



A Promise Kept to the Land



When Barbara and Jim Martin bought property on Walker Creek in 1980, their thoughts were on all the things they could do with the land. They were young and had big dreams. Over the next decade, as they spent time on the property building their home and moving onto the land permanently, their perspective about the property changed.

"The more time we spent up here, the more we realized, this land was already inhabited by lots of creatures," says Barbara. "I just marvel at the big creatures and plants, and the tiny ones, and all the ones in between that utilize this land."

Their plans switched from what they could do with the land, to how much of the property could they keep wild. They narrowed the driveway to their self-built home to minimize the trees that needed to be cut down. Although it was farther from the house, they situated their barn in an already cleared spot that had been logged before they owned the land.

Wetlands on the property feature a variety of plants and wildlife including bright yellow skunk cabbage plants in the spring. Walker Creek pictured above supports a variety of fish including chum, pink, and coho salmon, and steelhead trout.

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Executive Director Letter to Members

Dear Members,

Skagit Land Trust is updating its Strategic Direction this year. About 75% of you just stopped reading because...BORING. Yet, look at it this way. Our world is facing a crisis we created. Maybe, just maybe, the conservation viewpoint is gaining traction because it is increasingly going to become apparent that natural ecosystems are our life support systems.

Nature and conservation are huge factors in the amount of clean water we'll have available; whether native plants and wildlife continue to exist here, including essential pollinators; whether we store or release carbon from our Skagit lands; whether our cities are livable and linked by trails and greenspaces; whether we can absorb runoff and pollutants; whether many aspects of the fish & shellfish industry and farming & forestry continue far into the future; and much more.

If we don't pay attention, nature will wither in its capacity to be our life support system. And we'll continue to place our built environment in nature's path and then try to undertake expensive fixes when things don't work out.

The goal of planning is to look with fresh eyes and check in on what is now most important to conserve and restore. We also need to get more people's attention.

Our mission is broad: We conserve 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.

Our vision is that Skagit County is a place where people live in harmony with their natural environment and life-support-system (land, clean water, unpolluted air, and living things). We want natural processes to take place with development out of harm's way. We want nature parks and trails easily accessible for all neighborhoods. We want our cities and towns to have connected natural greenspaces that absorb storm water, keep temperatures in check and provide ways for people to travel in low impact ways.

We want people to understand how important nature is now and to their future. And we are at a point where we must consider going beyond minimizing impacts to nature. We need to stop destroying it. We also need to enhance and steward ecosystems so we gain natural spaces and enrich biodiversity. A big task? Yes.

And thus begins our Strategic Visioning discussion of how we can work towards these things in the next five years.

We cannot solve it all, yet land conservation is essential.

As we update our Strategic Direction, we want your input. If you have not participated in our survey, please consider filling it out on our website. Or send me an email with your ideas.

Thank you so much for believing in the many benefits of land conservation. Your voice and ideas are critical as we plan.



Molly Doran
Executive Director





Large healthy cedars tower above the forest floor

Over the next 40 years they stewarded their land with a focus on the health of the forest, wetlands, and salmon-bearing creek that runs through the property. Every year Barbara and Jim would receive letters of interest in clearing the land for the profitable lumber. Barbara made a promise to the trees that they would not be cut down.

"When you make a promise to a tree, it's a big commitment," she chuckles. "One day you realize that you are not immortal, so I had to figure out how I was going to keep that promise."

In 2022, Barbara called Skagit Land Trust to see if there was a way to protect their land, while she and Jim still lived on it. They wanted to make sure the land would be conserved now, even if their situation changed in the future. They also felt that the Trust would be the best long-term owner of their entire property after they were gone. Thus, they selected to do a life estate which gave them certainty these wishes would be met.

"Conservation of this property protects mature trees that provides habitat to an array of fish and wildlife species such as steelhead, coho, northern flying squirrel, and cougar. It builds upon a mosaic of other protected lands and restoration work in the area. We couldn't be more thrilled," says Conservation Project Manager, Jessica Lange.

Jessica worked with Jim and Barbara to establish the legal agreements needed for a life estate. Skagit Land Trust staff and the stewardship committee made visits to the property to assess the health of the forest, document the nature features, and develop a plan for the long-term stewardship of the land.

This spring, Skagit Land Trust officially gained a vested interest in the Walker's property. Barbara and Jim are allowed to live on the property for as long as they can, then full ownership and management passes to Skagit Land Trust. This arrangement on their 21-acre forest is in many ways a gift made now that will be received in the future.

"For us, a life estate was the right choice," says Barbara. "Even though it takes a long time to go through all of the steps, Skagit Land Trust made the process easy."

With her promise fulfilled, Barbara continues her daily walks through the forest. She goes slow to take in the beauty of the little guys. The birds, bugs, toads, and tiny fungi that inhabited the land before she came, and will continue to far into the future.

Interested in learning about ways to protect your property? Please contact Conservation Director Michael Kirshenbaum, michaelk@skagitlandtrust.org.



Conservation Director Michael Kirshenbaum, Conservation Project Manager Jessica Lange, & Stewardship Director Max Morange discussing the natural features of the property.



The Martin's property features a maturing forest of native plants include trailing blackberry, salal, low Oregon grape, salmonberry, red elderberry, vine maple, sword fern, deer fern, alder, birch, Sitka spruce, western red cedar, white pine, and Douglas fir.

Annual Membership Meeting

More than 100 members came together for Skagit Land Trust's Annual Meeting in March. The evening included a slideshow of the impact our members' gifts and volunteerism have made in the past year. Members also shared what they hope SLT can prioritize in the next five years.



Retiring board member, Carolyn Gastellum, was honored for her 12 years on the board. Among other accomplishments Carolyn formed SLT's Justice, Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion committee and chaired the Public Policy Committee. She and her husband Ed were also stewards of the Guemes Mountain Conservation Area and Hurn Field for many years.

Ellen Anderson received SLT's Outreach Award for her volunteer work that established story trails on our conservation areas in partnership with local libraries. Now in its third year, you can find the 2024 story trail at the Barr Creek Conservation Area. The pages of the book, 'Wonder Walkers' are displayed in English and Spanish on the property's beautiful loop trail.

Phil Kincare received the Stewardship Volunteer Award in recognition of his dedicated stewardship of two of our largest conservation areas totaling 560 acres. For years, Phil has generously donated his time and expertise on these and other upriver properties we manage. Phil also serves on the Trust's stewardship committee.

John & Patty Rose received The Conservation Award in recognition of their visionary leadership in establishing the Washington Opportunity Fund, which provides rapid, generous bridge financing for conservation land purchases in need. SLT's Big Rock project was the first recipient of a loan from the Fund, helping us to take on this important project.

Ginny Darvill received the President's Blue Heron award for her extraordinary dedication to the land of Skagit County. Ginny and Fred Darvill donated a conservation easement on the south side of Little Mountain in 1996. Ginny later expanded it. It protects 33 acres of forest and includes a public trail. Ginny is also a longtime supporter of the Trust's Youth Programs, including working with the Kulshan Creek Neighborhood Youth program.

Several landowners in the Nookachamps watershed were thanked for their conservation ethic and generosity. Chris Farrow donated a conservation easement on her property (Fall 2023 newsletter) and Barbara & Jim Walker gifted SLT a life estate on their land (see front page article). The Paul Family was thanked for leaving their Fir Island farm to SLT.

Guests received a handout with staff picks for local "land trust" hikes in Western Washington. These hikes highlight ways we and other land trusts partner with communities to protect and steward special places. Information on these

hikes can be found by scanning the QR code below or visiting our website. You can also stop by the office for a print copy.



Carolyn Gastellum



Chris Farrow



Barbara & Jim Martin



Leo Paul Farm estate



Phil Kincare



Ellen Anderson



Ginny Darvill



John & Patty Rose



Skagit Land Trust Community Comes Together to Save Land

Thank you to everyone who joined us for the Lands We Love Social in May at Beau Lodge. Nestled in the shadow of Blanchard Mountain, this venue immediately connected guests with the beauty of nature and peace that can be found near a babbling stream or under the canopy of a mature forest.



The evening was filled with cheerful laughter, great music from One Eyed Cat, and members gathered for the sole purpose of conserving land for future generations. We raised a net of \$95,000 for land conservation in Skagit County, thanks to everyone who attended, bid, and raised their hand for the land.

Executive Director Molly Doran shared the history of conservation on Blanchard Mountain. Although the Puget Sound lowlands were once blanketed in native forests, Blanchard and the Chuckanut Mountains are the largest remaining native coastal forest along eastern Puget Sound. The forest is used by hundreds of species of birds, animals, insects, amphibians, plants and fungi. Molly stressed the importance of landowners who have helped knit together conserved lands on Blanchard and elsewhere.

Mary Elmore, who owns Beau Lodge, shared her love of the place and its history. To everyone's delight, it was shared that Mary is currently working on establishing a conservation easement with SLT to forever protect a large portion of her 60-acre forest containing wetlands, stream habitats and mature forest.



Thank You to our Sponsors!

Their support of our 2024 Lands We Love Social allows us to put every dollar raised at the social into conserving and stewarding the lands and waters of the Skagit. We are grateful for their continued support of our event.

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Welcome New Staff and Farewell to Old Friends

This winter we welcomed two new staff members to the Stewardship Department.



Max Morange (he/him/his) is the Land Trust's new Stewardship Director. Prior to work at SLT, Max managed emerging projects in the hunger relief sector as well as agricultural projects in Whatcom and Skagit Counties. He completed a bachelor's degree at Harvard University and graduate coursework in landscape architecture at the University of Oregon. In his free time, Max and his family tackle invasive weeds at home and dream of adventures in the Cascade Mountains and the Puget Sound.

"It is a privilege to join the staff and longstanding membership of SLT in this vital work to protect and steward natural areas of Skagit County alongside the trust's organizational partners. I'd like to extend my sincere thanks to all those who have welcomed me and shared their deep knowledge of this special place."



Jonathan Worley (he/him/his) manages stewardship activities on SLT's Conservation Areas. Jonathan joins the Trust as a full-time staff member after serving AmeriCorps terms with SLT and Washington Conservation Corps. Jonathan holds degrees in Human Biology and Sustainability Science & Practice from Stanford University, where he was a member of the men's baseball team.

"I'm thrilled to join SLT at a time when our work is expanding in both scale and complexity. In my time with SLT, I've enjoyed planning and implementing restoration projects and developing relationships with partner organizations, including Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group and Skagit River System Cooperative. I'm excited to continue stewarding the natural places that make the Skagit special!"

We also said goodbye to two wonderful Stewardship staff members, as they moved on to new positions in the conservation world.



After seven years working at SLT, Hannah Williams has begun working for the Washington Department of Natural Resources, where she serves as the Aquatic Restoration Manager of the Orca-Straits District. While at SLT, Hannah focused on improving the Trust's fee land stewardship, improving conservation area monitoring, recordkeeping, and management. Her new position is a great opportunity for her to utilize her marine skills to plan and implement restoration projects in northern Puget Sound. She brings her expertise with contracting demo and cleanup projects to her new position. We are excited to partner with Hannah in her new role at DNR.

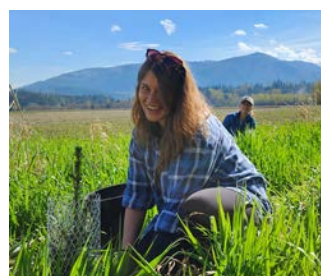
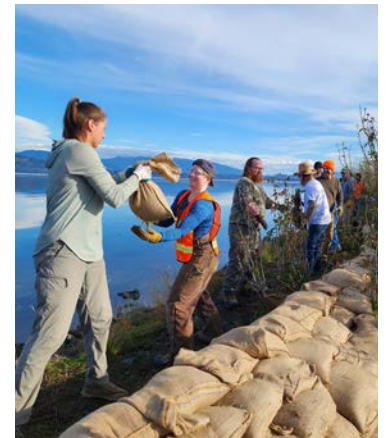


Kayla Seaforth has moved on to a full-time role as Project Manager with the Bonneville Environmental Foundation, where she has worked part time since 2021 (prior to starting at SLT). In her new position, Kayla supports multiple programs that seek to add capacity, build climate resilience, and promote collaboration among organizations engaged in ecological restoration around the Pacific Northwest. This position allows her to delve deeper into some interesting and forward-thinking projects. SLT has already attended some of Kayla's workshops, and we look forward to collaborating with her and BEF in the future.

Spring Stewardship

Stewardship staff and volunteers have been busy this winter and spring caring for Skagit Land Trust Conservation Areas. Stewardship volunteers gave close to 3,000 hours of time on 25 Trust Conservation Areas.

Pictured below from left to right: Day Creek tree planting; Beaver fence removal; Day Creek tree planting; Minkler lake invasive removal; Diobsud Creek scotch broom; Samish Bay dike sandbagging; Utopia Earth Day tree planting; Marblemount invasive and trail work; Little Mountain ivy pull; Barney Lake tree planting; Muddy Creek tree planting.





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

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Members' Picnic at Samish Miles Conservation Area

Mark your calendars for Sunday, July 21st 11am - 2pm

This property is only open to the public on rare occasions. We look forward to sharing the maturing forest, garden pond, and wildlife haven with you.

Activities Include

- Walks of the property's gardens and forest
- Forest and beach tours of the Samish Conservation Area
- Book Bazaar featuring a wide selection of books inherited by the Trust in a recent property donation

This is our chance to enjoy the summer weather together and say thanks to all of our members, volunteers, and partners. Feel free to bring a friend who wants to learn more about Skagit Land Trust. We have limited seating, so picnic blankets and camping chairs are encouraged! Scan the QR Code to RSVP, visit our website, or call the office at 360-428-7878.



The lands conserved and protected by Skagit Land Trust have been inhabited and stewarded by numerous tribes and Indigenous peoples since time immemorial. We recognize and respect the inherent, indigenous, and treaty rights of the Coast Salish People who have deep and abiding connections to these places. We seek to partner with local tribes as we conserve and care for these lands and waters.