

Frequently Asked Questions

How much land does the Land Bank own?

Outright, about 4,400 acres.

How do you support taking land off the tax rolls?

Public land is a huge benefit for the county in that it:

1. Preserves the islands' character, and gives us places to go.
2. Plays a key role in keeping us competitive in the real estate market.
3. Helps maintain our property values.
4. Is the underlying driver of our tourism/service businesses.
5. Does not create a need for additional taxes as does development (ie: EMS/hospital/schools/roads/library/fire district).

If all Land Bank property were taxed, and the tax rate was lowered as a result, the savings to property owners would be roughly \$2 per \$100,000 in value. The Land Bank owns roughly 4,400 acres, or approximately 4% of the County's total land area.

Also, over 75% of properties purchased by the Land Bank were already in preferred tax categories. For example, 1,575-acre Turtleback Mountain was in Designated Forest Land (DFL) and the previous owners paid less than \$1,000/year in property taxes.

When will you be done? How much conserved land is enough?

The obvious answer is when the public decides not to renew the Land Bank real estate excise tax (REET). Beyond that though there are many ways to look at it. We are about saving special places, keeping the islands rural, giving people the chance to climb a mountain or visit a beach – or just provide a public space where people want it. As long as we have funding there will be opportunities to continue doing these things. As the population continues to grow, and new houses are built, the demand for public spaces will continue to grow as well.

Can Land Bank funding be used for other types of community efforts?

No. The Land Bank operates under state enabling legislation that requires the revenues be spent on conservation. Other community projects, while they may be equally important, must have a different source of revenue.

What is a conservation easement?

A conservation easement (CE) is a restriction on private property, usually to limit how many houses might be built or how many times it can be divided. Think of the view of a favorite farm across a valley. Imagine it with 10 or 20 houses added. The goal of a CE is to limit this and preserve agricultural or open space areas in perpetuity.

When does the Land Bank use conservation easements instead of outright purchases?

The Land Bank ordinance requires us to try and secure conservation easements (CE) when it's possible to protect the conservation values of a property without owning it. However, many sellers simply don't want to retain any ownership in a property once they decide to sell. Also, "low intensity recreational value" is part of our mandate, and it is usually not possible to secure any kind of public access on easement lands, so the Land Bank often purchases property outright as well.

How/when was the Land Bank established?

The citizens of San Juan County voted to establish the Land Bank real estate excise tax (REET) in 1990, after helping to create the state enabling legislation. Citizens have renewed it twice, in 1999 and 2011.

Does the Land Bank buy land and "lock it up" so people can't use it?

Absolutely not. Of the Land Bank's 35 Preserves, 24 are open to the public, 7 on Lopez, 8 on Orcas, 8 on San Juan, and 1 on Henry Island. Over 70 percent of the area of Land Bank Preserves is open.

What is the difference between the Land Bank and the Preservation Trust?

The Land Bank and the San Juan Preservation Trust (SJPT) work closely with each other and there tends to be confusion about who does what. The Land Bank is public and the 1% real estate excise tax comprises most of its revenue. SJPT is a private land trust and derives the vast majority of its revenue from private sources.

Can I hunt on Land Bank property?

The Land Bank allows deer hunting on Lopez Hill Preserve. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) allowed hunting on the property for many decades prior to the Land Bank's acquisition.

What is the "drone" policy on Land Bank Preserves?

Recreational operation of Small Unmanned Aircraft Systems (a.k.a drones) from Land Bank Preserves is prohibited. The Land Bank Director may grant permission to non-recreational sUAS operators to use Land Bank Preserves under certain conditions. To learn more about the Land Bank "drone" policy, please visit sjclandbank.org/faq.