

THE UNDERSTORY

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE LAND STEWARDS, FOR THE LAND STEWARDS, BY THE LAND STEWARDS

DEC 2012

BASELINE THOUGHTS

BY JIM JOHNSON, CUMBERLAND CREEK LAND STEWARD

Sometime back it was suggested that Stewards begin a biological inventory of the land they steward. It makes sense. The Trust ought to know its lands as completely as possible. For a Steward like myself who is not a trained field biologist undertaking an inventory might seem both daunting and bothersome. I mean, all that list making. But keeping in mind that it's an ongoing process, one that will never be finished, makes it at once less intimidating and more leisurely. Viewed in this light an inventory is not simply the recording of random data, but a step on the way to knowing a place intimately. And, if nothing else, as the wizard Merlin in T.H. White's *The Once and Future King* says to his pupil, the young King Arthur, "the best thing for being sad is to learn something. It never fails." The old wizard's counsel here nearly always works for me.

Nor is the inventory necessarily always done in isolation. An Audubon outing to Cumberland in May of 2008 led by Libby Mills, Tim Manns and John Day totaled 41 bird species. Since then, I've spotted another 21. The Oregon Spotted Frog amphibian surveys which Don Gay helped organize added species to my inventory and more to my knowledge. When I stumbled upon a pile of mussel shells along the Oxbow, Phil Kincaid with the Forest Service offered me an obscure field guide to freshwater mussels of the Pacific Northwest. A smolt trap dropped into that same Oxbow held another surprise, a fearsome Giant Water Bug, a nasty creature entirely new to me. I'm currently casting about for a dragonfly expert I can drag to the Oxbow and turn loose on the clouds of dragonflies patrolling above those now not nearly so placid waters. Lichens and mosses are for now a closed world and will likely remain so. The vascular plants though, are a whole lot more accessible and while I first learned many of them on boyhood rambles, I keep Pojar close at hand. Yet another

collaborator on this project.

Simply naming things might seem a bit superficial and a long way from real knowledge, but here I'm reminded of the late ecologist Paul Shepard. For tribal peoples, he wrote, "the naming and recognition of plants and animals of the home range is the primary function of speech in childhood and the basis for later metaphorical meaning." I would add only that poking about a piece of land paying close attention is healthy for anyone, child or no longer agile Senior Citizen. It was only a couple of years ago, I should confess, that I finally had a name to give to a particularly insistent backyard singer. That naming brought what was little more than undifferentiated background birdsong into focus and now I'm hearing Black-Headed Grosbeaks in season whenever I step outside and my home is richer for it. That song and its singer were always there, but a name in some sense, if only for this observer, brought it into being. Of course, even with expert help, really knowing a piece of land, its creature and their myriad interactions with one another and with the physical environment is fodder for several lifetimes of learning. And then there's the time to be spent making "metaphorical meaning" as Shepard would have it apprehending the whole as well as its nearly infinite pieces. My aim with the Cumberland inventory is to do both. What I'm groping toward here is beautifully articulated by the American poet Mary Oliver:

the meadowlark is a spirit, and an epiphany, if I so desire it, I
need only to hear him to make something fine, even
advisory of the occasion.

and this also is true - that if I consider the golden whistler
and the song that pours from his narrow throat in the context
of evolution, of reptiles, of Cambrian waters, of the body's
Wish to change, of the body's incredible crafts and efforts, of
Life's multitudes, of the winners and the losers, I lose nothing
of the original occasion, and its infinite sweetness. For this is
my skill - I am capable of pondering the most detailed
knowledge,
and the most fastened-up mystery, at the same time.

FOUR SEASONS AT THE SAMISH ISLAND-SQUIRES HERONRY

BY ANNE MIDDLETON, SAMISH-SQUIRES LAND STEWARD

Early Spring: Jack and Anne's first visit to the Squires Property. A tangle: old growth maple, ivy, cottonwood, ivy, Douglas fir, ivy, head high salmonberry, ivy, magenta blossoms, ivy, calf high nettle, ivy, sedges. Multi-layered in the maples and cottonwoods, the stick pile nests. Dinosaur-like overhead, the heron doing their occasional "mine, mine, mine" patrol. Underfoot the tell-tale pile of feathers, sign of the predator, the top-rung eagle.

Late Spring, Early Summer: Nesting. Rearing. Off-limits. Stay out. Out, OUT.



Mid Summer:

As we walked towards the herony "our" eagle flew out. More than one pair for this herony? Mosquitoes, robins, swallows, doves, vole/shrew dashed out, back under. How many, many young herons, juveniles, still on nests? Appear as big as adults, confined to tree tops, calling, like chickens clucking, fast-paced, constant, walking along high canopy branches, throwing wings out for balance, calling, calling, "feed me, feed me, me, me, me." At NW shore of Alice Bay 50 – 60 – 75 adults at water's edge, on pilings, taking respite from feeding duties.



Mid Autumn:

Empty nests, ivy pull, molted feathers, pull ivy, aqua egg shells, ivy pull, "watch those nettles," saw ivy, more nests in east maples, take big clippers to ivy, how to count the layers of nests, take hand clippers to ivy, pull, stack, stack, pull, cookie break, lunch break. Ann Eissinger's heron class. Learn more, more to learn. Watch, watch, look, and listen. Take notes. Talk to folks. Pull ivy.

SKAGIT CONSERVATION AREAS AND THEIR LAND STEWARDS

Barney Lake - Tim Manns & Brenda Cunningham

Barr Creek - Russ Dalton

Butler Creek - Jim Owens

Cumberland Creek - Jim Johnson

Day Creek (Berquist & Forest) - Stan Zyskowski

Day Creek Kosbab - OPEN!

Day Creek Slough and Minkler Lake - Hal Lee

Grandy Creek - John Freeman

Green Road Marsh - Heidi Nichols

Guemes Mountain - Ed & Carolyn Gastellum,
Marianne Kooiman & Joost Businger

Hurn Field - Steffany Raynes & Lin Skavdahl

Lyman Slough - Dick Raisler

Marchs Point - LaVerne & Jim Scheltens

Mud Lake - Lloyd Brown

Pressentin Ranch - Bill & Sally Pfeifer

Samish - Ochs - Pete & Dorothy Haase

Samish River - OPEN!

Samish - Squires CE - Jack & Anne Middleton

Tope Ryan - John Day

Utopia - OPEN!

HEY STEWARDS! PLEASE SEND YOUR LAND TRUST PROPERTY INSPIRED ARTICLES, REFLECTIONS, PHOTOS, ILLUSTRATIONS, OR WHAT HAVE YOU TO MAYA FOR INCLUSION IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF THE UNDERSTORY!

STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS

By Maya Cough-Schulze

I grew up learning eastern deciduous trees from my dad, so naturally turn to trees upon arriving in the Skagit. Regina starts me off with conifers and understory plants: feathery Doug fir; ice-blue Sitka spruce warding off browse; fuzzy thimbleberry, familiar in its flowering stage last spring in Arizona; vine maple like yellow graffiti in the gray woods. I always feel warmly towards maples with their palmate leaves—"like a hand with the five fingers outstretched." On a bright October afternoon, Pete Haase and I go looking for Chinooks, threading our way between the maples to the Samish. I hear them before I see them, mottled backs half out of water as they thrash upstream. "No adipose fin—they're hatchery fish," says Pete. I'm excited to see salmon for the first time, and hope some wild ones are making it upstream, too.

Visiting Butler Creek, Jim Owens and I fall silent upon passing from sunny blackberry scrub into shady forest. Big sheaves of sword ferns and mossy cedar trunks remind me of an artist's rendition of the Carboniferous forests where they had foot-long dragonflies. "Wait till you see the part further on," Jim says with the air of someone unveiling a great surprise. The shade deepens down the trail, springy underfoot from fallen needles. A hemlock's roots twine octopus-like around its nurse stump and its crown reaches all the way up to the canopy—standing on the shoulders of giants. We can't help but talk in quiet voices.

Nick Fahey's Cypress Island easement has similarly awe-inspiring forest. He tells us it was all logged in the early 1900s—hard to believe until you spot the stumps among the undergrowth. Forests regrow quickly here in the land of rain. Rick Machin points out a stump taller than us, which in addition to a full-grown hemlock sprouting from its top, has deep horizontal grooves cut into its sides our eye level. "Springboard notches," he explains. "Loggers stood on boards wedged into them, so they could saw the tree down at a uniform diameter." He's clearly as impressed as I am with the loggers' moxie. I wonder if they ever looked down. I wonder if the forest made them fall silent, too, when they first saw it. I imagine it must have—certain places speak to everyone.



BASELINES: From which we measure progress *by Pete Haase, Samish Ochs Steward*

I am not sure how it is with other SLT Land Stewards, but I am pretty behind in formally creating baselines (and photo points) for the Samish-Ochs property. I have this image in my mind of a big file folder or notebook – maybe real, maybe digital – full of pictures, measurements, inventories, descriptions, and so forth. Then, as time passes and changes happen and specific actions are taken, a comparison set of pictures and inventories etc. can be taken, stored and analyzed to see how things are going.

But, I am just one lowly volunteer with other things to do as well, and with an "only sometimes locatable" digital camera. I don't have a GPS unit, nor do I know how to use one. So I am behind.

Fortunately, all is not lost! I have taken some few photos at a very few specific identified spots, and I labeled them like we learned in our photo point training a year or so ago. I am pretty sure they are digitally filed in the folder where I keep my Property Visit reports that I get hounded for now and again. One day I will take some more photos

at those spots and store them too. Our favorite graduate student researcher, Bashira, has conducted two yearly vegetation surveys and that data is available. The points are staked and GPS'd, and so there is one nice baseline. We once did a survey of the river characteristics at five locations which also are staked and GPS'd, although the stakes may have been long swept away in the heavy winter flows. Someone has that data too.

Because there is so much knotweed, the Samish Nation has done extensive GPS mapping of all of that, to serve as a baseline for determining the success of this past summer spraying activity. And the Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group has established numerous photo points – there are labeled flags and stakes all about the property – to assist them in evaluating the success of the revegetating that will follow the eradication of the knotweed.

I also keep track of how much trash I pick up along the road each visit, and record that on the visit reports.

Golleee – we know more about baseline conditions at Samish Ochs than I thought! How/what are you other folks doing?



August 2011, where trail first meets river



September 2012 at the same location

THANK YOU, VOLUNTEERS!

Citizen Scientists Learn About Our Heronries



Samish Island Heron Nest Counters Brenda Cunningham, Stephanie Fischer, Feryll Blanc, Morty Cohen, Jack Middleton, Tim Manns, Strand Wedul, Anne Middleton, and Regina Wandler counted our Squires heron nests this year.

Stewards & Stalwarts Improve Forest Diversity



David Baer, Jim Owens, Jim Johnson, Jim Fukuyama, Stan Zyskowski and Regina (photographing) planted 150 native trees and shrubs in a downpour at Cumberland Creek.

SKAGIT VALLEY TIMES PICAYUNE

WEDNESDAY

November 28, 2012

50 CENTS

By Cedro Wulley
Staff Writer

MT. VERNON—Michael Kirshenbaum, Chief Entertainment Officer [CEO] for the Skagit Land Trust, announced today the beginning of a fundraising campaign, its stated goal being to raise \$1.3 million to develop the Trust property on Guemes Island. “We are really jazzed about this opportunity to not only build a world class destination theme park, but we will also be putting the Skagit Land Trust on solid financial footing.” Plans for the park, tentatively called GuemesLand, include a competitive Exotic Weed Pulling course, a Spawned-out Salmon Hurling Ground—inspired by pumpkin trebuchets featured elsewhere in Skagit county, the Life-Lister which Kirshenbaum describes as a place to get “a good cuppa joe, and a chance to compare bird lists with other like-minded folks.” But the highlight of the park will be the Fiscal Cliff, where today’s bold adventurer can ride a zipline from the summit of Guemes Mountain back to the ferry landing. Kirshenbaum (readers will remember him as the former Hollywood BoyToy) reported “we are in talks with Steven (Spielberg) and Babs about possibly developing a performance center, with an environmental theme of course—that goes without saying. I mean if you can’t trust the Land Trust, who can you trust?”



Michael Kirshenbaum at
future Salmon Hurling
Ground

(Please see special insert for background on this article)

“What the heck?” you say. “A theme park, the Land Trust...and Michael K, Regina and Maya a party to all this?” Now that I have your attention, I’d like to discuss my theme for this issue: What guides the Skagit Land Trust? Not who, but what. Can we trust the Trust to make good decisions with its resources?

I was drawn to volunteer with the Skagit Land Trust in part because of my background with the National Park Service. NPS’ and SLT’s mission statements are quite similar: Skagit Land Trust’s is to “help protect the natural lands, open space and wildlife habitat of Skagit County for the benefit of this and future generations;” NPS’ reads, in part, “to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same as will leave them unimpaired for future generations.” Similar missions, similar challenges in implementation. Once natural lands have been procured, the trick is to strike a balance between building a constituency, maintaining a steady source of funding for stewardship and resisting inappropriate messing about with the resources being protected.

Room for interpretation in the Park Service language led to remarkable developments in some national parks. Yosemite National Park still has the nine-hole Wawona golf course and a twenty-two bed jail, and for nearly a hundred years featured the nightly “Fire Fall,” in which employees at a concession pushed burning embers 3000 feet off Glacier Point. Just this week, during the annual “Elk Reduction Hunt” at Grand Teton National Park, a grizzly bear was shot and killed by elk hunters. What was that about “conserving...the wild life therein”? Well, national park management includes many checks and balances—the U.S. Code addresses everything from hiring and firing to preserving historic documents to “the final rule for authorizing bicycle use.”

I asked Michael Kirshenbaum what guides SLT in the day-to-day management of trust properties. He cited several sources. In 2009, Skagit Land Trust became one of the first land trusts to receive the honor of being accredited by the national Land Trust Accreditation Commission. Accreditation requires rigorous independent analysis of Skagit Land Trust’s programs and practices. Accredited land trusts have demonstrated that they meet national standards for excellence, uphold the public trust and ensure the permanence of their conservation efforts. The accreditation seal is a mark of distinction in land conservation.

SLT follows federal and state laws, as well as IRS regulations, in its role of holding conservation easements on private property whose owners receive an income tax deduction to preserve their land for future generations. SLT will monitor these conservation easements in perpetuity to insure compliance with conservation goals. SLT is guided by numerous other laws and regulations – including the Endangered Species Act, County Critical Area Ordinances, the Shorelines Act -- when planning for and conducting land conservation.

An example: As Barr Creek Land Steward, I helped SLT set in motion a plan to build a connector trail to the historic Sauk Mountain trail and a separate loop trail. But a check with WA DNR found that the loop trail would be inconsistent with habitat for threatened & endangered species, scuttling the loop trail, but allowing us to proceed with the old Sauk Trail.

So, it is my belief that we can “trust the Trust” and that the zip line on Guemes Mountain will remain just a fantasy.

Russ Dalton, Barr Creek Land Steward



The Barr Creek Trail



WE WANT YOUR MONITORING REPORTS!!!

Please remember to visit your site and send us a final monitoring report for the year!

For an electronic template, email mayacs@skagitlandtrust.org.



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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 AND OPPORTUNITIES

Anacortes-Mehler Conservation Easement Invasive Removal (and possible planting)
January, date TBD

Tope Ryan Willow Stake Planting
January, date TBD

Land Steward Appreciation Dinner and possible training
Contact Maya with suggestions at:
mayacs@skagitlandtrust.org or (360) 428-7878
January, date TBD

Day Creek Forest Planting
February, date TBD

7th Annual Dinner and Auction
St. Joseph's Center, Mount Vernon
March 3