

# THE UNDERSTORY

Skagit Land Trust Land Steward Newsletter

Winter 2015-2016

## Grandy Creek: A Little History

By John Freeman

One of the special benefits of being a Skagit Land Trust steward is having time to let our minds wander while trekking across our various properties. Recently on a monitoring visit to Grandy Creek, I found myself wondering how this beautiful area had changed over the years both in purpose and appearance. I had some information from reading literature given to me by Skagit Land Trust staff, but I decided to do a little more research. What I found was quite interesting. Situated at the confluence of Grandy Creek and the Skagit River, the Grandy Creek Conservation Area is a 54 acre property acquired by the SLT in April 2003. It consists of two large meadows totaling 20 acres surrounded by 34 acres of riparian forest with heavy native understory.

Originally one large property purchased by the Pritchard family during World War II, two meadows exist on what is now Land Trust property. Over the years a variety of crops were grown including strawberries, corn, and wheat. Later the western-most meadow was used for cattle grazing and the eastern section for horses. In addition, the surrounding forest areas were selectively logged.

*(continued on page 3)*



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*How strange that nature does not knock, yet it does not intrude.*

*~ Emily Dickenson*



Left: Grandy Creek, J. Freeman; Right: Area map, SLT

# New 2015 Land Stewards



View of Mud Lake and interpretive sign from Hwy 9, SLT

## Mud Lake — is pleasantly clean and clear

**Richard and Carol Treston** retired to the Pacific Northwest from New York in 1996. During the past 19 years they have volunteered for many organizations, such as the American Red Cross, the Lincoln Theatre, Skagit County Sheriff's Office, Stream Team and Wolf Hollow Wildlife Rehab Center. While living in Anacortes they became land stewards for the then Harvey Raymer (now Butler Creek) property.

One of the most memorable aspects of stewardship was getting to know Harvey, and to see his dream of land preservation become a reality. When the Trestons moved to Alger, they concentrated on certifying their 14 acres as a Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary through DNR. Now, having moved to a smaller place in Big Lake, they are once again active with SLT as stewards for Mud Lake.

Mud Lake is an ecologically critical wetland valued by the local community. The Trestons feel stewarding Mud Lake is truly a privilege. The Trestons enjoy music, reading, theater, museums, bridge and being outdoors.



## Utopia-it's more than a name

**Kinsey Shilling** originally from Maryland, has now lived in the Skagit Valley for the past eight years and has become attached to the Valley. Before moving to Mount Vernon, Kinsey moved around the United States for 30 years with the National Park Service (CA, CO, WV, VA, PA, MO) focusing on education and emergency management.

Prior to the National Park Service, he spent several years in outdoor education and four years as teacher and staff with the Peace Corps in Lesotho, South Africa.

Since retiring from the National Park Service, Kinsey became interested in volunteer opportunities and after spending a day planting trees at Utopia last April, decided to become a land steward there. He is looking forward to spending time at the site.

*"I am encouraged by seeing all the tree plantings and work devoted to the Utopia property."* Kinsey



Young Steward planting at Utopia





Left; John Freeman at Grandy. Right: Grandy Creek meets Skagit. Photos courtesy J. Freeman

*No river can return to its source, yet all rivers have a beginning. ~ Native American proverb*

(Continued from cover page)

Since purchased by SLT, both pastures have taken on yet another purpose and are now being hayed several times a year by a local neighbor. This also provides a modest income for the Land Trust.

During all this activity, the beautiful riparian forests circling these meadows has not changed—but years ago on Grandy Creek itself, something else did....

The Grandy Creek property is bounded by Grandy Creek to the east and the Skagit River to the south. At its confluence with the Skagit River, Grandy Creek brings silt, sand, and nutrients into the Skagit River creating an excellent spawning area for salmon and steelhead as well as two fabulous fishing areas—The Stump Hole and Grandy Creek Riffle. With its shifting sand bars and riffles, this nutrient outfall did not go unnoticed.

At the turn of the 20th century, aware of the pristine waters flowing on Grandy Creek adjacent to what is now SLT property, a small hatchery was built by the State of Washington, upstream from Grandy Creek's confluence with the Skagit River. This sockeye hatchery was established as an auxiliary to the Baker Lake hatchery built previously in 1896. Extensive improvements were made at the Grandy Creek hatchery in 1911 including a new hatchery building, barn and several residences. However, by 1947, with declining salmon runs in Grandy Creek and uneven water flows, the hatchery was closed and transferred to the Washington Department of Game (WDG)\*.

The WDG used the facility as a hatchery until the 1970's when failing water returns and water quality problems caused the facility to be abandoned. Very few remnants of this historical hatchery remain today—see photo below. Overgrown sections of the hatchery foundation can be viewed from Cape Horn Road and the residence sites can still be located on the Fish and Wildlife property.

A spectacular view from a bluff overlooking the confluence of the Skagit River and Grandy Creek, along with their riffles, bars and channels can be had by continuing just a short distance further down the trail. Just the place to conclude your visit and let your mind do a little wandering.

***John Freeman has been the Grandy Creek Land Steward since May 2008***

\*The Concrete Herald June 21, 1951.



## Green Road Marsh

We are pleased to report that the plantings from the Ric Boge events last spring are growing quite well and beautifully transforming the site. If you haven't made a trip out to see how well they have done keep an eye out to join a late-winter work party to remove tree protectors.

Initial planting November 2014



Second Planting March 2015



Planting success as of October 2015!





# **MOST WANTED** Japanese Knotweed *Polygonum cuspidatum*

## Description:

*Height: 4-12 feet tall, averages 6 feet*

*Leaves: Alternate, bright green, smooth edges, flat base, pointed tip*

*Flowers: small yet showy plumes, white to green, form July through August*

## Causes of Concern:

*Displaces native vegetation by forming dense stands.*

*Degrades riparian habitat and water quality.*

*Extremely difficult to control; stems and rhizomes can create new infestations downstream.*

If you see this plant, or have questions contact Lisa.



## **SKAGIT LAND TRUST'S DEDICATED LAND STEWARDS AND PROPERTIES IN THEIR CARE**

Barney Lake ~ Brenda Cunningham, Tim Manns, Kendon Light

Barr Creek ~ Russ Dalton    **Butler Creek ~ Jim Owens**

**Cumberland Creek ~ Jim Johnson**    Day Creek Berquist and Day Creek Forest ~ Stan Zyskowski

Day Creek Slough ~ Hal Lee    Grandy Creek ~ John Freeman    **Green Road Marsh ~ Heidi Nichols**

**Guemes Mountain ~ Carolyn and Ed Gastellum, Ian Woofenden and Kit Harma**

Hurn Field ~ Steffany Raynes and Lin Skavdahl    Lyman Slough ~ Dick Raisler

March Point ~ LaVerne and Jim Scheltens    **Minkler Lake ~ Hal Lee**

**Mud Lake ~ Carol and Richard Treston**    Presentin Ranch ~ Ranae and Jim Watson

Samish Island Squires ~ Anne and Jack Middleton    Samish Island Ochs ~ Pete Haase

**Sumner Lake ~ Tami Thomas and Tom Mayes**    **Tope Ryan ~ John Day**    Utopia ~ Kinsey Shilling

## A WORD FROM OUR COMMUNITY STEWARDSHIP ASSISTANT, LISA MILLER

Most days while riding the bus through the flats from Anacortes into the office I find myself looking out the window and thinking how truly honored I am to call Skagit Valley home; and those connected with Skagit Land Trust my colleagues and friends. Although I am from the beautiful land of the Rocky Mountains in Colorado, there is something very different and special about being nestled between the Cascades, Olympics and the ever-sustaining Puget Sound.

My first time visiting Washington I travelled through Mount Vernon to the ferry terminal to go whale watching from Orcas Island I said to my friend as she drove, "How do people get to live here? I could live here, but that is just a dream." Now, five years later, this is home. It is my privilege to work both for and towards a strong healthy community of people and wildlife, and to do so with all of you who share a passion for our natural world around us.

During the past year I have worked with many of you at public volunteer events or visiting and stewarding properties. With many changes at the Trust this year I am happy to be a part of yet another one, as the Community Stewardship Assistant. I am welcoming this new role and responsibility to link together community involvement and the never-ending tasks of stewardship.

Over the next few months you will certainly see me out in the field (wearing this **wide-brimmed** hat!!) observing herons, amphibians, invasive weeds of the west, and of course reaching new people (young and old) to help us care for these very special places of Skagit.

As I look out the window on this cold, grey, winter day in the Pacific Northwest I am eager to watch the seasons change while working with and learning from all of you.

Here's to 2016 and beyond!

Lisa



Lisa at Utopia-Earth Day 2015



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HERE

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

### Upcoming Volunteer Opportunities

*Amphibian* Monitoring Training - March TBD

*Boys and Girls Club* 'Conservation Corps' engagement - January-March

*Grandy Creek* tree planting and knotweed restoration - March 8

Visit [skagitlandtrust.org](http://skagitlandtrust.org) for more details



View from Mt Erie, ACFL, Geology Hike