

The Understory

Spring 2015



Green Road Marsh November 2014

2 The Understory

Welcome Jim and Ranae Watson, our new Land Stewards for Presentin Conservation Area!

Jim and Ranae have lived adjacent to Presentin Conservation Area for 20 years and enjoy watching and studying wildlife in the area. Here they are at Hurn Field helping remove barbed wire fencing. Thanks for jumping right in to your new roles!

*(And a hearty **Thank You!** to Bill and Sally Pfeifer for their four years of service as Presentin's previous Land Stewards.)*



Protecting the Skagit one work party at a time.

YOUTH!



Salmon Festival



Sedro-Woolley B&GC

Green Club, Anacortes H.S.



Emerson H.S. Natural Resources Class



A Nature Conservancy poll suggests that if “American youth are given more opportunities to have a meaningful experience outdoors, they will be more likely to value nature, engage with it, and feel empowered to do something about it.” (2011)



Photo by Russ Dalton at Olympic NP

What animal made these tracks...?

Answer on page 4.

Q: How can you tell that a tree is a dogwood?



A: By its bark.

LINKS, STITCHES AND HITCHES

By Jim Johnson, Cumberland Creek Conservation Area Land Steward

Cumberland Creek, now returned to its historic channel rather than dumping straightaway into the Skagit, makes a gradual and sweeping turn to the west before flowing roughly three quarters of a mile across the Cumberland Peninsula and emptying out. Entering Trust land a robust mountain stream, it gradually loses energy becoming a lowland dawdler, linking the Cumberland Creek Conservation Area parcels together. Trust staff has been working for ten or more years to assemble these properties, each with something of a different biologic and human history. No boundary markers remain to distinguish them, but their predominating tree species and age tend to set them apart from one another. Now, by flowing alongside or through five of these parcels, Cumberland Creek stitches them together into a more cohesive whole.

Cumberland, like any creek, demands an audience. Kay, Hal, and I brushed out a rough trail leading upstream through a sickly, decaying grand fir plantation to a stand of western red cedar and ended near the diversion structure, waters tumbling down from the slopes of Iron Mountain. One oddly linear grouping of cedars is the legacy of an ancient nurse log which is all but rotted away. These cedars are on a bench of slightly higher elevation which, over the years, has provided a refuge from the flooding Skagit and makes Cumberland more complete with a diversity of species and history not offered by their shorter lived brethren- maple, alder, and cottonwood. In truth, I knew these cedars existed, but was dissuaded from regular visits by the gloomy grand fir and pesky salmonberry thickets. The creek provided the necessary goad.

The re-routed creek ties more of the Cumberland Creek Conservation Area to the forest above it creating greater cohesiveness and a longer fetch of history. The South Skagit Highway is made to seem less of a psychological or biological barrier. Cumberland is more complete and less isolated. Of course, it is likely that all this may be happening more in my head than on the ground- wherever it is happening, a creek runs through it.

A quote from John Muir comes to mind: “When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe.” A homespun declaration of an ecological faith, it may also be read as an implicit call to arms. If those “hitches” have grown frayed or worn and connections nearly severed, then a thoughtful effort to mend and reconnect things is worthwhile work.

SALMON SURVEY RESULTS

Species	Carcass	Live
Coho	3	2
Chum	0	9



Photo: John Scurlock

I Think Signs Matter

By Pete Haase, Samish River Ochs Land Steward

Pete Haase submitted an anecdote that illustrates the importance of story-telling. Personal experiences provide evidence of Skagit Land Trust successes and give us all a reason to celebrate, even if just for a moment.

The property I steward, Ochs, is way up on the Samish River, nearly to Highway 9. It is a big parcel of brush and trees with the river flowing through it. It was once infested along the river with Japanese knotweed, but that has been treated several times and many small trees have been planted to manage invasive comeback. That hard work was done by the Samish Tribe's Department of Natural Resources and Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group's Washington Conservation Corps crews. Now, the property is left to be wild.

And so, my stewarding effort amounts to looking at the river once in awhile, keeping a look out for trouble, watching the little salmon fry in the late spring, and then watching for the returning spawners in the fall. I've never seen any trouble. I've seen lots of fish – and eagles.

I also pick up roadside trash. The road beside the land is Upper Samish Road, a pretty busy one with locals and truckers. It gets a fair amount of litter tossed out. Several hundred feet of the road are along the property. When I first started, there was a lot of litter. Lugging a big black trash bag up and down the road got to be work! I like to walk both ways on a side, because litter can be well hidden from one direction but so obvious coming the other way! I lugged the bag a long way!

After two litter picking trips, I got the nice Land Trust signs mounted on posts – one at about each end of the property and one near the middle. Right then I began to notice less and less trash and litter. I think that folks being able to see a pretty, clean road side and important-looking signs made a big difference!

Now I mainly clip tall grass and bushes away from the signs during the summer. *Much* easier!

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(The mystery tracks on pg. 2 are beaver tracks!)

Illegal Harvesting on Public Properties: What to Look For and What To Do About It

Russ Dalton, Barr Creek Conservation Area Land Steward

PART II



Marijuana Grow Sites

Washington State law regulates and permits growing marijuana for personal and commercial use, but Federal law deems it illegal. Regardless, illegal grow sites will still be profitable. There is environmental degradation from an associated prolific use of fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides. The workers may endanger anyone who stumbles upon a site. Spring and summer activity.

What to Look For:

- Cleared area, sunny or shaded, with a monocrop of bamboo-looking plants possibly laid out in rows and columns
- 1½" or 2" plastic irrigation pipe often on top of the ground
- Pools along a creek where you might find a water system (but you don't always need an obvious creek)
- Cars parked where they aren't supposed to be, ATV tracks in unusual places, social trails leading off-trail
- Caches of fertilizer bags, five gallon buckets, camouflaged tarps, items spray painted camo colors for concealment
- Brush piles for storing supplies out of view
- Small living quarters, camo tarps and/or tents
- Pesticides, mouse and rat traps
- Pits are dug where massive quantities of trash and human waste are dumped and as a sump for water containment. Watch where you walk --some are deep.
- An organized grow site means money, and that means trouble for anyone stumbling into it. Use caution and back out, notifying local law enforcement.
- Most grow sites have lookout spots away from the actual grow sites.



"Culturally Modified Trees"

Native Americans and other cedar crafters use the bark strips primarily for basket making. Access to traditional gathering areas has declined as development and harvest have reduced the number of trees in the region. Tribal members are allowed to gather cedar by permit in national forests or by permission on private land. Harvest occurs in late spring or summer.

What to Look For:

- Young cedar trees 1' to 3' in diameter.
- Horizontal axe chop or saw cut, 24" to 36" above the ground.
- Long triangular taper of exposed wood, 20'+ up the side of the tree.



Instruments/Furniture

Big leaf maple, alder, Douglas fir, madrona, and sitka spruce are sought after species. Maple can produce many different types of "figured" woods, including quilted (tubular, popcorn, cloud), curly (fiddleback, broken, basketweave), and burl. Whole logs or blocks of wood may be cut and removed, but less-than-desirable pieces are discarded.

What to Look For:

- Piles of wood waste and sawdust and scars on trees or logs where burls have been sawn off.
- Trails, wheel marks, drag marks and/or flagging or notching to indicate harvest sites for relocation.
- Taut wire between trees on sloped hillsides. Blocks of wood can be attached and moved out to a roadside.
- A person can work on one tree for days at a time, late at night or early morning with a chain saw.

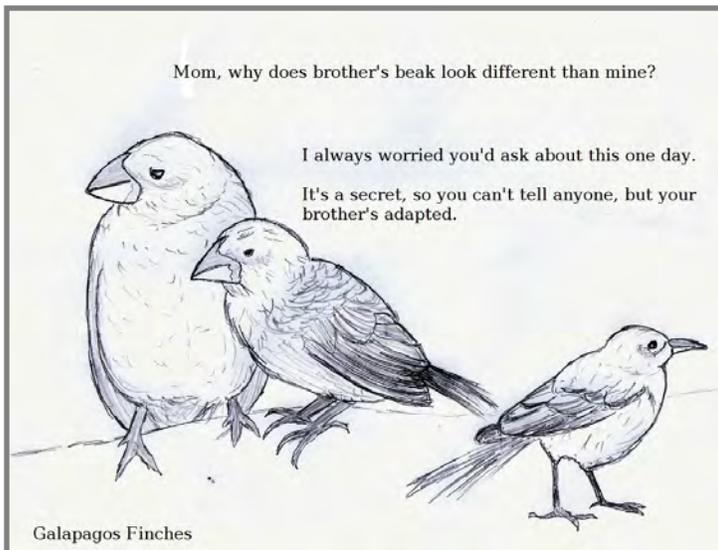
Remember! If you encounter anything suspicious, think first of your safety. Leave and report what you saw to Skagit Land Trust staff or Skagit County Sheriff's office. Record license plate numbers, photos or GPS. Most visits to Trust properties will be benign and welcome. However, Stewards do act as the eyes and ears for the Trust. Be observant, be *safe*, and have fun!



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OUR MISSION:

Skagit Land Trust conserves 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.



Sunset Swans at Lyman Slough

Skagit Land Trust Conservation Areas and Their (Lovely) Land Stewards

Barney Lake: Kendon Light, Tim Manns & Brenda Cunningham

Barr Creek: Russ Dalton

Butler Creek: Jim Owens

Cumberland Creek: Jim Johnson

Day Creek (Berquist & Forest): Stan Zyskowski

Day Creek Kosbab: Jim Fukuyama

Day Creek Slough: Hal Lee

Grandy Creek: John Freeman

Green Road Marsh: Heidi Nichols

Guemes Mountain: Ed & Carolyn Gastellum, Ian Woofenden, Kit Harma

Hurn Field: Steffany Raynes & Lin Skavdahl

Lyman Slough: Dick Raisler

March Point: LaVerne & Jim Scheltens

Minkler Lake: Hal Lee

Mud Lake: Lloyd Brown

Pressentin: Jim and Ranae Watson

Samish—Ochs: Pete Haase

Samish—Squires: Jack & Anne Middleton

South Skagit: Amy Gouley

Sumner Lake: Tami Thomas & Tom Mayes

Tope Ryan: John Day

Utopia: Ned Currance