Blanchard Mountain

“Nowhere in the Middle of Everywhere”\*

*\*Quote attributed to JoAnne Prentice of Blanchard in 1980's*

Most of the Puget Sound marine shoreline was covered in forest in various states of maturity – much of it with complex understory. Now on the Puget Sound coast between Olympia and Vancouver BC, the 8-mile long Chuckanut Mountains are the only remaining place where the Cascade Mountain forests touch the Salish Sea. This used to be common. Today, Blanchard and the Chuckanut Mountains stand alone.

We all love Blanchard Mountain for the wonderful close to home hiking, the biking, paragliding and horseback riding. But Blanchard also contains a unique and diverse concentration of wildife: over 150 bird species; 51 mammal species; 198 moth and butterfly species; all the amphibians found in Washington except two are found here; and numerous, mosses, lichens and native plants. Blanchard has special geologic features such as the Bat Caves, cliffs and the Oyster Dome that we are vital for birds, wildlife, bats and butterflies. There is a fungal fly in the bat caves found nowhere else in North America! Blanchard is home to a high number of species that are considered at risk elsewhere.

Part of what makes Blanchard's habitat rich is that it has size - it connects with 2680 Larabee State Park and other protected lands along the coast and around Samish Lake. It also connects to thousands of acres of working forest lands that provide a different, undeveloped habitat. Because I-5 blocks quite a bit of historic wildlife migration – many birds and animals need enough space and types of habitat to live their cycle here in the Chuckanut Mountains. It lies along the marine waters of Puget Sound – and in particular the shallow waters of Samish Bay with lots of bugs and small fish and cool marine air. Many birds and animals use Blanchard because they require both coastal forest and marine waters for their life cycle.

Blanchard is a source of clean water for the Samish. There is a resident cutthroat trout on Blanchard. Many fish species are found in the creeks and rivers fed by Blanchard’s waters and forests –numerous of these are listed, threatened or species of concern. Maintaining high water quality free of silt in these streams’ headwaters, which are often exclusively on Blanchard, is essential.

But the forests of Blanchard Mountain are its single most important habitat feature and that is one of the reasons **we must protect “the 1600-acre core” of Blanchard Mountain**. **The 2017 Legislative Session is critical. Blanchard needs your help**

The core contains naturally regenerating forests that are 65 to 100 years + in age. At this age, forests begin to develop complexity rapidly. Blanchard's core provides year-round cover and interior forest conditions that has been lost in most forests along Puget Sound’s coast. The forest has a closing - or is some places a closed - canopy. This gives it a unique micro climate and stable air mass that is optimal for year round roosting, nesting and raising of young for many species of birds. 64% of the 150 birds identified on Blanchard are thought to breed and reproduce on the mountain. This is wonderful habitat!

It is no coincidence that the pileated woodpecker and 30 species of neotropical birds – who are struggling due to loss of their habitat - are here. 19 species of raptors use the forest and cliffs…not including that unusual raptor who likes to jump off the overlook with a sail.

Migratory birds are a common sight over Blanchard. Blanchard and Nisqually are the two most important bird corridors in Puget Sound for birds who need to migrate between Puget Sound tidewaters and the Cascade forests. Only two of these corridors are left in Puget Sound.

With at least 9 bat species recorded, the diversity of bat populations is as rich as it gets in Washington. This is not only because of the caves on Blanchard but also because of the mature forest and snags bats need for their life-cycle. Many of these bat types are species of concern.

If you were a bird or a bat – wouldn’t you live on Blanchard?

Blanchard is fantastic wildlife habitat now. If the core is left undisturbed, these forests can develop old growth characteristics faster than anywhere else on the coast of Puget Sound between Olympia and the border. There is nowhere else left on the eastern edge of Puget Sound with a coastal forested range of this type, size and complexity.

Forests that are logged, regrow - Blanchard did. But there has been immense loss of forested habitat in the Puget Sound lowlands, especially along the coast. There is increasing pressure on private lands surrounding Blanchard. Bat, bird and amphibian species on Blanchard don’t have the luxury of time or perhaps space to “find a new home” with this same level of forest/marine complexity.

We know Puget Sound has immense ecological challenges. It just makes sense that we should protect one of the few coastal forests where the ecosystems are intact. It would take decades or centuries to re-create what we have here- if we even can.

**Please contact your state legislators. Write letters to the editor. Tell other people about the need. Our website www.skagitlandtrust.org (click the Take Action tab) gives addresses and phone numbers.** Our legislators must hear from you- as many of you as possible. Let's save Blanchard, together.