

THE UNDERSTORY

SLT LAND STEWARD NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2011

FIRST TIME LAND STEWARDS

BY DOROTHY HAASE

We've been asked to be Land Stewards for a piece of property on the Samish River. What does that mean exactly? What kind of commitment does it represent?

We know how to care for animals, especially rabbits and cats. I am so tuned in to them that animals communicate their needs and wishes to me. I "hear" them as if they were to speak aloud.

But land. How does a piece of land speak to me? How does it tell me what it needs and wants? I've only visited the property once so far. It's filled with alders and other scrubby growth. There is thick underbrush, with mounds of wet leaves and barriers of blackberries.

This piece would bumble along without someone to watch over it. But now that we're here... what should we do? If we hack a safe path from road to river, is that a good thing? If we visit regularly, will the energy of the place reflect our interest?

Some people in this program have been members for years. They work tirelessly, planting, cleaning out invasive growths. They seem to have some vision for what the right course of action is. Experience is the best teacher.

But we are new. Our assigned piece of land has come into our awareness, and as such it can expect to receive the full measure of what we have to give. But first I must visit, and sit, and listen so that I can "hear" what it is I need to do.

When we care about something – anything – we are a better people. This is our home and we love it. We have great respect for the organizations and people who transform caring for, protecting, and saving into a reality that lasts.

Bumper stickers tell us: "Pavement is Forever." They are right. We lived in Issaquah; we saw what happened to farm land and wilderness areas. Cougars and brown bears have no place to hide. Wildflowers have no place to grow. Water that used to saturate into the land now runs off parking lots into storm drains that empty into streams that used to be filled with salmon.

I worry about twisting an ankle by walking through thick underbrush on my way through "our" property to the river. But I'm hoping the land will know I am there, already caring, ready to listen, doing what I can to make things better. I am counting on it protecting me so that I may protect it.



Dorothy and Pete have quite the task ahead of them - knotweed is a constant threat, and this property has knotweed along the twisty river channel that will need to be watched carefully. Knotweed control needs to be part of a larger, concentrated effort to be effective, and we will be working with the Samish tribe at Ochs.

Photo courtesy of Pete Haase, whom you may know as the man who takes photos at most Skagit Land Trust events and puts the photos online.

THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE BEAUTIFUL

Northwest Botany
by Regina Wandler

Nettles *Urtica dioica*

Nettles - almost everyone who spends time in the woods has accidentally brushed up against a nettle at some point, and learned that touching them can be painful. But nettles are medicinal - nettle tea is said to help cure diseases and inflammations of the urinary system, and stinging skin with nettles near arthritic joints can help relieve pain. Nettles are also edible. You have to blanch tender young leaves until they limp (make sure to cook them long enough or you will notice a stinging sensation in your mouth as you eat them!), and then they can be delicious, in soup, pasta sauce, or with dairy products. Nettles can usually be found in moist, open lowlands.



Stinky Bob *Germanium robertianum*

Also called herb robert, this sneakily beautiful plant is often mistaken for a beloved native (bleedingheart). Stinky Bob is a much hated invasive weed that, though small and sometimes barely noticeable, can invade deeper into shady forest than many other invasive weeds. Some botanists suspect it of poisoning soil against its competitors! It can take over an entire undisturbed NW forest herb layer. If you see this plant, with its parsley like leaves and flat pink flowers, test it by seeing if it smells like rank peanut butter when you crush it. If it does, remove it!



Bleedingheart *Dicentra formosa*

One of the quirky and uniquely beautiful flowers of the northwest, bleedingheart's gorgeous hanging heart-shaped flower suspended above the delicate lacy fern like leaves is easily identifiable when flowering. When not flowering, the delicate leaves can easily be mistaken for stinky bob. Make sure to check that the patch of invasives you are pulling up isn't actually our lovely bleedingheart!



**Much of this information came from Daniel Mathews' Cascade-Olympic Natural History. Check it out for more info! Images courtesy of the USDA plants database, NPS, and King County.*

March and April are good months to remove Stinky Bob if it is on your property. If you've seen these plants, try manually pulling small populations - then bag them and put them in the trash to prevent spreading. If you see it all over, let Regina know and she can schedule a work party. Visit <http://your.kingcounty.gov/dnrp/library/water-and-land/weeds/BMPs/Herb-Robert-Control.pdf> for more information.

A POEM BY ELLIE ROGERS



The first flowers in spring here
match the sun.

The earth marries the sky—
soaks and coaxes gold
from soil and light.

All winter we crouch
under clouds like Atlas,
our shoulders curl under
and crease beneath steep and steeled skies.
We carry on our backs the weight;
it is not light.

We travel toughened over
ice, stiff to the core
we slip over.

But I can feel the fiddleheads
turning to ferns
and I can feel the sky
pulling its own strings
lifting, shifting,
spilling sun onto
this holy ground.

THANK YOU!

To everyone who showed up at the Land Steward Potluck and Photopoint event to learn more about further opportunities to help Skagit Land Trust steward our properties. What a fantastic group!

HEY STEWARDS!

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

SKAGIT CONSERVATION AREAS AND THEIR LAND STEWARDS



You can't see the forest (or, perhaps, the river) for the trees at Samish - Ochs, as Pete's photo clearly demonstrates.

On our recent initiation trip to the property, Pete, Michael and Regina ended up picking up a plethora of litter along the roadside. Just an introduction to the less glamorous side of stewarding SLT properties.



- [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
- [Presentin Ranch](#) - OPEN!
- [Samish - Ochs](#) - Pete and Dorothy Haase
- [Samish River](#) - Koetje - OPEN!
- [South Skagit \(Shaw\)](#) - Skagit Land Trust
- [Tope Ryan](#) - John Day
- [Upper Skagit \(Nank Hewitt\)](#) - OPEN!

NOTES FROM MICHAEL KIRSHENBAUM

PUBLIC ACCESS AND SKAGIT LAND TRUST

How do we connect Skagit Land Trust members and the community with our conservation areas? A trail here, a trail there; interpretive signs and elk-viewing pullouts; heron cameras and nest counts. Combine all of that and suddenly SLT has quite a bit of public access on our properties. This notion is baked into the Trust's DNA: the very first land trust property, Tope Ryan, features a trail through the woods to the Samish River, complete with a log footbridge and parking area. From that humble beginning, we now find ourselves building what is sure to be a very popular 1.25 mile trail up Guemes Mountain, enlisting the help of the Washington Trails Association and hundreds of volunteers.

Many of your properties feature trails of some kind.

Others are remote and hard to access. As we grow, SLT board members are beginning to ask: How much public access can we afford? How will we maintain trails, pullouts, and other projects over the long-term? Is this our role? All of which are good questions.

With a background with the National Park Service, I'm inclined to support public access and see it as a way to build a connection with the land and trust. But as you walk your properties and think ahead, spend some time mulling over the role of public visitation to these lands and how that fits into your landscapes and into the land trust's future. I look forward to hearing your thoughts.



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Mission Statement

Skagit Land Trust conserves wildlife habitat, wetlands, agricultural and forest lands, scenic open space and shorelines for the benefit of our community and as a legacy for future generations.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Consider coming to an event this year if you'd like to help out a fellow steward or just want another excuse to get outside!



Guemes Trailbuilding:
Saturday, March 26th and Sunday, March 27th
Barr Creek Trailbuilding:
Friday, April 8th
Hurn Field Nature Walk:
Sunday, May 1st
Guemes Trailbuilding:
Saturday, May 28th and Sunday, May 29th
Minkler Lake Blackberry Hack-Down:
Sunday, June 12th
Lyman Slough Invasives Removal:
Friday, June 24th

More events to be added soon.
Email Regina for more information, or look online!