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Recreation: “Natural Skagit” released

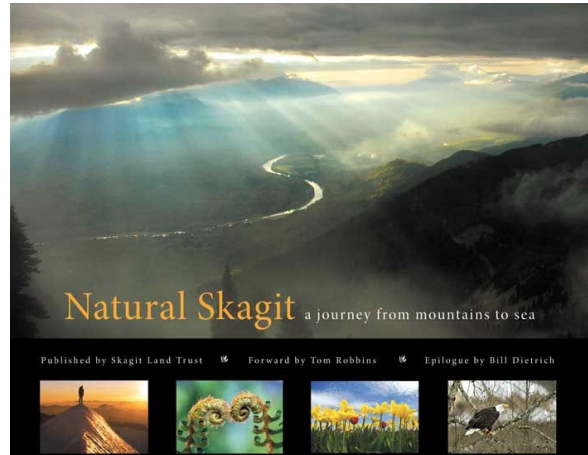
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by Vince Richardson

MOUNT VERNON — It’s said that a picture is worth a thousand words.

So what are 240 pictures, including those by photo icon Lee Mann, worth?

And what if those 240 pictures are accompanied by thousands of words penned by the likes of Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Bill Dietrich, author Tom Robbins and a host of naturalists, editors, photographers and conservationists.

Now imagine just such a body of work whose epicenter is the very area many call home — the Skagit Valley.



"Natural Skagit: A journey from Mountains to Sea" was put together by Skagit Land Trust.

Skagit Land Trust will release just such a publication Thursday. “Natural Skagit: A journey from Mountains to Sea” highlights the natural diversity of Skagit County.

A free book launch begins at 5:30 p.m. Thursday at Skagit Valley Gardens. Dietrich and Robbins will read from the book.

“It’s just a great idea,” said Dietrich. “It’s a great vision by an organization I am very familiar with. A book like this can really get people fired up. And for me, there was this feeling of great personal gratification to be able to put my experiences down in writing about a place that I care so deeply about.”

“Natural Skagit: A journey from Mountains to Sea” can be purchased from Skagit Land Trust, its Web site at <http://www.skagitlandtrust.org> or from participating book stores. The soft cover edition is available for \$29.95 and a limited edition hardcover will sell for \$44.95.

“All of the funds, 100 percent, are going right back into conservation,” said Molly Doran, executive director of Skagit Land Trust. “The money will go right back into conserving more Skagit land. The books are 100 percent, post-consumer recycled. We are very pleased about that.”

Skagit Land Trust had several motives behind the book.

“Making money was not the top priority,” Doran said. “The top priority was making people aware of this incredible place in which we live in. It’s really quite a remarkable place.”

From concept to delivery, it's been a labor-intensive, collaborative effort spanning about 13 months.

"People are so excited about it," said Renata Hoyle Maybruck, development and communications director for Skagit Land Trust who was the project director. "People have for years been asking for a book that encompasses the entire valley. People who are visiting and people who are moving away, to take with them. There's never been a book like this before. Now there's a book that shows the entire valley in 128 pages."

The book is a work of art, both through its photos and its written word. Skagit Land Trust brought together a group with a variety of backgrounds to make the book.

"We are hoping it serves as a call to action for people to say 'wow, this is an amazing place we live in and it's not going to be able to save itself,'" Doran said. "So we have to work as a community to protect it all and not just the farmlands and not just the salmon habitat and not just forest lands, but everything."

"Natural Skagit: A journey from Mountains to Sea" is based on Whatcom Land Trust's book, "Whatcom Places."

Ron Feld, a Skagit Land Trust board member, accompanied Doran to a reading of the Whatcom book. Both realized what a book like that would mean to Skagit Land Trust.

"We were so moved," recalled Doran, "by how many people could get a conservation message in such a fast, dynamic way.

"The Skagit River boasts so much. Huge, productive farm lands, flats with all the birds, massive salmon runs and yet there was no one place where you could find all that information and also at the same time see what was at risk."

And with that, the idea for a Skagit book was born.

"We came back and said we have to do this," said Doran. "We were the perfect organization to do it because we take a very holistic approach toward conservation. Skagit Land Trust does the whole area – from mountains to sea – just like the book."

Little did those involved know what they were getting into.

A steering committee was formed. Its lone job was to put the puzzle pieces together.

"We started going through how this book should come together," said Doran. "The idea was to make it a vision of what the land trust does, which is this holistic approach toward conservation. Then the geographic elements just fell into place.

"We started putting together a list of people who we thought would be good on a steering committee. You have a wish list of conservationists, editors and writers. We had our wish list and every person we called said yes. It was really the first time I had been part of a project where every person came on board without hesitation. They all worked so hard. It's very exciting, and through the whole project everything we asked of everyone, they said yes."

Skagit Land Trust hired Patricia Chambers as the project manager and creative coordinator. She hit the ground running, focused on the monumental task.

“Patricia was phenomenal,” said Hoyle Maybruck. “We can’t say enough about the work she did and all the hours she put in to finish this project.”

Once the steering committee was in place and Chambers was on board, the group set forth to find the voices and photographs to tell the Skagit’s story.

“It really built momentum,” said Hoyle Maybruck. “Everyone wanted to be a part of it. It was a real neat process. We had 10 steering committee members, five photo committee members, and then 60 photographers.

“The photo committee was exceptional. Having Lee Mann on it really helped to get those other photographers on board. They are all Land Trust members. Every person on steering and on photo committee is a Land Trust member. That was great. So many people wanted to be a part of it.”

The group included Robbins, who penned the forward, and Dietrich, who wrote the epilogue.

“We weren’t sure what his (Robbins) forward was going to be,” admitted Hoyle Maybruck. “Of course, we had described the intent of the book and when it came in, it was just perfect. It was really interesting because we structured the book geographically, from the mountains to the sea, and he describes it in his forward, he describes the river from upstream to downstream. It was really in sync with everything we wanted. It was really exciting to get that.

“And, of course, the title of his forward, ‘The Magic Skagit,’ was perfect.”

The endeavor brought together those from a variety of backgrounds.

“The interviewees in the book are so diverse,” said Hoyle Maybruck. “There is Mike Janicki and Shirley Solomon. It’s very exciting to have such differing conservation viewpoints all together in one book.

“There are a very diverse group of people featured in the book. The land trust is probably the only group that could bring them together. We are really pleased about that.”

The photography in the book is top notch. Skagit Land Trust put out a call for photos and received about 2,000. From those, the committee spent 46 hours, over eight sessions, in Mann’s studio. Eventually, it picked the 240 that made the cut.

“We had two community calls for photos,” explained Hoyle Maybruck. “The first call, we just wanted to see everything that came in. Just to see what was going to happen. The second call, we realized that we needed to have some holes filled. We had really selected all of the photos from the group that had already sort of passed muster on the first round.

“So we asked those photographers to resubmit additional photographs. So out of 2,000, we basically took 10 percent. Even with only 10 percent of the photographs making the cut for the book, we still ended up with 60 photographers whose work appeared in it. That’s really a testament to the community effort behind this book.”

Some of the chosen photographers were asked to shoot other photos to fill holes that sprung up as the book was being pieced together. Hoyle Maybruck referred to that time as the “hunter/gatherer phase.”

“It was very intense,” she said. “It really was because you had to find every photo strategically. It had to fit perfectly.”

And the finished product?

Well, it’s the work of a diverse group that came together to tell a story through words and photographs in the hopes that future generations will respect, conserve and protect the Skagit.

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