fork, the tall cottonwoods provide excellent spy perches for the eagles. The side channels of the North Fork that flow around the island are also home to beavers who make their lodges behind small log and earthen dams. While these small beaver dams might look like obstructions to fish they are really no problem for our finned friends: salmon and trout have evolved over eons in concert with beavers and in fact prefer the ponds behind beaver dams for resting and hiding from herons, kingfishers, mergansers, and bears. The fish, birds, insects, and mammals of the North Fork thank our generous donors for protecting their island home. —Gordon Scott

Come Celebrate 20 Years With Us!

Whatcom Land Trust
20th
Anniversary Party

**Boundary Bay Brewery
and Bistro**
September 23rd
7pm-12:30

Featuring a slide presentation
on the Whatcom Transect,
music, and dancing.

This year Whatcom Land Trust is celebrating our 20th year of land conservation in Whatcom County.

Our 20th Anniversary Party will be on September 23rd at Boundary Bay Brewery and Bistro. Come and enjoy a presentation by Scott Brennan and Angela Schuler on the Whatcom Transect. Then get ready to dance to the music of *Sweetheart of the Rodeo*, the *High Wide and Handsome Band*, and the *Paeder McMahan Band*. The event starts at 7pm and the cover charge will be \$10. For more details stay tuned to our website: www.whatcomlandtrust.org, or call the office at 360-650-9470. If you are interested in volunteering for this event, contact Ann Russell at the WLT office 360-650-9470, arussell@whatcomlandtrust.org.

Sarah Walker ...guiding the Nature guides

Whatcom Land Trust will be part of Make a Difference Day on October 23rd

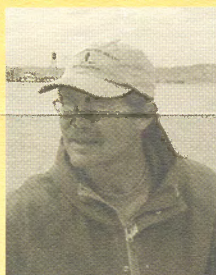
Whatcom Land Trust will join the myriad local organizations in celebrating this national day of helping. If you are interested in helping remove invasive species from Land Trust Properties please contact us at 360-650-9470, or by e-mail at info@whatcomlandtrust.org to sign-up. For more information on Make a Difference Day see the Whatcom Volunteer Center's website: www.whatcomvolunteer.org.

Correction

We failed to give Brett Baunton credit for the photo on page 11 of the last issue of the *Steward*. We regret our error, and appreciate that Brett has generously allowed WLT to use his photographic images.

Geoff Menzies named Land Steward of Year

Whatcom Land Trust is pleased to name Geoff Menzies our Land Steward of the Year for his dedicated work in cleaning up the water, and watershed, of Drayton Harbor.



Geoff has been involved in watershed planning efforts in the Drayton Harbor watershed since 1990. He was a commercial oyster grower in the harbor prior to its closure in 1995. He is volunteer Chairman of the Drayton Harbor Shellfish Protection District's Citizens Advisory Committee and manages the Drayton Harbor Community Oyster Farm.

Geoff developed the Drayton Harbor Community Oyster Farm as a unique, community-based shellfish restoration project that gives the community a hands-on stake in the health of Drayton Harbor.

The Land Trust salutes Geoff. His dedication has created a concerned, aware community, a cleaner, healthier harbor, and an abundance of delicious oysters.

Sarah Walker understands volunteers. She knows the rewards and the challenges first hand from years of volunteering herself and from her paid job as Co-Director of the LEAD Program at WWU, recruiting, managing and rewarding volunteers for environmental service learning. The Whatcom Land Trust has been lucky enough to benefit from her dynamic and professional volunteer management skills as she volunteered over the last six months developing a Nature Guide Program for the Stimpson Family Nature Reserve.



photo courtesy of Sarah Walker

Sarah learned about the Stimpson Reserve in a graduate class at Huxley College taught by WLT board member Wendy Walker (no, we aren't related, but are flattered by the comparison). She then volunteered to help Wendy teach an Environmental Stewardship class at the Stimpson Reserve. This class began the process of envisioning a nature guide program for the reserve, and the students created a rough draft training manual.

When Sarah Walker recognized that the stewardship class only began the process, she committed herself to finishing the job. She decided to make developing the nature guide program is her Master Degree project in Environmental Education at Huxley.

Sarah's goal for the Stimpson Nature Guide Program is simple: she wants to tell the preservation story for this remarkable nature reserve. Sarah commented, "I would really like to create a program that is sustainable be-

yond my Master's Degree. I hope to find people among the present nature guides who want to carry on in the future. The Stimpson trail is such an accessible trail loop which allows people to visit many diverse nature features. It is a great place for a nature guides program."

Since then, Sarah has rewritten the training manual, recruited ten outstanding volunteers, conducted twelve hours of training, scheduled the nature guides, publicized the programs and led the first program in July. She will be supporting and encouraging the nature guides through September and then working with them in October to evaluate the program and determine how to keep it going.

She is a vibrant, energetic person who makes us want to live up to her high level of commitment and excellence. Thank you, Sarah, for all your work and for your cheerful spirit.

—Wendy Walker

Volume 14, No. 1 - Summer/Fall, 2004

The Steward published quarterly by

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Summer/Fall 2004 - page 2

Newsletter Team Rand Jack, Bob Keller, Rod Burton, Connie Clement, Daniél Morgan
Production Help/Proofreading Pat Karlberg, Bob Keller
Design and Layout..... donated by Roderick C. Burton - Art & Design
Printing..... Lithtex Northwest
Contributors..... Chris Moench, Bob Keller, Scott Brennan, Rod Burton, Wendy Walker, Rand Jack, Ann Russell, Sarah Walker, Gordon Scott, Daniél Morgan

printed with vegetable-based inks on 100% recycled paper

Earth Day Volunteers Help Enhance Habitat —Ann Russell

On April 18th Whatcom Land Trust began a clean-up project on the J. Arley Harrison Memorial Wildlife Refuge. A dedicated group from 1st Presbyterian Church of Bellingham removed several truck-loads of garbage and re-usable items from the old barn on the property.

The Harrison Refuge was donated to WLT in 2000 by Jo Anne Harrison to honor the memory of her husband. The 5.37 acre prop-



photo: Ann Russell

Volunteers open the way for wildlife at the Harrison Refuge.

erty contains sensitive wetland and open space habitat. Volunteers also helped to remove fencing. The barn and the re-

mainder of the fencing will eventually be removed so wildlife may move freely through the property. This work and the

planned removal of blackberries and reed canary grass will ensure that the property remains viable wildlife habitat for years to come. Thanks so much to the following volunteers who helped: *Chris Moench (WLT Board Member), Al and Sandy Hunter, Jessie Alan, Joan Weeks-Keppel, Bruce Keppel, McKenna Fink and Peter Illyn*

If you are interested in getting involved in projects like this, or in any other way, please call the Land Trust office: 360-650-9470, or e-mail: info@whatcomlandtrust.org.

Nature Guide Program at the Stimpson Family Nature Reserve —Sarah Walker

The Nature Guide Program at the Stimpson Family Nature Reserve celebrates a successful first summer! For the past three months, nine volunteer nature guides have been guiding the public through the diverse habitats of the 350-acre Reserve. It is to them that the greatest thanks are offered. In May, these volunteers were handed a rough draft of an interpretive manual, given a few hours of training and told to hit the trail.



photo: Rand Jack

Newly completed handicapped-accessible trail at the Stimpson Family Nature Reserve

They have, and with great success. Every Saturday at 10 a.m. a general nature tour is offered to the public. In addition to the general tours, additional special interest topics ranging from amphibians to the watershed were given. These special interest topics provide nature guides and the public more information about the land and its dwellers. The nature guides closely observed the site, hearing and seeing barred owls, deer, newts, frogs, wood ducks,

herons, and of course a few old growth trees! As nature guide Jamie Law explains, "I have learned the geology of the area, how to identify several native plants, and on... and on..."

When asked why she volunteered as a nature guide, Gloria Ruyle replied, "I wanted to be able to, in some way, help people to connect to the land around them where they live. The story of Stimpson Reserve gives me hope for the future that we can work together on behalf of the land."

If you are interested in becoming a nature guide or have any questions about tours, please contact me via e-mail: walker5@wwu.edu, or contact the Whatcom Land Trust office.

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Nooksack Habitats Enhanced

Raymond Acquisition

In August the Land Trust increased the "Forks of the Nooksack Preserve" with the acquisition of 5 acres of riverfront, located on the North Fork Nooksack along the Truck Road. With this parcel from Harold and Otila Raymond, the Forks of the Nooksack Preserve has grown to 95 acres. This area is a complex of braided stream channels that change course regularly, keeping the North Fork a wild and diverse river, perfect habitat for native salmon and other fish. From November through January eagles roam the river bars in search of chum salmon, making this one of the most popular bald eagle feeding grounds in Northwest Washington. Thank you to Harold Raymond for contacting the Land Trust and offering to sell his small but important riverfront habitat.



photo: Gordon Scott

Braided channels of the Nooksack on the Raymond property.

Innis Creek

In August the Land Trust acquired 50 acres of important wetlands along the Samish River. The headwaters of the Samish River begin near Saxon (near the South Fork Nooksack) in southern Whatcom County where it flows north, then west, then south past Wickersham before entering Skagit County on its way to Samish Bay near the south end of the Chuckanut Range.

The newly acquired property is called "Innis Creek." The Samish River flows north to south through the property for 2,500 feet. Nearly all of the property is officially designated as wetland over a soil type aptly named "Schalcar Muck." Once farmed, the property now is vacant open fields with a small patch of forest along the eastern boundary.

Innis Creek is a tributary of the Samish River, and flows adjacent to the new property in a roadside ditch for about 1000 feet before crossing the road and meeting the Samish.

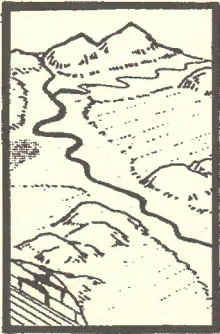
Innis Creek floods and courses out of its roadside ditch, forcing closures of the Innis Creek Road and stranding spawning coho salmon on the road bed and in adjacent fields. Innis Creek is

a very productive stream for coho, steelhead and cutthroat trout and serves as one of the main spawning grounds for these species in the Samish River basin. Because of low numbers of returning adults, Coho is a candidate for endangered species listing.

The Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group (SFEG) has monitored Innis Creek for several years and became concerned about the poor quality of habitat in the roadside ditch and the adverse impact of flooding on returning salmon. During investigation of Innis Creek's history SFEG discovered that in the course of construction of the Innis Creek Road, Innis Creek had been diverted out of its original channel and into the roadside ditch. Over the subsequent 100 years periodic ditch maintenance further harmed spawning habitat by removing gravel and cover.

To improve fish habitat and reduce flood closures on Innis Creek Road, the SFEG proposed re-routing Innis Creek into its original channel under the road and through the newly acquired Innis Creek property. SFEG asked the Land Trust to acquire the property to help facilitate the stream restoration. In July Whatcom Land Trust partnered with Skagit County to acquire the Innis Creek property.

The Land Trust plans to work cooperatively with SFEG to re-route and restore Innis Creek to its original channel. Whatcom County Public Works has signed on in support of the project and has offered to request funds for a bridge to span the relocated creek. Though it has taken many years and the help of several groups and agencies, the Innis Creek project is another example of how we all must work patiently together to understand and restore our natural heritage. —Gordon Scott



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WLT Loses a Friend, Past President Michael Durbin —Chris Moench



photo: Chris Moench

We are saddened to report the untimely death on August 15th of our dear friend and former Whatcom Land Trust president and board member Michael Durbin, age 51. Michael served on

the board from 1993 through 1995. He served one term as president in 1994. His tenure on the board was marked by several milestones: opening our first office, hiring our first full-time staff, as well as the successful protection of several properties, most notably Squires Lake in which Michael played a significant role in procuring donated services for trail building and for rebuilding the dam.

After leaving the board, Michael continued to be a stalwart supporter, offering his expertise as a civil engineer to our land committee and donating kayak trips to the auction.

An enthusiastic athlete throughout

his life, Michael loved whitewater and ocean kayaking, skiing and dancing. Little more than a year after undergoing heart valve replacement surgery, Michael participated in the Bellingham Traverse on the Land Trust team by paddling the kayak leg and then jogging two miles to the finish line. He was planning to do it again this year until his life was cut short by heart failure while surfing in Baja, Mexico.

Michael's death is a true loss for his family, friends and for the community as a whole. But his spirit lives on through each of us by remembering him and striving to live with the same vigor, commitment and compassion that guided his existence.

Improvements At Stimpson Nature Reserve —Rand Jack

It doesn't seem quite possible that the majestic, serene Stimpson Family Nature Reserve could be improved. But there are some useful and beautiful additions.

Thanks to a generous grant of \$8,600 from the Sidney Fund of Seattle, the trail from the parking lot to the beaver pond is now handicap accessible. At the beaver pond overlook, you will find a magnificent olivine bench, one of two donated to the Nature Reserve by Edward Stimpson, one of the original benefactors of the Reserve, and his wife Dorothy. The other bench is located about half way around the 3-mile loop trail. Made of olivine from Whatcom County's own Twin Sisters, the benches were cut and polished by Dean Briske at Princess Jade on the Mount Baker Highway. Each weighs nearly 1,500 pounds.



photos: Rand Jack

Above: Ed and Dottie Stimpson enjoy the first use of one of the benches.

Right: Russ Pfeiffer-Hoyt and Eric Carabba moving 1,500 pound stones.

You might wonder how a 1,500-pound rock was moved a mile and a half down a forest trail. The answer is master trail builder and bench mover Russ Pfeiffer-Hoyt and his able assistant



Eric Carabba. Russ and Eric also built the Stimpson loop trail and made the handicap accessible improvements.

In keeping with its appellation, cougars have been spotted several times this summer at the Nature Reserve.



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Whatcom Transect - Crossing the Land

text and photos: Scott Brennan

During the first two weeks of August, Angela Schuler and I completed a 200-mile, human powered crossing of Whatcom County. Initially conceived as our summer vacation,



the trip became known as the Whatcom Transect and in doing so, it took on much greater significance for us and many other members of our community. It taught us a lot about this place, what makes it unique and the importance of protecting it.

We began at Hart's Pass at the county's eastern end and finished 14 days, and a whole lot of hiking, pedaling and paddling later, in Point Roberts. During our travels we passed through lands managed and mismanaged by the U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, Washington state, county and city governments as well as countless private land owners. We visited wilderness, parks, farms, public and private land--including properties protected by the efforts of the Whatcom Land Trust. In the end we realized that regardless of ownership, all of Whatcom County's landscape falls into two categories: the protected and the unprotected.

Whatcom County is unique in that half of its land base is federally protected wilderness, largely unchanged for millennia, and the other half is a hodge-podge of private, city, county and state land that is experiencing unprecedented population and real-estate booms. We have more

glaciers than Glacier National Park and more wild country than many nations possess. At the same time we are at the epicenter of a population and visitation boom fueled by the rapid retirement of affluent baby boomers around the country and a recent rash of national media attention.

We have been featured in the National Geographic (a short Zip Code piece on the quirky isolation of Point Roberts) and *National Geographic Adventure* (a feature naming Bellingham as one of the top ten "Great Adventure Towns" in America). The folks at Geographic know what many Whatcom County residents don't--that the natural landscapes of this county are, in their diversity, scale, accessibility, and in the close juxtaposition of civilization and wildness, of national and perhaps even global significance.

During our travels Angela and I realized that there are indeed two counties here in Whatcom. A glance at a county map might suggest that these two counties are the federal and the local, or perhaps the wild and the civilized. What we experienced, however, are two counties defined by the degree of protection afforded to their landscapes. We saw pristine public wilderness and eroded, degraded private farmland, to

be sure. But we also saw ugly clearcut swaths on public lands and healthy habitat and vistas on private lands including the Glacier Springs, Racehorse Creek, Deming Homestead Eagle Park, Stone-Schraeder property, Miller farm, Eames Tidelands, Maple Beach properties that have been protected through the efforts of the Whatcom Land Trust and its many supporters.

As this county continues to change and its population grows, we have an opportunity and, I would argue, a responsibility to further extend protections to these unique and varied landscapes. As we move forward, the efforts of the Whatcom Land Trust and other local conservation organizations will become increasingly important.

The Whatcom Transect is complete but our work is far from finished.

Scott and Angela would like to thank Daniel Morgan, Ann Russell and the rest of the WLT staff for their support, Bob Keller and Pat Karlberg for the canoe, Robyn du Pre for sup-



porting the bike and kayak legs of the trip, Elise de Luna and Jonathan Morgan for the Ross Lake shuttle, Johnson Outdoors for the use of a beautiful, seaworthy kayak and Karl Kruger and Jess Kruger-Stahl for spending the Saturday before their wedding day sailing the salty, seasick and smelly Transect Team home from Point Roberts. They are also grateful for the outstanding webpage by Greg Heffron of Midline Design.

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Auction Pays Off

We gambled, holding our 4th Great Outdoors Auction at White Salmon Lodge. Sixty miles east of Bellingham on a twisting mountain road, 60 miles away from offices, stores and storage, the place had 100 seats less than previous sites. It also came with mountain weather—and, in fact, delivered a Cascade downpour on May 15th.

But the site offers one of the most spectacular vistas anywhere. We also like to circulate around Whatcom County. Besides, this truly *was* the great outdoors. We went for it. It worked.

The auction sold out in early April, even before Rod Burton produced another of his superb catalogs. We had the highest net income ever (\$51,000). Dinner was catered by Milanos, with beverages flowing from Mt. Baker Vineyard. Live bidding started strong and at times became raucous as items sold. When people left, many said “thanks for the evening,” the ultimate compliment at a fundraiser.

Of course, bumps occurred en route. The worst happened when a week before the auction David & Jayme Curley donated \$5,000 for the Trust to acquire the planned Fund an Acre site. That made the auction crowd so mad that they pledged another \$9,000 in revenge.

Special gratitude to over three dozen volunteers, including committee members Julia Bennett, Sheilagh Brown, Rod Burton, Yolanda Calderon, Sally

Hansberry, Sara Hill, Andrea Hood, Liz Isaly, Becky Masters, and Joe Peabody. Special thanks to event volunteers Janet and Tom Boyhan. Consultant Gaye Godfrey kept us sane. And above all, thanks to two wonderful staff, Daniél Morgan and Connie Clement. Daniél had the whole auction stored in her head for over four months, attending to crises as well as the smallest needs. Connie, new on the job,

...the Great Outdoors Auction is not about ...acquiring piles of money. It is actually about establishing sustainable human connections and building good will in the community.

proved indispensable for her attention to detail, good cheer, and clear head.

How much hard work does an auction require? Each of 250 auction items involves at least a dozen steps: procurement, pickup, recording, storage, receipt, delivery, decoration, display, a bid sheet, selling, recording, final delivery, billing, and thanks. In addition there's food, drinks, directions, décor, bid cards, the auctioneer, volunteers, promotion, rides, invitations, table captains, clean up.

Thus the Great Outdoors Auction is not about quickly and easily acquiring piles of money. It is actually about establishing sustainable human connections and building good will in the community. That requires dedicated effort. *Thanks to everyone who contributed:* guests, donors, staff, and volunteers.

—Bob Keller, 2004 Auction Chair

Environmental Heroes

On June 5th Re-Resources held its 2nd annual Environmental Hero Awards dinner. Land Trust board members Bob Keller and Rand Jack were each presented with an award for preservation. Rand Jack was honored for his persistence and ingenuity in finding opportunities and making deals happen. Since our founding in 1984, Rand has played a guiding role in every preservation transaction—forty properties and thirty-five conservation easements. Bob Keller was honored for ten years of tireless outreach and fundraising efforts. He has greatly increased awareness of WLT and our mission. His work to establish the development committee greatly increased the long-term financial stability of the organization. In addition, his efforts have put in place a full-time development director, the Great Outdoors Annual Auction, and the book *Whatcom Places*. Bob and Rand are a true inspiration. Their dedication and vision will serve members of this community in perpetuity. —Daniél Morgan

Suzuki Coming

David Suzuki will be speaking at Bellingham High School on Dec. 2, with proceeds from admissions going to WLT. We'll tell you more in the next issue of the *Steward*. For now, you can get more details by calling Village Books, 350-671-2626.

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Whatcom Land Trust • By the Numbers

Land protected through the efforts or assistance of Whatcom Land Trust:

- Total Acres** 6,178
- Miles of Riverfront** 13.8
- Public Parks Created** 8

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