



SAN JUAN COUNTY

LAND BANK

ZYLSTRA LAKE PRESERVE



INTERIM MANAGEMENT PLAN
November 2016

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Approved by Land Bank Commission: [Insert date]
Approved by San Juan County Council: [Insert date]

Introduction

Zylstra Lake Preserve is a joint project of the San Juan County Land Bank and San Juan Preservation Trust. Ownership was transferred to the organizations on December 15, 2015 following a \$350,000 down payment towards the \$3 million purchase price. The project goal is to protect Zylstra Lake's unique ecological, scenic, and agricultural resources and outstanding potential for recreational access. The 284-acre preserve is located at the northwest head of San Juan Valley on San Juan Island. The property borders two previously conserved lands – the Land Bank's 68-acre King Sisters Preserve to the north and the Preservation Trust's 725-acre Red Mill Farm Preserve to the east (Figure 1).

The dominant features of the Zylstra property are the two large water bodies – the roughly 50-acre “Zylstra Lake” and 7-acre “Lower Lake.” The lakes are located in the middle of the False Bay Watershed, considered the largest watershed in San Juan County (Figure 3). They were created in 1963 for agricultural irrigation purposes by constructing two earthen dams across False Bay Creek.

The lakes are surrounded by agricultural fields which in recent years have been used primarily for hay production and cattle grazing. Past agricultural endeavors include dairy cows, grain and fruit crops, as well as an ornamental holly farm. Willow and other water tolerant woody species ring the lake and upstream connection. Douglas fir forested areas are found scattered along the western and southern portions of the property. Two rocky balds with native prairie plant species are found at the northern edge of the preserve and a small rocky bald at the SE corner. A pleasant bigleaf maple, grand fir, and Douglas-fir forested zone covers approximately 24 acres at the southern part of the property.

Future management will be determined with input from the public once the land has been paid for, probably no sooner than 2018. Potential uses include: recreational (wildlife viewing, swimming, boating, trails); environmental (protection and restoration of habitat for fish, birds, and other wildlife); and agricultural.

Ownership, interest, and future management will be influenced by funding sources. For example, one potential source of grant funding favors a “nature preserve” approach with less emphasis on recreation and farming. Other grants favor recreation or enhancement for native fish. While our goal is to manage the preserve for multiple purposes, it may not be able to do “everything” due to funding limitations and/or use conflicts.

The Land Bank is required to prepare a management plan for any given property in the year after its acquisition. Management plans are adopted by the Land Bank Commission following a public hearing, then ratified by the San Juan County Council, typically as part of the county budgetary process. They are to include a summary of annual, five-year, and ten-year maintenance activities and improvements in substantive and financial terms (SJCC 2.120.120 Stewardship and management plan).

The Zylstra Lake Preserve Interim Management Plan will satisfy the above requirements. It will guide the care and stewardship of the land into the near future. Following a period of preserve inventory, assessment, and scoping, the Land Bank expects to prepare a more comprehensive and detailed plan, including expanded opportunities for public involvement and comment.

I. General Management

Zylstra Lake Preserve is being acquired from the Charles Tomas family estate, with the transfer of ownership having taken place in December of 2015 following a down payment of \$350,000 by the Land Bank. In August of 2016 a thirty-acre parcel known as “October Farm” (Figure 2) was resold for \$825,000. The Land Bank and the Preservation Trust are collaborating on several federal, state, and private grant opportunities with the goal of raising the remaining \$1.9 million by a deadline of December 15, 2018.

The October Farm parcel included the bulk of the residential and agricultural infrastructure. The original estate also included two hundred additional acres located to the east. While this parcel is also currently on the market and of considerable conservation value, it is not being pursued by the Land Bank and Preservation Trust due to financial constraints. During the fundraising period the two organizations are jointly managing the preserve with the Preservation Trust taking the lead on stewardship costs and managing agricultural activities. Ultimate ownership interests in the property remain uncertain and likely dependent on funding sources.

Historical and Cultural Resources

A historical analysis of the preserve was completed by Boyd Pratt shortly following the transfer of ownership. No cultural resources have been identified on the preserve. Consideration will be given for additional historical and cultural resource assessments.

Access Easements

Two access easements serve the Zylstra Lake Preserve. The primary access is a gated entry off of San Juan Valley Road (Figures 1, 2, & 3). A secondary easement enters via October Farm’s entry off of Valley Farms road. The main roads into the preserve are narrow, single lane, and surfaced with gravel. More primitive roads, primarily used for dam maintenance and agricultural purposes cross the dams and follow the perimeter of the west and north sides of the property. There is no easement on the existing main road which links the Zylstra and Lower Lake parcels.

Power and Utilities Easements

The Town of Friday Harbor’s old waterline parallels the northern property line, but the westernmost portion of this was abandoned following the construction of a new water line buried in Wold and San Juan Valley Roads during summer of 2016. The Land Bank and Trust may pursue formal vacation of this easement. The current waterlines, meters, and associated infrastructure continue along the Zylstra Preserve north boundary from the driveway east to the property corner. The Town, its agents and contractors, should have adequate access for maintenance, repairs, and meters for this section from the county right-of-way along San Juan Valley Road.

Utilities serving the October Farm are overhead lines which cross the northern portion of the October Farm parcel from Valley Farms Road. An overhead line extends to an outbuilding on the Preserve land. This will likely be disconnected as it runs off of the October Farm meter and neither organization currently has need for electrical access at

the structure. An electrical extension to a separate transformer runs from the Farm to the Lower Lake dam. This was used to power an irrigation pump located in an outbuilding immediately east of the dam. The outbuilding is inaccessible due to encroachment by blackberries and other thorny shrubs. The condition of the pump is not known, but presumed not functional. There is no plans to utilize the pump or other electrical needs at this location and the transformer has been turned off.

Dams

Two earthen dams were constructed circa 1963 to create the upper and lower lakes. The impoundments were created to serve agricultural purposes. The Land Bank manages other properties with smaller earthen dams (Limekiln and Fowler's Pond preserves) and will use this experience in the maintenance and operation of the Zylstra Lake dams. Both dams are in need of assessment and possibly repair and upgrade. This will be evaluated during the interim process, especially in determining if the current designs will be adequate or need adaptations to meet ecological restoration goals. During the interim period we plan to maintain the existing facility and conduct repairs as necessary but otherwise not undertake large scale changes to the existing system. Should acquisition be successful, the Washington State Dam Safety office will be consulted in the development of a dam maintenance and operation manual for existing facility as well as any modifications for habitat, safety, agriculture, recreation, or other water resource management.

Water Rights

The Washington Water Trust contracted with Northwest Land and Water, a private consultant, to produce the 2016 Zylstra Lake Water Rights Management Assessment. According to the report, two water rights were associated with the construction of the lakes. The first was a Reservoir Water Right for 285 acre-feet of water to be used for irrigation of 295 acres. The second was a surface water right of 80 acre-feet for irrigation purposes of 40 acres. Initial inquiries indicate the reservoir water right is still valid and may be transferable to habitat and recreation purposes. The surface water right, however, has been lost due through Washington States "non-use" statute. Further assessment, clarification, and understanding of water rights will be critical to project goals.

In the 1980s a previous owner set about dredging the lake as they believed sediment had reduced its capacity. The work was initiated without permit and subsequently shut down by regulatory agencies. Numerous spoils piles dot the margins of the lake, particularly along the southeast portion.

II. Ecological Resources

The interim management goals for Zylstra Lake Preserve are to assess, maintain, and enhance its ecological resources. The emphasis during this period will be to increase understanding and knowledge of the preserve's natural features. This will be accomplished through regular monitoring as well as assembling an ecological assessment in collaboration with the Preservation Trust, local, state, and federal agencies, non-profits, universities and other special interest groups. Opportunities for restoration and research, in particular for anadromous fish, will be investigated.

The sheer size of Zylstra Lake Preserve provides many ecological benefits, but its long history for agricultural use has also impacted diversity and density of native species. Nonetheless, there are many interesting pockets along the margins of the lakes in addition to the obvious importance of the lakes and streams. The lakes and surrounding fields are a particularly important resource for waterfowl, especially during the winter months. Access to the preserve will be limited between November and April to minimize disturbance. Biological surveys using staff, volunteers, contractors, and partner agencies have begun in order to create an inventory of species within the preserve.

Management activities in general will focus on control of invasive species and enhancing native species habitat as opportunities allow.

Specific activities related to ecological resource management during the interim period include:

- Manual control of noxious weeds and invasive species.
- Providing access for regular monitoring and ecological inventory by Land Bank, Preservation Trust, approved volunteers, contractors, and outside agencies.
- Mowing, trimming, and vegetation removal on roads and dams.
- Allow limited access for research and educational purposes
- Restrict access to the preserve between November and April in order to minimize disturbance to waterfowl.
- Construction and maintenance of fences, gates, and other agricultural infrastructure.
- Communication and collaboration with neighboring property owners regarding management of noxious weeds, invasive species, and other resource management issues.

III. Agricultural Resources

The interim management goals for Zylstra Lake Preserve agricultural resources are to maintain the existing agricultural uses and infrastructure and evaluate the preserve's agricultural potential. The San Juan Islands Conservation District, San Juan County Agricultural Resources Committee, San Juan Islands Agricultural Guild, and other groups and individuals will be enlisted to help in assessing the preserve's farming and farm lease potential. The Land Bank and the Preservation Trust will continue agricultural uses which were in place at the time the property was acquired. This includes grazing on the southern portion of the property and haying fields on the northern portion. A small portion of the property will also temporarily be used by Island Haven Animal Sanctuary for the rescue and care of large animals.

In addition to agricultural activities on the preserve, the water from the lakes is used for livestock watering by farmers downstream. The Land Bank and Preservation Trust will continue to work with these farmers to cooperatively manage the fresh water resources for agricultural purposes during the interim period.

While existing uses are continued, the Land Bank and Preservation Trust may require lessees to make some modifications in order to protect ecological resources, provide access to researchers, provide access for assessments, and ensure the safety of staff, visitors, lessees, contractors, and volunteers. Permission for short term use does not ensure nor imply long term access, which will be determined during management plan development if the acquisition is successful.

Specific activities related to agricultural resource management during the interim period include:

- Negotiation of leases or license agreements for agricultural activities on the preserve
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- Manual control of noxious weeds and invasive species.
- Road construction and maintenance.
- Operation, maintenance, and repair of dams.
- Fence and gate construction and maintenance.
- Mowing and trimming access roads.
- Providing access for regular monitoring and assessment by Land Bank, Preservation Trust, approved volunteers, contractors, and outside agencies.
- Identification and protection of significant conservation features.

IV. Scenic and Recreational Resources

The goal for the interim management of Zylstra Lake Preserve's scenic and recreational resources is to maintain and enhance them as opportunities arise. While the long term goal is to provide public access to the preserve, general open public access it is not permitted under this plan. The property has not been used or developed for public access and remains a working farm with numerous hazards. A great deal of uncertainty remains on whether the fundraising efforts to purchase the remainder interest in the property will be successful and many questions remain regarding specific stipulations on public access that might be associated with the grant funding.

The Land Bank and Preservation Trust do not want to set up expectations for public access which may not be able to be met in the long term nor expend resources developing and managing access that is not secure. The Land Bank and Preservation Trust will look for opportunities to host small scale special events for the purposes of research sharing, education, soliciting input on the project as well as cultivating a shared vision for the future of the preserve. Some neighbors and other nearby residents have enjoyed permissive and non-permissive access to the property from previous owners. During the interim period, general access is prohibited without prior notice and permission from Land Bank or Preservation Trust.

In addition to recreational resources, islanders have long enjoyed the scenic vista of the preserve, especially from San Juan Valley Road. Efforts will be made to preserve and enhance these views.

Specific tasks related to scenic and recreational resources include:

- A recreational assessment will be developed. The analysis will consider trails, access points, fishing, swimming, non-motorized boating, parking, other infrastructure, construction and maintenance costs, collaborative management opportunities, and level of public interest in accessing this preserve.
- Maintain road, gate, and primitive perimeter road.
- Invite input from and communicate with neighbors and the general public.
- Work with WSU Master Gardeners and/or other groups to salvage Lebanon cedars planted along the Preserve's northern border

Financial analysis

Annual expenses

Projected annual property management (2016– 2020):

Annual costs shown below are estimates and do not necessarily reflect costs born every year. Five and ten year totals show projections based on 3% annual inflation. Interim stewardship expenses, exclusive of staff time, will be shared equally between the Land Bank and Preservation Trust. Estimates below are for total expense, half of which would be the responsibility of the Land Bank.

Monitoring

Staff time is shown as estimated percentage of FTE hours by position.

Routine monitoring (*average once visit per month, three hours per visit*)

Staffing per visit:

Preserve Steward (.75)	1,240
Field Assistant (.75)	916

Annual boundary and preserve monitoring

(*Depending on site conditions may require two or more visits, total eight hours.*)

Staffing per visit:

Preserve Steward (1.0)	360
Field Assistant (.75)	204
<i>Subtotal</i>	<i>\$2,720</i>

Maintenance

Fencing, Gates, and Agricultural Infrastructure and use administration

Materials	300
Staff Time	600

Mowing

Contract	1,200
Materials	200
Staff Time	500

Dam

Materials	250
Staff Time	800

Road

Materials	500
Staff Time	500

Noxious weeds

Materials	100
Staff Time	1,600

Subtotal: *\$6,550*

Annual Expense Totals

<u>Year</u>	<u>Amount</u>
2016	\$9,360
2017	\$9,270
2018	\$9,548
2019	\$9,834
2020	\$10,129

Five-year expenses

One-time expenses that the Land Bank expects to incur within the first five years (or, more likely, within the first year) of this interim management plan include:

Assessments

Recreational Assessment	500
Historical & Cultural Assessment	3,750
Ecological Assessment	1,200
Agricultural Assessment	500
<i>Subtotal:</i>	<i>\$5,950</i>

Planning

Restoration	\$8,000
Recreational	\$4,000
Grant Administration	\$2,500
<i>Subtotal:</i>	<i>\$14,500</i>

Signage

Design and fabrication	1,500
Installation	350
<i>Subtotal:</i>	<i>\$1,850</i>

Fencing

Design, tools, equipment	1,200
Construction (with volunteer contributions)	7,000
Materials	10,500
<i>Subtotal:</i>	<i>\$18,700</i>

TOTAL **\$41,000**

Ten-year expenses

None are anticipated under this interim management plan.

Public Comments

Public hearings on this plan were held on [insert hearing dates] . The following comments were received:

[Insert comments, or summary thereof]

Public comments and questions are always welcome. The Land Bank can be contacted at:

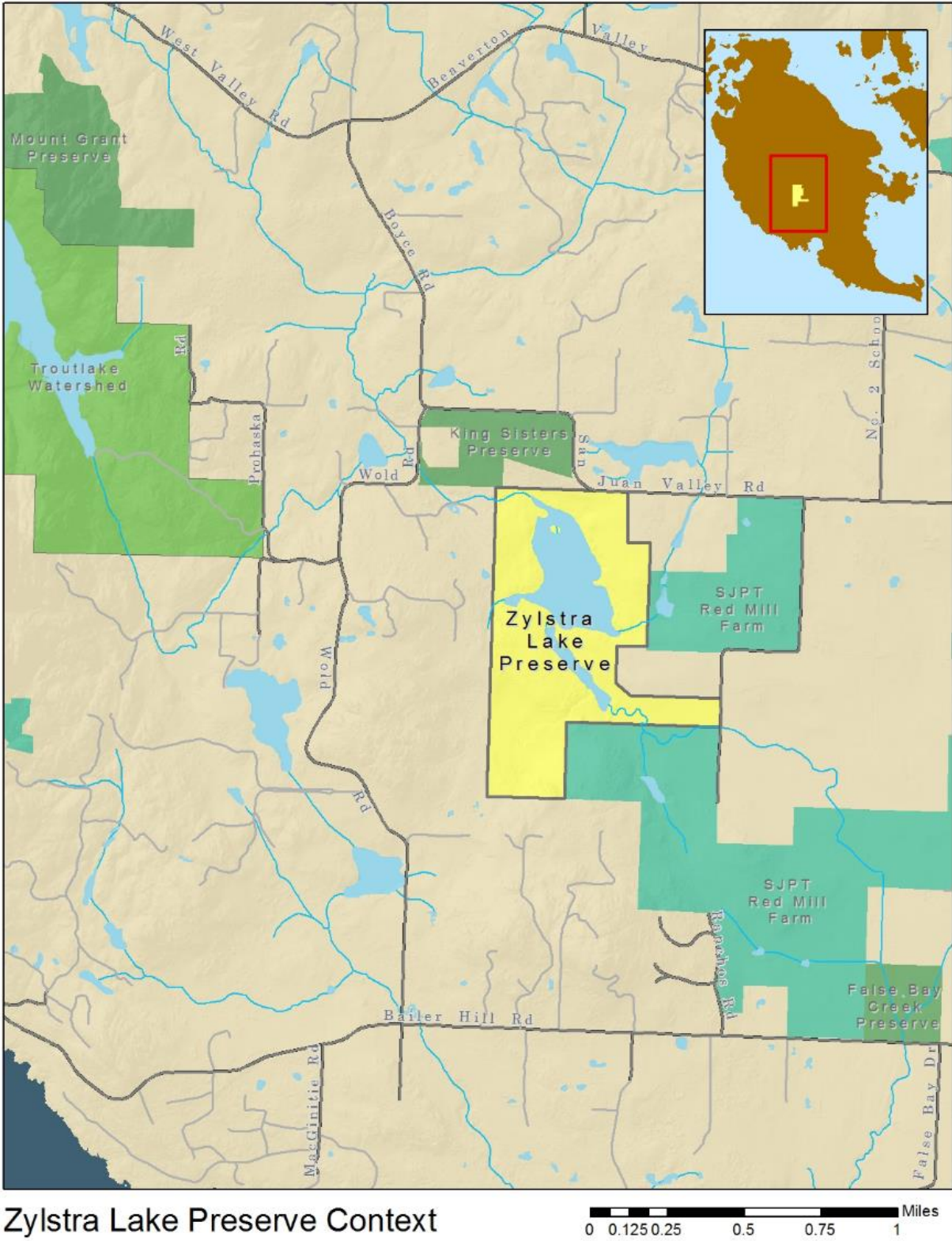
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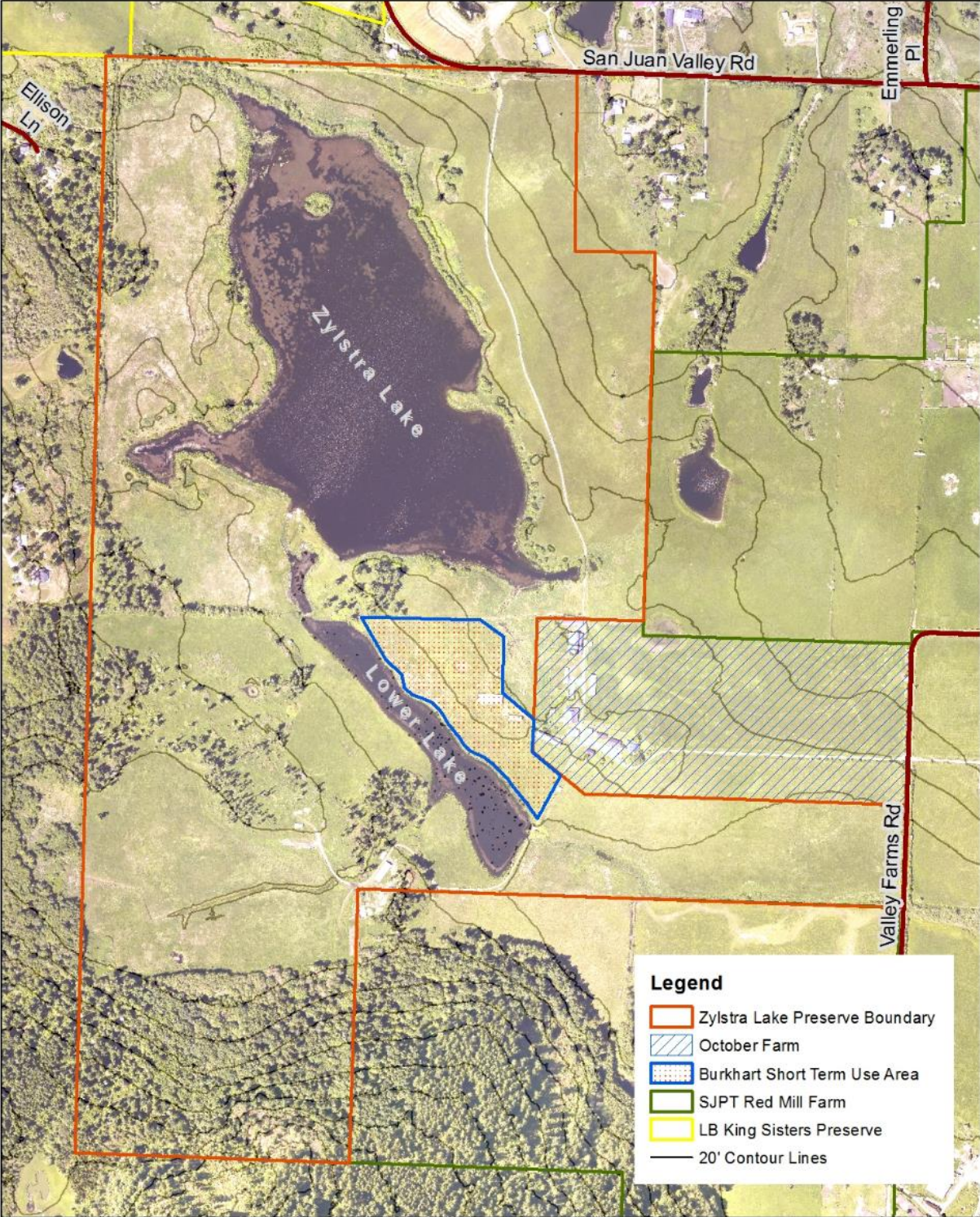
Figure 1. Zylstra Lake Preserve Context Map



Zylstra Lake Preserve Context

0 0.125 0.25 0.5 0.75 1 Miles

Figure 2. Zylstra Lake Preserve Topographical Map



Zylstra Lake Preserve Topographical Map

0 200 400 800 1,200 1,600 Feet

Figure 3. False Bay Watershed Map



Zylstra Lake Preserve - False Bay Watershed Context
