

Samish Island Heronry Abandonment During 2017 Nesting Season
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Skagit Land Trust holds a conservation easement on privately owned forestland on Samish Island, which Great Blue Herons (GBH's) have nested in for decades. The Trust is sad to confirm that the Samish Island heronry was abandoned by herons mid-nesting season in June of 2017. Our dedicated volunteer citizen scientists informed us that the heronry appeared empty when they visited the property to carry out regular monitoring on June 22nd, 2017. We reached out to biologists and to our Samish neighbors through the remainder of the summer to solicit observations to help us determine whether there was an attributable cause.

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) biologists emphasized that it is almost impossible to know whether there was a single trigger for abandonment and that it would be hard to know an event was a trigger without observations that connected a single incident with abandonment. They noted that heavy eagle predation likely played a strong role. There were also several disturbances in the surrounding landscape reported by neighbors that may have contributed to abandonment (including, but not limited to, loud noises, low flying aircraft, smoke from fires, off gassing tankers, and land clearing). Trust staff surveyed the heronry in early July and did not find compelling evidence pointing to a single explanation. The decision to abandon may also have been influenced by impacts to nearby food sources. One biologist also noted that there is some evidence that heronries historically shift around more within a larger landscape, and that abandonments are part of natural processes.

It is not yet possible to know whether the herons will come back in the near future – but there are a few instances where they returned, and we are hoping for that outcome right now. We will continue to monitor the heronry through the coming nesting season. Please remember that the heronry is located on privately owned land, and is closed to public access during nesting season.

If you would like to learn more about how to be a good GBH neighbor, you may choose to review WDFW's Management Recommendations for the GBH, which are available at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/publications/01371/wdfw01371.pdf>.

These helpful guidelines give guidance on mitigating human activities surrounding heronries during the critical nesting season that runs February through the end of July. If you discover the locations of new heron colonies, please contact WDFW at 425-775-1311. We also welcome you to call Skagit Land Trust if you have concerns or questions directly related to the heronries we and other landowners protect on Samish Island, March Point and Barney Lake.

With your help, we will continue to work to keep Skagit County a good home for both Samish Island residents and these amazing birds.