

Photo credit: Stephen Nyman



Protecting the Voice of Our Coastal Wetlands

If you live in a marshy area, spring arrives with the pulse of throaty frog songs. In the traditions of many local tribes, frogs symbolize abundance, renewal, resilience, and wisdom. The Samish Indian Nation website's Story Map on Oregon spotted frogs tell us that frogs – *Wéxes* – live between the worlds of land and water and serve as sacred messengers between the spiritual and human realms.

As indicator species, native frogs like the endangered Oregon spotted frog offer ecological knowledge. Their mating call, which sounds like the quiet tapping of a drum, speaks of connected wetlands where this native species thrives.

These frogs need clean, shallow, sunlit wetlands to breed – habitats that are rapidly disappearing. Once common in the Pacific Northwest, the Oregon spotted frog has now vanished from up to 90% of their historic range. This sensitive species is both federally-listed as threatened and state-listed as endangered. Wetland loss, invasive species, and climate change have left these amphibians teetering on the edge. Our river floodplains once featured lots of shallow wetland habitat for Oregon spotted frogs, but most of these areas have since been transformed to accommodate our human needs.

The arrival of invasive species such as the American bullfrog (native to the East Coast) has added to the problem, making it a frog-eat-frog world for Oregon spotted frogs since big bullfrogs often eat smaller frogs for breakfast. Meanwhile, invasive

Board President's Letter to Members and Partners

Dear Members and Partners,

Over my 18 years serving as a senior land use planner for Skagit County, Skagit Land Trust (SLT or the Trust) became one of my favorite community organizations to work with. With their detailed knowledge of habitat conservation priorities and cherished open spaces, Trust staff provided an important voice for conservation on a variety of projects during my tenure.

Skagit Land Trust played a major role in helping Skagit County develop the Skagit Countywide Urban Growth Area (UGA) Open Space Concept Plan, adopted in 2009. The plan, which won a Governor's Smart Communities Award, established a framework for "preserving and enhancing open spaces, trails, and interpretive opportunities on a countywide basis that extends around, within, and through the 10 county UGAs." Then in 2016, Skagit Land Trust joined with other groups to prevent the removal of non-motorized (bike and trail) projects from the Comprehensive Plan.

Since retiring from Skagit County in 2017, I have volunteered with Skagit Land Trust's Public Policy Committee (PPC). The PPC engages with policy issues that directly affect the Trust's mission. Chaired by SLT board member Anne Winkes, the PPC has six members with a wide range of knowledge and expertise. The committee meets periodically with elected officials; submits comments during official public comment periods; coordinates with other conservation organizations; and encourages Skagit Land Trust members to comment on important conservation policy matters. We have achieved some significant successes in recent years, including:

- Helping to defeat a proposal to allow Fully Contained Communities (essentially new cities) in rural Skagit County.
- Helping to scuttle a state proposal to dramatically expand Skagit Regional Airport for passenger service.
- Ensuring stronger regulatory protections from the City of Anacortes for the March Point heronry.

Most recently, the PPC has participated in Skagit County's 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update. We have attended multiple county-sponsored open houses; participated in focus groups; spoken at public hearings; and submitted multiple rounds of comments on policy and code updates. Anne Winkes explains: "Our comments have sought to ensure that the Comprehensive Plan update helps Skagit County develop in ways that best meet environmental and climate change challenges while keeping our rural areas rural and protecting habitat and ecosystems."

At each step of the way, we're working to ensure a better public policy environment for Skagit Land Trust to pursue its core mission of conserving and stewarding natural lands and open spaces "for the benefit of our community and as a legacy for future generations."

Kirk Johnson, Board President, Skagit Land Trust



Join Us for Skagit Land Trust's Members' Picnic July 27th!

We are excited to welcome our community together on the land this summer Area from 11:00am – 2pm.

This property is only open to the public on rare occasions. We look forward to Park's tennis court, the wooded entrance to the property opens up to a large

- Tours of the property's gardens and forest
- Activities for the whole family, including tie-dye!

This is our chance to enjoy the summer weather together and say thank you We have limited seating, so picnic blankets and camp chairs are encouraged!

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plants such as reed canary grass clog waterways and prevent frogs from moving between breeding and sheltering areas.

"Answering the call of threatened species like Oregon spotted frog is one of the great challenges of our time," says Stephen Nyman, Lead Scientist for Whatcom County's Amphibian Monitoring Program. "But there are reasons for realistic hope of averting the worst outcomes if we regard this as a call to action. Evidence-based conservation programs for amphibians will have to utilize a wide variety of tools, including protecting areas of high biodiversity (such as the upper Samish River); reducing threats by managing and restoring habitats; and controlling invasive bullfrogs."



Oregon spotted frog with egg masses. Photo credit: Stephen Nyman

Skagit Land Trust plays a role in supporting Oregon spotted frog habitat. This spring, the Trust permanently protected a 26-acre property located in the headwater wetlands of the Samish River Watershed. Protecting headwater reaches is especially important because these upstream areas are essential to the entire watershed's health.

This newly protected property is next to land where Oregon spotted frog egg masses have been documented by the Samish Indian Nation, WDFW, and other organizations. The area offers suitable wetland conditions for frogs and is a sanctuary for black bears, great blue herons, migratory birds such as trumpeter swans, and important native fish such as steelhead.

The permanent protection and planned restoration of this area is funded by a National Coastal Wetlands Grants Program, a private foundation grant, partner organizations, and you as a Skagit Land Trust member. Thank you so much for your support! You are helping protect not just frogs, but the entire wetland ecosystems that they – and we – depend on. Together, we can ensure that native frogs keep announcing spring for generations to come.



for our Annual Members' Picnic. Mark your calendar for Sunday, July 27th, and join us at the Samish Miles Conservation

sharing the maturing forest, garden pond, and wildlife haven with you. Just a quarter of a mile past Samish Island County field with an ornamental pond. It's the perfect spot for gathering and appreciating nature. Activities will include:

- Walks through the forest and beach of the nearby Samish Conservation Area
- Picnic fixings starting at 12pm

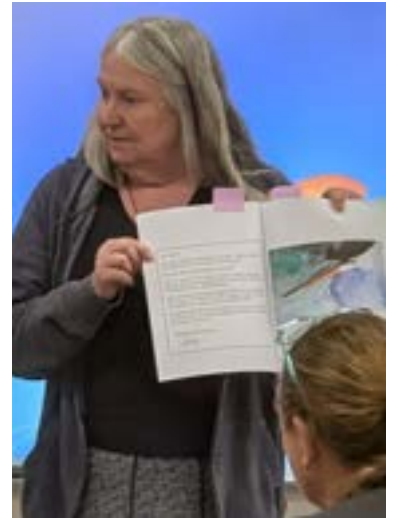
to all our members, volunteers, and partners. Feel free to bring a friend who wants to learn more about Skagit Land Trust. Registration is required, so please go to our website for registration information. We look forward to seeing you!

"Seven Pooping Herons" -- Forging Paths for Youth to Love the Land

"Five growing herons and two pooping parents make a total of...seven pooping herons!" reads Skagit Land Trust's Volunteer & Education Programs Coordinator, Stacy Dahl, to rapt second graders at Washington Elementary School in Mount Vernon. "Oooh, yuck!", students respond, faces scrunched up in disgust.

As part of the new Herons in the Classroom program offered by the Trust, students read *Sapsucker Blues: The Story of an Enduring Family of Great Blue Herons* and watch a video about the natural history of Skagit's great blue herons – with photos and narration by volunteer heron expert Anne Winkes. Students also get the chance to watch herons in real time, through one of three wildlife cameras high in the trees at Skagit Land Trust's March Point Heronry Conservation Area. This new program offers teachers and students the chance to learn about wildlife conservation right there in their own classroom.

Heron in the Classroom is the newest of many paths that Skagit Land Trust has built for connecting youth with the land. Every year, we partner with Skagit Boys and Girls Clubs, Mount Vernon Schools, homeschool groups, Skagit Conservation District, and the Kulshan Creek Neighborhood Youth Program to bring hundreds of youth to Trust properties for hands-on education and stewardship.



Stacy Dahl, reading to second graders at Washington Elementary.



Paul Anderson, measuring wingspans at the Utopia bird station.

enthusiasm, patience, and humor – we couldn't have done it without them!

School is now out for the summer, but the Trust continues to engage Skagit youth through our partnership with libraries – particularly the Upper Skagit Library. We invite you to visit our Barr Creek Conservation Area near Rockport for the annual Story Trail. This year, enjoy a walk up to the falls and along Barr Creek while reading *One Day This Tree Will Fall*. Thanks to Ellen Anderson for shepherding this project every year, to Loly Gomez of the Upper Skagit Library for translating the book pages into Spanish, and to the Concrete Boys and Girls Club for helping install the trail. This is truly a collaboration to get all youth into the outdoors.

All of this diverse, creative youth outreach and education work is part of our mission of conserving land "...for the benefit of the community and as a legacy for future generations." Thank you to all of our volunteers and members for giving that mission the wings it needs to fly.

2025 marked the sixth year that Sedro-Woolley lower elementary school students visited the Utopia Conservation Area for field investigations of beaver, elk and owls, plants, macroinvertebrates and birds. A new Investigation Station on seed dispersal helped to connect 405 students to classroom lessons. Many thanks to our 23 volunteer facilitators, who engaged the students with their knowledge,



Boys & Girls Club member Tempe Johannsen (above), Oceanna Boulanger (below, left) and Ellen Anderson (below, right) installing the Story Trail at Barr Creek.



Lands We Love Social Raised \$100K!

On June 7th, 120 guests gathered at Skagit County's beautiful Pressentin Park in Marblemount for Skagit Land Trust's annual *Lands We Love* fundraiser. Guests enjoyed a delicious catered meal from Max Dale's Steak & Chop-House and toe-tapping live bluegrass from One Eyed Cat – against the stunning backdrop of mountains and rivers that reminded us all why this work matters.

Many guests participated in educational park tours guided by Skagit Land Trust staff and our conservation and restoration partners. Guests also got to look at the Trust's Douglas Island Conservation Area, which lies next to Pressentin Park.

We were honored to have Scott Schuyler, the Upper Skagit Indian Tribe's Policy Representative for Natural & Cultural Resources in attendance, as well Skagit County Commissioner Ron Wesen and Parks Director Brian Adams. We are grateful to work with both governments to conserve the places that make Skagit so special. Many thanks to Skagit County for opening Pressentin Park to us.

We are also very grateful to our 2025 event sponsors for doing their part to ensure that Skagit wildlife habitat, trails, farmland, forests, and shorelines will be protected for generations to come.

Thanks to our generous members, guests, volunteers, and partners, we raised over \$100,000 to protect natural places in Skagit County. Your commitment is both humbling and inspiring. Thank you for saving land for tomorrow!



Thank You to Our Sponsors

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Stewardship Strikes Against Stinky Invader at Pressentin Ranch

A silent battle is underway in the forested understory of the Trust's Pressentin Ranch Conservation Area, which lies along the Skagit River near Concrete. A fragrant invader, garlic mustard, threatens the balance of native ecosystems. Ongoing support and strategic effort from SLT's Stewardship team are needed to keep this aggressive weed from gaining a foothold in our forests.

Garlic mustard first made its way to North America in the late 1800s, hitching a ride with settlers who brought it over from Europe and Asia as a culinary herb. While it may spice up a salad, it has become a formidable invasive species in some parts of the United States. If we don't act quickly, this pungent pirate is likely to further invade and disturb Skagit ecosystems as well.

Skagit County's Noxious Weed Control Board considers garlic mustard a Class-A Noxious Weed – a non-native, fast-spreading plant that has not yet become pervasive in our area (which means there's still a chance to get rid of it). Unfortunately a mature garlic mustard plant can produce up to 8,000 seeds. It also releases chemicals into the soil that limit the growth of surrounding plants, is toxic to native butterfly larvae, and native wildlife don't like to eat it.

In most situations, control of unwanted invasive species can be done using mechanical methods such as pulling, digging, cutting, and shading. With garlic mustard, early action is everything. Due to the large size of the



Garlic mustard, growing tall before being removed by volunteers.

infestation at Pressentin Ranch, contractors were hired in early spring to help combat garlic mustard during its hard-to-pull rosette stage (before it "bolts" or flowers). Our Stewardship team returned later with volunteers to manually pull and pack out any remaining plants before they went to seed. We also carefully brushed our boots before leaving the site, and we will continue to monitor trails where seeds might have hitched a ride on boots or paws. Staff and volunteer fingers may reek of garlic for hours afterward, but it's the smell of hard-earned progress!



Work party poses proudly with bags of garlic mustard to pack out.

The best way to prevent the spread of invasive species – whether in a Land Trust conservation area

or in your backyard – is to plant native species. The second-best thing is to identify invasive plants and replace them with plants that spread less easily. However, sometimes the "seeds" have left the station, so here are a few tips on controlling invasive weeds on your property:

- *Learn to identify local noxious weeds, especially Class-A and B species.*
- *Research the best times and methods for removing invasive species you find.*
- *Never put invasive weeds in your compost – dispose of them in the trash, or per county guidelines.*
- *Clean your boots and tools before leaving a site with known invasives.*
- *Attend and support the wonderful native plant sales that take place each spring and fall.*

Removing invasive weeds requires patience and commitment. Thank you to our work party volunteers, land stewards, and landowners for pitching in and becoming part of the solution.

Diobsud Creek Watershed Protection Expands Again

The Diobsud Creek watershed is a place of renewal and persistence. Since 1997, Skagit Land Trust has been working to protect and restore the health of this vital watershed.

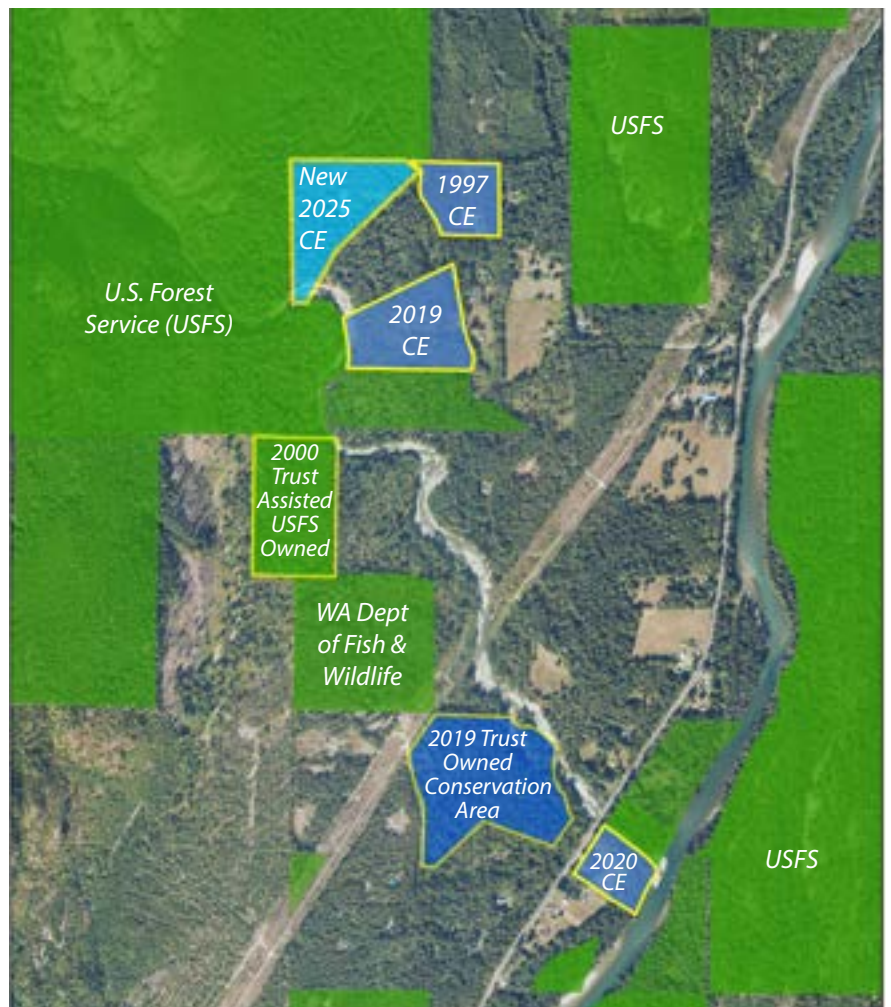
Our latest effort, in partnership with private landowners Robert Coffey and Deborah North (pictured below), is the establishment of a conservation easement (CE) on 21 acres of lush forest and creek shoreline that provide essential habitat for native salmon.

This new CE helps protect not only the creek itself, but also the rich tapestry of life that surrounds it. The easement borders the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest on two sides and connects to another nearby SLT easement. It is the latest in a long line of conservation projects the Trust has worked on in the Diobsud Creek watershed, where we have protected 117 acres and nearly 5,000 feet of shoreline and counting.

This project was made possible by funding from the Washington State Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB), the generosity of landowners Rob and Deborah, and our members' contributions. We are grateful for Rob & Deborah's vision in helping us permanently protect the next piece in this conservation puzzle!



Above: Each fall, Diobsud Creek teems with native salmon making their way home.



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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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Upcoming Events

Annual Member Picnic:

July 27th

@ 11am - 2pm

Samish Island Trail

Maintenance

Work Party:

Friday, July 11th

@ 10am-1pm

Register online at
SkagitLandTrust.org



Cedar Legacy Circle Appreciation Gathering: August 20th

Have you made a gift to the Trust in your will? Then you are part of our Cedar Legacy Circle! Please make sure we know, so that we can include you in special events for this group of dedicated members. Email Laura Hartner at laurah@skagitlandtrust.org.

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.