

THE UNDERSTORY

SLT LAND STEWARD NEWSLETTER

JULY 2011

A DAY OF EXCITEMENT

BY REGINA WANDLER

You never know what you might find when you head out to a corner of your property you didn't know was yours. On a fairly nice Friday in mid April, a group of hardy volunteers and stewardship staff assembled at the South Skagit Park and Ride. There was Jim Johnson, Cumberland land steward extraordinaire, Rick Machin, a new member of the stewardship committee, Bob Boudinot, our recently elected board president, and Michael and I. We were heading out to look at an island right next to the Cumberland Creek property which – lo and behold – we had recently learned may belong to Skagit Land Trust. We still weren't quite sure as to whether it was our property, but we were already going out to look at a culvert which was unashamedly losing gravel from one side, and thought we should check it out.

The morning's culvert check had been fairly normal. Land stewards typically catch problems before they become major. However, after hopping back in our cars and parking slightly farther east down the road, we had a puzzling situation. Someone had strung a heavy cable across two trees. They must have been blocking ATV's from driving across our property, and felt that the sticks and logs Michael and Jim had piled up to dissuade recreationalists had not been enough. We awkwardly hopped over the cable, and headed to the 'island'. The 'island' was currently completely connected to land – the channel which sometimes separated it was dry. We immediately tried to bushwhack straight into the island. This was ineffective. After a minute of stomping down blackberry and salmonberry, we decided to try walking around the end of the island. As I had rubber boots, I went first to see if it could be done.

I crossed the creek and was on the tip of the island. I saw a small path leading into the trees, and clambered up into the woods. On my entrance to the woods, I was very surprised to find a widened, flat, very crisp and clean pathway leading east. What on earth was happening here? Continuing on for a minute, I found that the path became more defined, and began to diverge into multiple loops off of the main trail. This was not a simple walking path. This was a well cared for network of some sort. After yelling a few times to see if the

others could hear me, I got out my phone and called Michael. He said that he would gather the others and they would bushwhack through to see what I had found. I wandered around until I heard them through the bushes, and met up with them. They were also surprised. If they hadn't seen it, I don't think they would have believed me. I hardly believed myself, even when I saw it.

We wandered east, marveling at the fact that the paths looked as though someone was sweeping them. Talk about unexpected! Suddenly, soon after a 15' diameter path interchange, we stumbled right onto a cabin. On the seemingly inaccessible island. That we hadn't thought we owned. That was quite the surprise. It was a beautiful piece of work – surrounded by a cemented in outdoor oven, two horseshoe (the game) posts, and all sorts of other perfectly maintained cabin details. We knocked on the door, and wandered about, looking at the potential stewardship disaster, until Michael breathed a sigh of relief after intently watching his GPS for several minutes and said that the cabin, at least, was definitely over the line and not owned by Skagit Land Trust. All of us calmed down, and headed back to the trail network – because many of those were still on what was, potentially, our land. We found an area where some naturally fallen logs

were being hauled back towards the cabin. While not an acceptable activity for our properties, it was much better than a home, and we determined to figure out who the cabin owner was and contact them, after going over the legal land description a few more times to find out for sure if we owned half of



THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE BEAUTIFUL

Northwest Botany
by Regina Wandler

Western Sword Fern *Polystichum munitum*

Sword Fern is commonly found in the understory of moist northwest forests. It thrives in shade (and sun, if it isn't outcompeted), and can grow to be almost 6 feet tall. The tough stalks grow in a clump, radiating up and slightly outward. Sometimes there are only a few, and other times they dominate the forest floor, with shrubs and flowers tucked around them. When there is pollen on the underside of the fronds, you can swipe it over a nettle sting to calm the burn. Native americans sometimes bundled them into mattresses. Today, they are often used in floral arrangements, especially for funerals.



Butterfly Bush *Buddleia davidii*

Though pretty, butterfly bush is a noxious invasive plant. It was imported from asia, and has quickly spread outside of gardens to compete with native vegetation in natural areas. It's now naturalized throughout most of Europe. If you are planting it for the butterflies, you should rethink your efforts - while a butterfly bush does provide food, it doesn't provide food for butterfly larvae. Other native species are far better for keeping butterflies around into the future, and don't replace valuable native vegetation.



Fringecup *Tellima grandiflora*

Look in damp, shady forests for this beauty - or, sometimes, you can find it in a meadow. The leaves are fuzzy and heart shaped, and the flowers rise from them on a tall, gracefully arcing stem with alternating tiny upside down cups dipping off of it. The flowers are yellowish white, and turn pink with age, and the edge curls delicately back and dissolves into a lacey wispy edge. Fringecup blooms from May through June. It is even mildly slug resistant!



**Much of this information came from Daniel Mathews' [Cascade-Olympic Natural History](#). Check it out for more info! Some also from Rodale. Images from the USDA plants database and taken at Guemes island.*

We've had work parties at Cumberland Creek, Lyman Slough, Minkler Lake, Guemes Mountain, Hurn Field, Barr Creek, Sumner Lake, Tope Ryan and Butler Creek since March - and gotten a lot done! Thanks to everyone who's helped clean up trash, hack down blackberries, and build and clear trails - we couldn't do it without you.

A DAY OF EXCITEMENT CONTINUED

the island.

This had been quite the day already, and we weren't done yet. Tromping back to the car, we met up with Hal Lee, who was leading us to Day Creek to clean up some fencing he had found while looking for property lines



– some fencing that had been encircling another interesting find. From Hal's monitoring report the month before, "On my way back to the tree planted area, I noticed some white plastic trash. I went over to investigate and found 11 mostly empty quart bottles of Dead Line Slug Bait, a box of Miracle Grow fertilizer, lots of 1, 2, & 5 gal planting pots, black plastic tarps and a couple of fenced off areas. I assumed to grow something illegal. I didn't see any plants growing currently. Dates on the Dead Line were 9/2006 and the label on the fertilizer copyrighted 2007." Someone assumed that it was a safe place to conduct illegal activities – and while we had not caught them while they were growing, our land steward had found the site and we were able to clean it up. I am sure that Hal will keep a close watch out and make sure that they and other growers do not come back to Day Creek Slough.

Stan Zyskowski joined us via bike at Day Creek, and we headed out to get all of the fencing and clear a path so that we could get it off of the property. We had it rolled up and out of there in a jiffy, and loaded into Rick's truck. This was one of the most interesting stewardship visits any of us had ever been on – and I have to say, we hope there aren't more like it. Thank you, stewards, for helping us monitor our properties – it's sometimes surprising how much they need it!

An Epilogue: It turns out that Skagit Land Trust does not own the contested island, and the trail network and cabins are on the neighboring property. Thank goodness!

HEY STEWARDS!

CREATIVELY INCLINED? PLEASE SEND YOUR LAND TRUST PROPERTY INSPIRED PHOTOS, ARTICLES, POEMS, ILLUSTRATIONS, RIDDLES OR WHAT HAVE YOU TO REGINA (REGINAW@SKAGITLANDTRUST.ORG) FOR INCLUSION IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF THE UNDERSTORY!



Above
Stan, Rick, Hal, Bob, Michael and Jim stand in front of the truck they filled with fencing hauled out of Day Creek. Nothing like teamwork!



To the Right
Jim Johnson next to a tree he planted while a steward at Day Creek Slough.
Grow strong and tall, little tree!

A sad goodbye to Pat Hurley - a dedicated volunteer who passed away in June. He will be greatly missed.

NOTES FROM MICHAEL KIRSHENBAUM

We are all so busy planning and thinking about what we need to do next that I'd like to take a moment to reflect on and appreciate all of the good work that has occurred over the past year on every property. Thanks go to: **Tim and Brenda** for monitoring Barney Lake and planning for the possible expansion of the land trust property there; **Russ** for leading the trail building at Barr Creek; **Jim O.** for ensuring that more conifers were planted at Butler Creek; **Jim J.** for keeping the trails open at Cumberland Creek and sniffing out possible dangers on our borders; **Stan** for guiding grad-student Bashira through vegetation monitoring protocols at Day Creek; **Hal** for finding and breaking down a possible old grow-operation at Day Creek and advancing the front lines against blackberry at Minkler Lake; **John F.** for watching Grandy Creek carefully and making sure our neighbors know where the property lines are; **Scott** for making sure the waterfowl at Green Rd. Marsh are left in peace; **Ed, Carolyn, Joost and Marianne** for pulling thistle, leading trail hikes and taking care of the new Guemes Mountain trail; **Lin and Steffany** for finding ATV trespass at Hurn Field and keeping the pullout in

SKAGIT CONSERVATION AREAS AND THEIR LAND STEWARDS

- [Barney Lake](#) - Tim Manns and Brenda Cunningham
- [Barr Creek](#) - Russ Dalton
- [Butler Creek](#) - Jim Owens
- [Cumberland Creek](#) - Jim Johnson
- [Day Creek \(Berquist\)](#) - Stan Zyskowski
- [Day Creek Kosbab](#) - Skagit River System Cooperative
- [Day Creek Slough](#) - Hal Lee
- [Grandy Creek](#) - John Freeman
- [Green Road Marsh](#) - Scott Andrews
- [Guemes Mountain](#) - Ed and Carolyn Gastellum, Marianne Kooiman and Joost Businger
- [Hurn Field](#) - Steffany Raynes and Lin Skavdahl
- [Lyman Slough](#) - Dick Raisler
- [March's Point Heronry](#) - LaVerne and Jim Scheltens
- [Minkler Lake](#) - Hal Lee
- [Mud Lake](#) - Lloyd Brown
- [Pressentin Ranch](#) - Bill and Sally Pfeifer
- [Samish - Ochs](#) - Pete and Dorothy Haase
- [Samish River](#) - Corey Stout and Bonnie Baker
- [Sumner Lake](#) - Tamara Thomas and Tom Mayes
- [Tope Ryan](#) - John Day

good shape; to **Jim and LaVerne** for keeping the heron nests counted at March Point; **Lloyd** for ensuring that the ivy remains in check at Mud Lake; **Bill and Sally** for signing-up for duty at Pressentin Ranch and taking baseline photos; **Bonnie and Corey** for signing up for duty at Samish River and learning about the property; **Dick** for working hard to hack the blackberry, protect the spruce plantings and keep an eye on public use at Lyman Slough; **Pete and Dorothy** for picking up garbage and participating in the knotweed fight at Samish - Ochs; **Tamara and Tom** for hauling away tires and garbage from Sumner Lake; **John D.** for investigating the latest beaver mayhem at Tope Ryan; and **Regina** for all her work as AmeriCorps volunteer coordinator this past year. Thank you to everyone - it's been a great field season!