



Climate Change and Skagit Land Trust's Conservation Strategy

Natural landscapes play an important role in our climate and in climate adaptation. The EPA estimates that U.S. lands, public and private, together provide nearly 900 million metric tons of annual carbon dioxide removal from the atmosphere. This represents 15% of total U.S. carbon dioxide emissions. But there is strong evidence that this sink is being diminished, particularly through loss of forests and grasslands. Additionally, global warming may literally change the face of our conserved lands with rising sea levels and a wide array of unpredictable stresses on plants, fish, and wildlife as well as human populations.

Skagit Land Trust worked under our first Conservation Strategy for over a decade to guide our land protection and habitat restoration activities. However population growth, evolving science, and the effects of climate change have caused us to adjust our criteria and location of priorities. With increased data availability and new tools, Skagit Land Trust was able to develop a more sophisticated blueprint in 2014. The new Strategy uses the best available scientific data and analyses and geographic information system (GIS) mapping tools together with extensive local knowledge and plans to prioritize lands for conservation. Our current Strategy is the only compilation of data that is in a useable scale and context to enable community-based, voluntary, local conservation in the Skagit.

Skagit Land Trust's new Conservation Strategy addresses climate change by prioritizing land conservation for large blocks of low elevation forests as well as coastal wetlands. The Strategy also prioritizes protecting lands that will help build ecosystem resiliency and will provide the best opportunities for habitat and species adaptation in the face of changing conditions. These concepts are embedded in the Strategy's Guiding Principles, which call out many concepts of landscape ecology and planning for biodiversity, including:

- Protecting core areas as refuges for species to repopulate surrounding areas.
- Preserving landscape connectivity to allow for species migration and adaptation.
- Protecting ecosystem processes that sustain, build, and form native habitats.

