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Effort to preserve Guemes mountain continues

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by Joan Pringle

With a concert, community picnic and live and silent auctions, admirers of Guemes Island's mountain hope to raise the last portion of funds needed to preserve it for future generations.

The campaign to purchase the 70 acres on the summit of the mountain on the east end of the island and preserve it in a conservation easement began early last year. Community members went into action soon after the property went up for sale by private owners Panoramic View LLC.



Save the Mountain

Save the Mountain benefit concert

*The Total
Experience
Gospel Choir*

Saturday, June 27 • 7:00 pm
Murray Read Pavilion

Admission \$20
Tickets available at:
Anderson's Store
Pelican Bay Books
Watermark Book Co.

Donations accepted night of concert
by Skagit Land Trust

Artwork donated by Dale Elliott • Photos donated by Lisa B. Hanks, Inc.

The Skagit Land Trust and the San Juan Preservation Trust joined the undertaking to raise the \$2.8 million purchase price. Since that time the price has been renegotiated down to \$2.2 million and \$1.64 million has been pledged. The deadline to come up with the remaining \$560,000 is Oct. 1.

First on the list of events to raise those funds is the Save the Mountain benefit concert. The Total Experience Gospel Choir performs at 7 p.m. Saturday at the Murray Read Pavilion on the island. Admission is \$20 with tickets available at Anderson's Store, Pelican Bay Books and Watermark Book Co.

Donations will also be accepted the night of the concert.

An event designed for the whole family starts at 10 a.m. Saturday, Aug. 15. The Save the Mountain Picnic at Schoolhouse Park on the island will include live music, children's activities and tours of the mountain starting at 10:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.

The event, hosted by the Save the Mountain Steering Committee and the two trusts, will feature a lunch of local foods and beverages with a vegetarian option at no charge noon to 1:30 p.m. and a no-host beer and wine garden open from noon to late afternoon.

The picnic is free and open to the public though there will be collection baskets for donations.

"First and foremost, it's a good time to celebrate the island and the community," said Brian Windrope, San Juan trust director of philanthropy.

Attendees are encouraged to walk on the Guemes ferry since parking is limited at the park. A shuttle service will take people to the park and mountain for the hiking tours.

Next on the fundraising list is a live and silent auction on Friday, Sept. 18. Some of the items

already acquired for the auction include a Philip McCracken sculpture, photographer Lee Mann artist portfolio and Rebecca Hyland sketch of the mountain, said organizer Gail Nicolls. Other items expected are certificates for dinners and services such as computer cleanups and art lessons by the Guemes Girls, a group of local artists who will also be hosting the event.

In addition to the fundraisers, the Skagit Audubon Society is hosting a hiking and birding outing to the mountain Saturday, July 18. Though the hike is not specifically a fundraiser, it is a "friend-raiser," Windrope said. It's a way to expose people to the ecology and views on top of the mountain.

Brenda Cunningham and Tim Manns will lead the group to the summit and if time permits to the adjacent Square Harbor and forest along its shores. Participants are asked to wear hiking boots and other appropriate dress and to bring binoculars, cameras, snacks, lunches and water. The outing begins at 8:15 a.m. in the northwest corner of the Anacortes Safeway parking lot to form carpools for the 9 a.m. ferry.

Steering committee co-chair Paul Beaudet said the campaign is going well with the team of dedicated volunteers organizing the events and one-on-one asking family members, friends and neighbors for donations.

"We're organized," Beaudet said. "We're pretty confident this will close and close on time."

Beaudet welcomes and encourages contributions not only from Guemes Islanders but from residents in Anacortes and the rest of the county.

"This really will be a project important for the whole county," Nicolls said.

The mountain, slightly less than 700 feet high, is surrounded by more than 560 acres of preserved land, part of it owned by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. The property is undeveloped but R10 zoning allows for up to seven 10-acre home sites.

The top of the mountain has a rocky and meadow-like terrain with native wildflowers, small trees and natural shrubs. The area used to be forested but was been logged in the higher elevations, opening up the views to all points on the island, Mount Erie and Mount Baker, the Cascades and Olympic mountains and the rest of the San Juan Islands.

By purchasing the property, the two trusts will be able to permanently preserve its public access, wildlife and fauna. The plan is for the Skagit trust to own and manage the property as a publicly-accessible nature preserve, while the San Juan trust will hold a conservation easement to assure the land can never be developed. The property will be permanently protected as part of the land title.

"Pedestrian access will be created to encourage enjoyment of the views and other natural features while protecting sensitive habitat," according to the Skagit trust.

The \$2.2 million will cover the purchase of the land, transaction costs and stewardship funds for future property management and trails.

"Just to know it will be forever preserved is a terrific gift for the future," Beaudet said.

Guemes Mountain events

- The Total Experience Gospel Choir concert fundraiser, 7 p.m. Saturday, Murray Read Pavilion on Guemes; \$20.

Tickets available at Anderson's Store, Pelican Bay Books and Watermark Book Co.

- Skagit Audubon Society hike, 8:15 a.m. to late afternoon Saturday, July 18, Guemes Mountain; Free.

Information available at <http://www.fidalgo.net/~audubon/Fieldtrips.htm>.

- Save the Mountain Picnic, starts at 10 a.m. Saturday, Aug. 15, Schoolhouse Park; Free, but will be asking for donations.

For picnic information and to RSVP for the mountain hikes, call (360) 428-7878.

- Live and silent auction, Friday, Sept. 18, Depot Arts Center.

More information to come.

Additional information about the campaign to save the mountain is at

<http://www.saveguemesmountain.org> or available by contacting Brian Windrope, San Juan Preservation Trust, at (360) 468-3202 or bwindrope@sjpt.org or Molly Doran, Skagit Land Trust, at (360) 428-7878 or trustmd@fidalgo.net.