



## SKAGIT UPDATE — FALL 2016-WINTER 2017

### Working Together to Benefit Hamilton

“We canoed right over the top of a neighbor’s Corvette,” remembers Jane Zillig about living through a Hamilton flood. “There were cats swimming to reach a house with high enough windowsills to perch on out of the water.”

Zillig, who works as a Conservation Project Manager for Skagit Land Trust, made it through two floods before she and her husband decided to move from Hamilton. “Our house was raised up, but it was sad to see what other homeowners had to come back to. Houses filled with silt and garbage everywhere; it was a disaster area and the cleanup seemed to take forever.”



Homes in Hamilton during the 2003 flood. Courtesy of Skagit Valley Herald - Photographer Matt Wallis



Map of Hamilton, Skagit River, and Carey Slough

Hugging a curve on the Skagit River and nearly encircled by Carey Slough, **over 75% of the original town of Hamilton lies in a flood way. The residents experience major flooding about every five years and resources for rebuilding have dried up.** Residents cannot build new homes in old Hamilton, and if over 50% of an existing home is destroyed by any event, it cannot be rebuilt.

“We have a small levee at the south side of town that provides a little protection,” said Hamilton Mayor Joan Cromley. “This past winter it came within a quarter inch of spilling over the top. We are long overdue for another major flooding event.”

These properties along the river and slough, though not great for houses, are crucial to the conservation and restoration of natural space. The land anchors valuable habitat for juvenile salmon traveling the Skagit. The slower moving waters of Carey Slough allow salmon to grow safely until they are strong enough to join the forceful currents of the Skagit River. These waters also provide resting grounds for salmon making their way upstream to spawn.

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## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

### Blanchard Mountain

### “Nowhere in the Middle of Everywhere”

- Quote attributed to JoAnne Prentice of Blanchard in 1980's



Take a step back in time.

Most of the Puget Sound marine shoreline was covered in forest – much of it with complex understory. Now, on the Puget Sound coast between Olympia and Vancouver BC, the 8-mile long Chuckanut Mountain range is the only remaining place where the forests of the Cascades 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 hiking, the biking, paragliding and horseback riding. Blanchard also contains a diverse concentration of wildlife: 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 Oyster Dome. 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 its size - it connects with 2,680 acres in Larabee State Park and other protected lands along the coast and around Samish Lake. Because I-5 blocks quite a bit of historic wildlife migration, many birds and animals that need space and varied types of land to live their life cycle reside in the Chuckanut Mountains. These mountains lie along the shallow marine 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 River. There are resident cutthroat trout on Blanchard. Many fish species are found in the creeks and rivers fed by Blanchard's waters and forests – several of these are considered rare or in decline in Washington State. Maintaining high water quality free of silt in these streams' headwaters, which are often exclusively on Blanchard, is essential.

**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 forested core” of Blanchard.**

Blanchard's core contains naturally regenerating forests that are 65 to over 100 years in age. At this age, forests begin to develop complexity rapidly. These forests provide year-round cover and interior forest conditions that have been lost in most forests along Puget Sound's coast. **The forest has a closed canopy, giving 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** including the Marbled Murrelet, 30 species of neotropical birds, and 19 species of raptors. Sixty-four percent of the 150 birds identified on Blanchard are thought to breed and reproduce on the mountain. With at least nine bat species recorded, the diversity of bat populations on Blanchard is as rich as it gets in Washington. This is not only because of the caves, but also because bats need mature forest for their life-cycle. Blanchard is fantastic wildlife habitat now. **If the forested core is left undisturbed, it will develop old growth characteristics faster than anywhere else on the coast of Puget Sound between Olympia and the Canadian border.**

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

A collaborative group from conservation, forestry, recreation, business and local communities have been working to protect Blanchard's core for a decade. The 2017 Washington State Legislative Session is critical to receiving all or a majority of the \$7.7 million still needed to finalize its conservation.

Blanchard Mountain needs your help. Blanchard is a state forest managed by DNR. They agree the core should be conserved but **unless the funding is received, they will need to authorize logging in the forested core later in 2017. Please contact your Washington State legislators, Governor Inslee and Lands Commissioner-elect Hilary Franz.** Our website, [www.skagitlandtrust.org](http://www.skagitlandtrust.org) (click the Take Action tab) gives addresses and phone numbers. **They must hear from you- as many of you as possible.** Let's save Blanchard, together.

Sincerely,



Molly Doran, Executive Director

## Conservation Classrooms - Engaging Youth in Nature

*By Lisa Miller, Stewardship & Outreach Associate and Hannah Williams, AmeriCorps Member*

Skagit Land Trust has been working with schools and youth groups around the county for several years to encourage the next generation of land stewards. This past year we hosted over 400 students on our lands! We are now working to create an exciting outdoor classroom experience.

The Conservation Classroom initiative invites educators to develop curriculum that uses close-to-home Trust-owned conservation areas for experiential learning in a natural setting. These experiences will be designed by educators to help further student engagement in natural sciences and teach many components of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) curriculum. Our goal is to help promote a sense of place, connection, and a lifelong stewardship ethic.

Launching this initiative begins by connecting with educators to understand their needs, barriers to getting outside, and ensure they are comfortable teaching on the land. If you are a teacher, or know any educators that may be interested in this program, please contact us today!





## Final Wishes Return Fidalgo Bay Property Back to Nature

By Kari Odden, Conservation Project Manager

Barbara and Ron Carstens, longtime residents of Anacortes, loved their property on the shores of Fidalgo Bay. Barbara laughs as she remembers Ron looking at the view and telling their realtor that they would buy the property before he even went inside the house. Barbara asked Ron, "Don't you even want to look inside?"

He said "No, I've seen what I need to see."

Ron passed away in June of 2015. This past summer Barbara Carstens, with the support of her children - Randy Carstens, Cheryl Sison and Daren Carstens - honored Ron's wishes and generously gave their property located on south Fidalgo Bay to Skagit Land Trust. Barbara and her late husband Ron lived on the property for close to 20 years and loved the beauty and wildlife they would regularly watch in the marine nearshore. The family wanted to see the shoreline permanently protected, the house removed and the land restored to its natural state.



Ron and Barbara Carstens

This ecologically important shoreline property features over 1,000 feet of shoreline on the bay with intact shoreline vegetation, including large, mature trees. Surf smelt spawn on the beach with additional spawning sites nearby. These small fish spawn in the upper portion of the intertidal zone, depositing eggs on sand-gravel beaches. The nearshore shading provided by overhanging trees on the Carsten's property prevents the eggs from desiccating during summer spawns. Surf smelt are classified as forage fish, small schooling fishes that form a critical link in the Puget Sound food chain between plankton and larger predatory fishes, such as salmon.



The Carstens' were immediate neighbors to John and Doris Tursi, who protected their land and shoreline with a conservation easement twenty years ago. Both properties border the Fidalgo Bay Aquatic Reserve, which is owned and managed by Washington State Department of Natural Resources with a conservation easement held by Skagit Land Trust. The Aquatic Reserve's shallow, vegetated tidelands with eelgrass forests provide habitat for multiple species of juvenile fish, including salmonids, and resident and migratory shorebirds and waterfowl.

Just to the north, the popular Tommy Thompson trail stretches across the Bay. This stretch of shoreline is an important part of the scenic view from this trail. Removing the Carstens' house and deck, which overhangs the beach, while protecting native shoreline vegetation will help the health of the nearby marine area and protect invertebrate habitat and spawning sites. Removal of pavement and roadways will also reduce storm water runoff and pollution from entering Fidalgo Bay.

Skagit Land Trust is very grateful to the Carstens family for preserving this natural space as a gift for generations to come.



Over the last year and a half Skagit Land Trust has been working with Skagit Watershed Council, Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group, Washington State Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB) and the Town of Hamilton on a project that benefits salmon and the citizens of Hamilton alike.

**In 2016 the Trust completed three property purchases in Hamilton and handed this land over to the town to permanently steward as open space and salmon habitat.** Acquiring open spaces such as these properties allows Hamilton to reach their growth management goals.

“It’s been a really great partnership to get movement on this project. I’ve been pleasantly surprised with the amount of landowners willing to talk with Skagit Land Trust to see what programs are available to help them.” said Mayor Cromley.

All purchases were funded by the Washington State Salmon Recovery Funding Board with assistance from Seattle City Light. One property acquired has **532 feet of shoreline on the Skagit River as well as 762 feet of shoreline on Carey Slough. The property has intact native vegetation along the slough and river** and is directly across the river from the Trust’s Cumberland Creek Conservation Area. These properties are important not only for habitat protection, but also for a potential salmon habitat restoration project with partners along Carey Slough.

“It is very special that Hamilton has this intact habitat,” said Sue Madsen with the Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group. “We see great potential to benefit salmon through projects along the slough. This area is home to a lot of different creatures. Once preserved and restored there could be trails and great birding spots for the public.”

**Another benefit of the Hamilton acquisitions is moving residents from harm’s way.** Some people rent in Hamilton because it is affordable, making moving difficult. **The grant allows for relocation assistance for renters.** The Trust’s latest property purchase included a rental manufactured home and several outbuildings.

As part of the property purchase the Trust was able to arrange relocation of the renter and family which helped them put a down-payment on a place to buy upriver. The Trust will now remove all structures and debris, returning this frequently flooded property to a natural state.

“It’s a great partnership and a win-win situation in that it helps residents, it helps protect important habitat, and it helps with flood management because the town doesn’t have to worry about the safety of these properties and their inhabitants,” said Zillig.

Knitting together a fragmented landscape through such property purchases from willing landowners allows the Trust to provide cohesive spaces for restoration. Partnering with nonprofits, towns, landowners, and the state allows for the most frugal use of funds to revitalize an area, turning it into a healthy and useful space for people and wildlife alike. **Skagit Land Trust has more potential property purchases on the horizon, so look for future information in emails and online to see how this project grows.**



Cattle crowd onto higher ground on a farm near Hamilton in the 2003 flood. Photograph courtesy of Skagit Valley Herald - Photographer Matt Wallis





**SAVE THE DATE!**  
**Auction & Dinner**  
Saturday, March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017

Join us for our largest event of the year! Come see what we have accomplished together and learn about where Skagit Land Trust plans to go in the next 25 years. Tickets for the 25th Anniversary Auction & Dinner go on sale in January. Watch for your invitation in the mail. All proceeds help conserve Skagit's natural lands today and for the future.

Interested in being a sponsor or donating to the auction? Contact Laura Hartner, [laurah@skagitlandtrust.org](mailto:laurah@skagitlandtrust.org) or call 360-428-7878. [www.skagitlandtrust.org](http://www.skagitlandtrust.org)



Cumberland Creek Conservation Area - John Scurlock

**Welcome Phil Wright to the Board of Directors**



**Phil Wright** retired in 2013 after a 40 year accounting career in the mortgage banking industry and later for several small businesses. Phil has a B.A. in Economics from Whitman College and a M.S. in Business from University of Montana. After moving from Seattle to Anacortes in 2000, he joined Skagit Audubon board, holding several positions including president. Phil's interests include birding, hiking, cycling, and classical music.

**Welcome Laura Hartner and Hannah Williams**



**Laura Hartner** joins the Trust with ten years of nonprofit and small business experience in Washington State from Pullman to Seattle to the Skagit. Raised in the Mat-Su Valley of Alaska, Laura understands the important relationship nature and natural resources play in vibrant communities. We are excited for Laura to bring to the Trust her creative ideas, well-honed organizational skills, and a passion for community involvement. Join us in welcoming Laura to the Trust.



**Hannah Williams** joined the team in September for a ten and a half month service position as an AmeriCorps member and volunteer coordinator. She will spend a bulk of her time highly involved with our programs to engage youth in conservation by sharing her love and understanding of the natural world. Hannah has worked in a variety of environments leading and mentoring youth in south Puget Sound at science camp programs both in the field and on the water. Please look for opportunities to meet and welcome Hannah to the team.

## Leaving a Legacy of Conservation

By Laura Hartner, Development & Communications Director



Timothy Volwiler's love for nature and open spaces started early in life growing up on a wooded property just north of Seattle. His father shared his love of the mountains and abundant wilderness with Tim and started him hiking at an early age.

Throughout his life Tim sought out remote and wild spaces, traveling to Nepal with the Peace Corps, then moving to Alaska to escape the hustle and bustle of the west coast's growing cities. He taught school in the Eskimo village of Noorvik just north of the Arctic Circle, then in Sand Point on the Aleutian Islands, finally moving to Juneau to teach correspondence classes for students in small coastal villages without schools.

When he moved back to Washington in the early 2000's, Tim settled in Bellingham and quickly began exploring the local trails. Blanchard Mountain held a special place in his heart with the expansive views from the Cascade Mountains to the Puget Sound shorelines. Tim supported the work that Skagit Land Trust was doing on Blanchard Mountain and across Skagit County. He believed that open spaces and wilderness should be preserved for future generations and was a member of the Trust during the ten years he lived in the area.



*Tim Volwiler enjoying two of his favorite hobbies, music and nature.*

Looking for a way to support the conservation and social organizations that he loved, Tim selected several charities to be included in his estate plans. After Tim passed away suddenly this past February in Juneau, Skagit Land Trust was honored to learn that Tim had named us in his will. Tim's hope for the future was that wilderness would survive the pressures of development and be available for future generations to enjoy as he had.

Tim's gift to the Trust allows us to continue the work of saving land for tomorrow and preserving places like Blanchard Mountain where people can connect with nature. It is a great legacy to leave and we are grateful for the belief Tim had in the work we do.

### ***Leave it to Nature, Forever***

Learn how an estate gift can preserve Skagit's wildlife habitat and green places for generations to come. View ***Skagit Land Trust's Guide to Planned Giving*** at [skagitlandtrust.org](http://skagitlandtrust.org) or contact Executive Director Molly Doran at (360) 428-7878 or [mollyd@skagitlandtrust.org](mailto:mollyd@skagitlandtrust.org) for information on the ways you can leave a legacy gift.

## **PLEASE JOIN US FOR OUR 25TH ANNUAL MEMBERS MEETING**

**Friday, January 27th, 2017, 5:30-8:30pm Hillcrest Lodge, 1717 S 13th St, Mount Vernon**

**5:30 - 6:30 pm:** Social hour, appetizers and refreshments

**6:30 - 7:30 pm:** Dinner and a special 25th Anniversary presentation

**7:30 - 8:30 pm:** Awards, Board elections, and member updates

Visit our website at [skagitlandtrust.org](http://skagitlandtrust.org) for more information.



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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.

## SAVING LAND FOR TOMORROW

### *Upcoming Events*

#### **25th Annual Members Meeting & Celebration Friday, January 27, 2017**

5:30pm - 8:30pm, Hillcrest Lodge  
1717 South 13th Street, Mount Vernon, WA

#### **Upcoming Volunteer Events**

December 9-10 Annual Heron Nest Counting

January 20 Barney Lake Maintenance - Future Trail Site

February 4 Citizen Science Training - Amphibian Monitoring

#### **25th Anniversary Auction & Dinner Saturday, March 25, 2017**

5-9pm, WA Walton Event Center at Swinomish Lodge

*Tickets available in January*

Visit our website [skagitlandtrust.org](http://skagitlandtrust.org) for details and other upcoming events.



**Our 2016 Annual Picnic was held at Deception Pass State Park's Bowman Bay picnic shelter on Saturday, July 30th. Thanks to everyone who came out!**