



○ 2020

**SAN JUAN COUNTY
LAND BANK
ANNUAL
REPORT 2020**

1990 ○

**CELEBRATING
30 YEARS
CONNECTING
PEOPLE TO NATURE**

FROM THE CHAIR

CHRISTA CAMPBELL, CHAIR
CHRISTA@CENTURYLINK.NET

The sale of houseplants dramatically increased last year.

The trend was attributed to people attempting to compensate for the stress of the pandemic, and for their loss of opportunities. They sought ways to connect to nature; and so, they bought houseplants. When I heard about this, I felt a profound sense of gratitude for my good fortune to call the San Juan Islands my home, not just over the past 12 months but for nearly four decades. And, for much of my time here, the quality of life for which I am so grateful has been protected by the efforts of our Conservation Land Bank.

Last year, our preserves remained open.

We even opened two new properties for public benefit. These places, now 29 in total, provided island residents with critical opportunities to connect: to safely visit with friends, walk in forests, observe osprey and anemones. They provided parents and children with places to go for learning and play. On my own outings, I felt a sense of reassurance to find these landscapes so well-tended.

Every year's accomplishments matter.

But what I've come to realize is that how well we prepare for change determines our ability to withstand, respond and recover from it.

"The Citizens Conservation Land Bank" was voted into existence in 1990. Last year, we turned 30. And many of the special places that surround us, and that sustained the health of our island community, are a result of three decades of day-to-day hard work. This letter feels like a good opportunity, on behalf of the Land Bank Commission, to express our deep appreciation to staff, partner organizations, and to all the volunteers that have made contributions to our legacy. Thank you for serving on committees, clearing trails, picking up marine debris, pulling weeds and planting acorns, willows, and wildflowers.

Thank you all for tending to these beloved islands that we collectively call home.

LITTLE PRINCE'S PINE
Lopez Island



2020 ACQUISITIONS

LADY'S SLIPPER

Ihiya Conservation Easement

San Juan Island

IIHYA CONSERVATION EASEMENT (SAN JUAN)

In 2017, a group of San Juan islanders decided they wanted to purchase a property near them and turn it into a conservation area. They came up with a plan, committed funds of their own, actively fundraised, and even created a nonprofit to manage the property — the Ihiya Biological Reserve. Named for the reed that grows throughout its wetlands, their dream became a reality in 2018 when the group closed on this 30-acre parcel, adjacent to the Town of Friday Harbor's Trout Lake Reservoir and nearby the Land Bank's King Sisters Preserve.

In 2020, the Land Bank partnered with Ihiya by purchasing a conservation easement on the property ensuring that it will retain its open space character in the future. Ihiya's upland Douglas-fir forests, stretch of False Bay Creek, and extensive wetland area create a wide array of habitats for birds and many other species. Like many Land Bank preserves, Ihiya provides public access and features several established trails. This grassroots project provides a place of learning about nature and how people can better understand their role in our environment.

TURTLEBACK ADDITION (ORCAS)

Always iconic in the landscape of the islands, Turtleback Mountain was conserved by the Land Bank and San Juan Preservation Trust in 2006. Since that time, people have been able to enjoy its trails and views, forests and savannah. In 2012, the Trust purchased an additional 110-acre area to the west, connecting the turtle "back" to their existing Turtlehead Preserve.

This year, the Land Bank was able to add another 36 acres to the Preserve, and to connect the upland area, across Deer Harbor Road, to the shoreline known as Massacre Bay. The acquisition was made possible by a \$2 million donation from Malcolm Goodfellow who simultaneously returned another six acres of shoreline to the Lummi Nation.



The added area features mature Madrona and Douglas-fir, and a small patch of brittle prickly-pear cactus. This acquisition creates future opportunities for public enjoyment and enables the Land Bank to extend its restoration efforts on this Preserve all the way down to the saltwater. Thank you Malcolm!



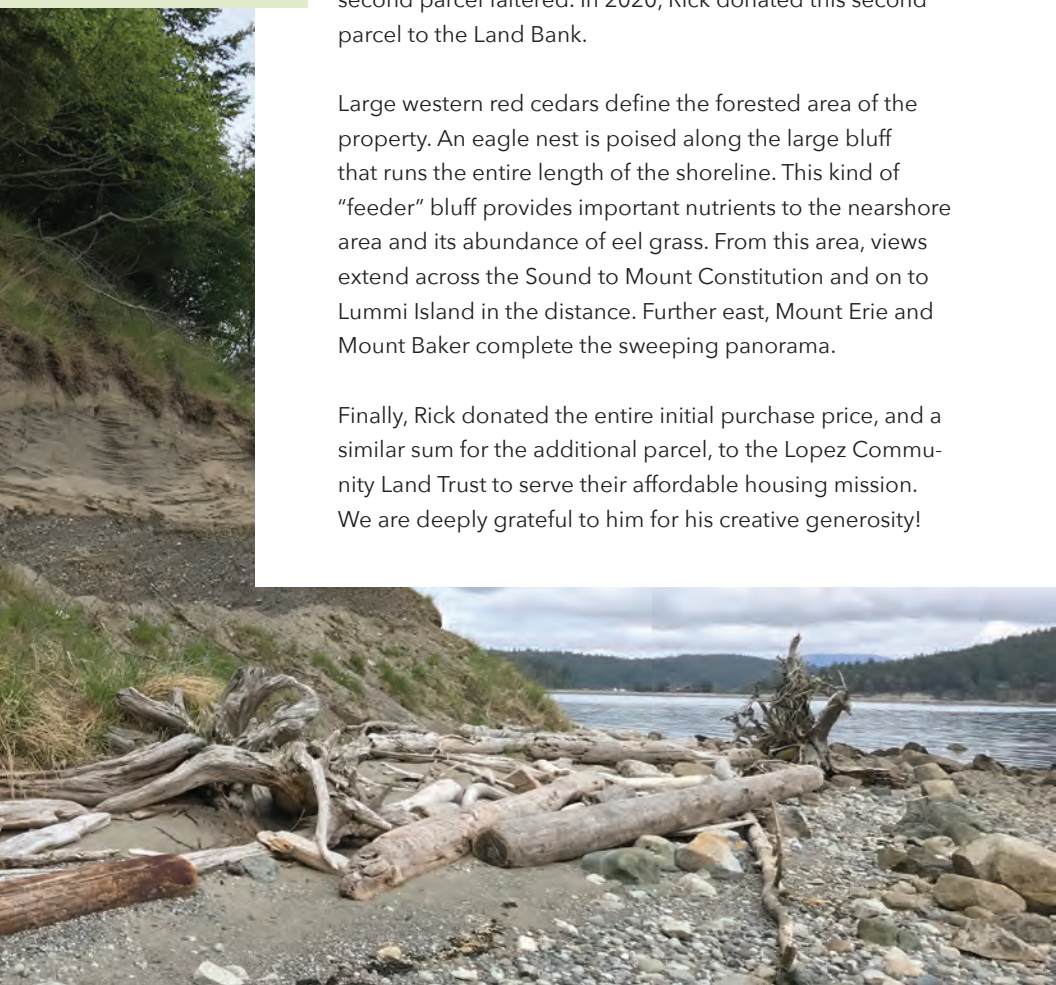
*MASSACRE BAY
Turtleback Mountain Preserve Addition
Orcas Island*

SPENCER SPIT ADDITION (LOPEZ)

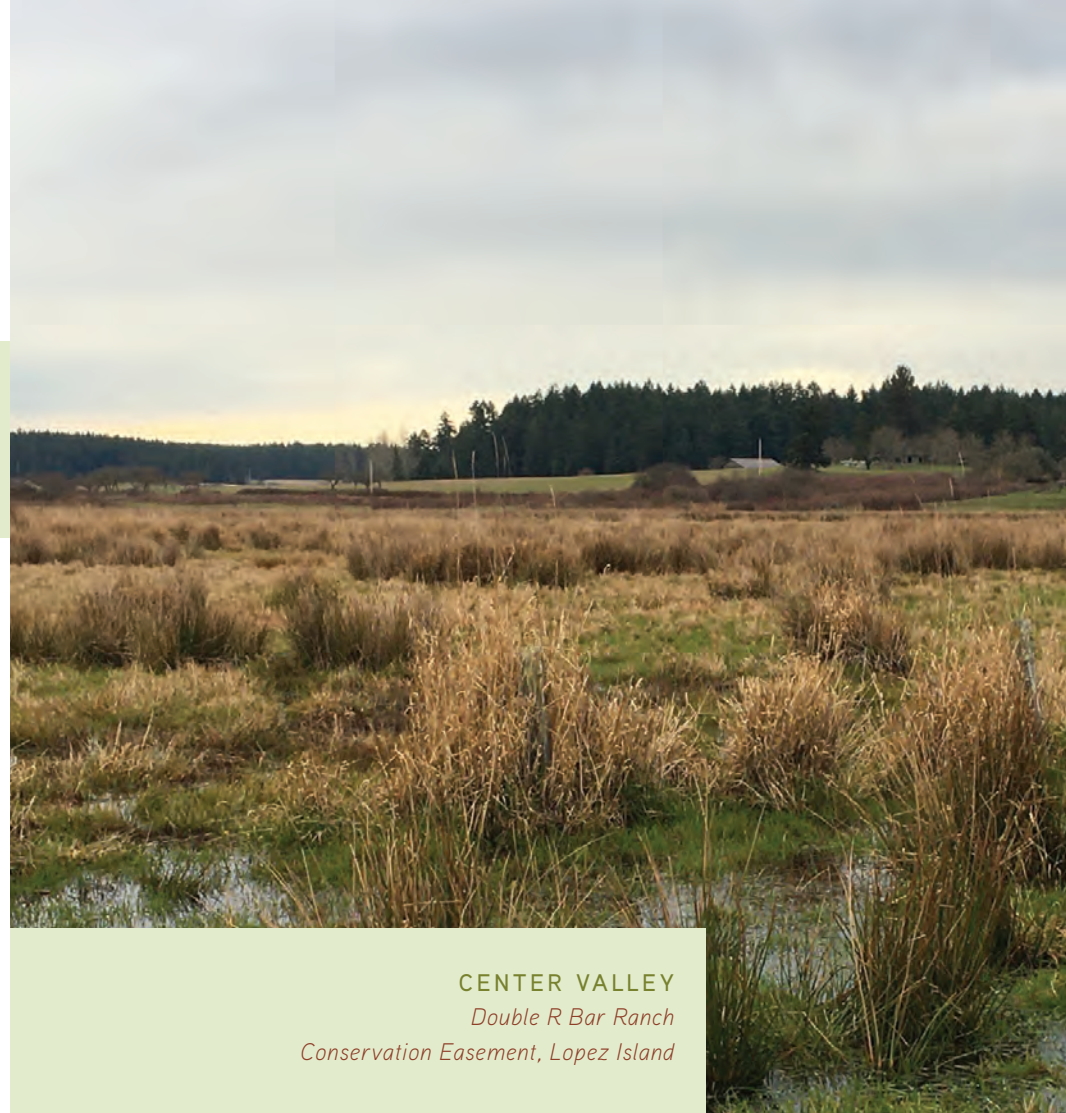
In 2019, we became aware of the potential to conserve 20 acres north of Spencer Spit, including a third of a mile of shoreline along Lopez Sound. The owner, Rick Strachan, offered the Land Bank and Washington State Parks each a ten-acre parcel at a deep discount. While the Land Bank closed on the first parcel, the transaction related to the second parcel faltered. In 2020, Rick donated this second parcel to the Land Bank.

Large western red cedars define the forested area of the property. An eagle nest is poised along the large bluff that runs the entire length of the shoreline. This kind of “feeder” bluff provides important nutrients to the nearshore area and its abundance of eel grass. From this area, views extend across the Sound to Mount Constitution and on to Lummi Island in the distance. Further east, Mount Erie and Mount Baker complete the sweeping panorama.

Finally, Rick donated the entire initial purchase price, and a similar sum for the additional parcel, to the Lopez Community Land Trust to serve their affordable housing mission. We are deeply grateful to him for his creative generosity!



*LOPEZ SOUND
Spencer Spit Addition
Lopez Island*



*CENTER VALLEY
Double R Bar Ranch
Conservation Easement, Lopez Island*

DOUBLE R BAR RANCH CONSERVATION EASEMENT (LOPEZ)

Double R Bar has been held by the Ritchie family for the better part of a century. They have produced beef and lamb, grain and hay, and a variety of other crops across the decades. In 1990, when the Land Bank was first created, this property, the linchpin in the Center Valley landscape, was a priority for farmland conservation. Thirty years and a generation later, the vision has finally become a reality.

In 2020, the Land Bank purchased a conservation easement on 130 acres of the ranch. The easement area encompasses the large freshwater marsh at the core of the property and extends up the hillside to the iconic Center Church near the southern boundary. In winter, the marsh hosts a variety of waterfowl, and in summer cattle graze back the grass and create open water for the next year.

The Ritchie family, now including a new generation, intends to farm the land for the foreseeable future. Keep an eye out for the property on your next trip south from the Village on Fisherman Bay Road.



30 YEARS

CONNECTING PEOPLE TO NATURE

First acquisitions:

Westside Preserve, San Juan Island (5.13 acres); **Eastsound Waterfront Park, Orcas Island** (.43 acres and 100' of shoreline); **Watmough Bay Preserve, Lopez Island** (75' section of beach donated); and **Weeks Wetland, Lopez Island** (22.56 acres).

First conservation easement:

Watmough Marsh, Lopez Island (13 acres).

First agricultural conservation easement: **Warm Valley Farm, Orcas Island** (78 acres).

San Juan County voters reauthorize the Land Bank through 2014.

First historic

preservation easement: **Tharald Homestead, Shaw Island**, donated by Fred Ellis.

First long-term farm lease:

King Sisters Preserve, San Juan Island.

For over six years, the Land Bank helps negotiate for San Juan County's remaining "School Trust Lands," pegged for trade to an out-of-state developer. The 845 acres now remaining in conservation, at no cost to the County, are: **Odlin South lease** (103 acres), **Mitchell Hill** (312 acres), **Lopez Hill lease** (400 acres), **Cormorant Bay** (30 acres).

Two major projects, **Mount Grant** and **Zylstra Lake Preserves, San Juan Island**, become reality. 141-acre Mount Grant's road to its summit now provides visitors with mobility restrictions the opportunity to enjoy its sweeping vistas. 285-acre Zylstra Lake plays a key role in protecting the False Bay watershed. Partnering with SJPT, the Land Bank secures over \$2 million in grant funding for the projects over the next two years.

The endangered Island Marble Butterfly (*Euchloe ausonides insulanus*), and 19 of her eggs, are observed in a SJPT habitat patch located on **Frazer Homestead Preserve, San Juan Island**.

1993

1999

2002

2008

2012

2015

2019

1990

1996

2006

2009

2011

2014

2018

2020

On July 1, State legislation takes effect allowing a conservation excise tax, enabling San Juan County Commissioners and voters to create the Land Bank. Four months later, voters approve the measure, launching the **San Juan County Citizens Conservation Land Bank**.

First trail opens at **Weeks Wetland, Lopez Island**.

The Land Bank pledges \$10 million and The San Juan Preservation Trust (SJPT) raises \$8.5 million in less than six months from over 2,000 donors, protecting 1,576 acre **Turtleback Mountain Preserve, Orcas Island** from development into 40 home sites. One year later, the first documented sighting of the elusive **sharp-tailed snake** (*Contia tenuis*) is found on the Preserve.

Working with the Department of Natural Resources and legislature, the Land Bank purchases a 50-year lease for **Lopez Hill, Lopez Island** protecting it from development.

San Juan County voters reauthorize the Land Bank through 2026.

Funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service helps launch **The Salish Seeds Project** – a cooperative effort between the Land Bank and SJPT to produce plants, bulbs and seeds of native island wildflowers and grasses for local restoration projects.

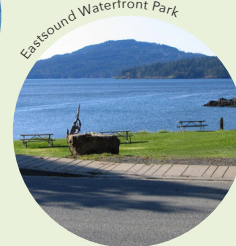
Through persistence, creative thinking, and community and legislative support, the Land Bank purchases **Lopez Hill** outright.

San Juan County Citizens Conservation Land Bank celebrates 30 years.

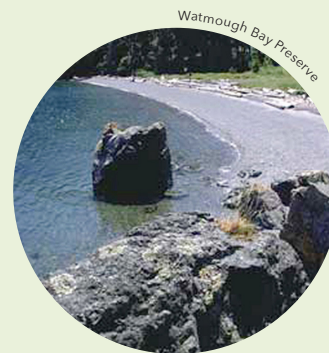
29 Public Preserves
12 Beaches
54 Miles of Trails
50 Conservation Easements



Westside Scenic Preserve



Eastsound Waterfront Park



Watmough Bay Preserve



Zylstra Lake Preserve



Rough-skinned newt, Mount Grant Preserve



Island Marble Butterfly, photo © Susan Vernon



Turtleback Mountain Preserve, photo © Kurt Thorsen



Sharp-tailed snake



Prickly pear cactus, Opuntia fragilis, Blakely Island Conservation Easement



Lopez Hill Preserve



ISLAND AGRICULTURAL LANDS

BY THE NUMBERS

\$3 M⁺

PAID DIRECTLY TO LANDOWNERS FOR FARMLAND
CONSERVATION EASEMENTS FROM 1993-2020

8

PRESERVES WITH OVER **600** ACRES OF PRIME FARMLAND

Products

HAY, MEAT, WOOL, DAIRY, EGGS, GRAIN, NUTS, FRUITS,
VEGETABLES, FLOWERS, SEED, NURSERY STOCK

Public Benefits

- PRESERVING PRIME FARMLAND
- PROTECTING SENSITIVE HABITAT & FRESH WATER RESOURCES
- FOOD RESILIENCY AND ECONOMIC DIVERSITY
- FARMERS' ACCESS TO FARMLAND
- SCENIC VALUES



OUR MANDATE

"To preserve in perpetuity areas in the county that have environmental, agricultural, aesthetic, cultural, scientific, historic, scenic or low-intensity recreational value and to protect existing and future sources of potable water."

- Land Bank Preserves
- Conservation / Historic Preservation Easements

Labeled preserves provide public access.



DO LAND BANK PRESERVES TAKE LAND OFF
THE TAX ROLLS, RESULTING IN
HIGHER PROPERTY TAXES FOR LOCAL LANDOWNERS?

ARE THERE GREATER COMMUNITY
BENEFITS TO ALSO CONSIDER?

We are often asked if Land Bank acquisitions “take land off the tax rolls,” resulting in higher property taxes for other landowners. To answer this specific question, yes, but very little.

To begin, the taxable value of Land Bank Preserves is about *one half of one percent* of the total taxable property in the County (roughly \$35 million of the total \$8.8 billion). If this amount were added back into the total, and the tax rate adjusted to keep the total amount collected the same, it would reduce the annual tax on a \$500,000 property by \$15.00.

However, the Land Bank also contributes to the total taxable value of the County because properties near conservation land

also have higher values (up to 20%) than similar properties elsewhere. If Land Bank Preserves were privatized and taxed, the loss in the total value of neighboring properties¹ would be considerable. Assuming just a 5% increased value, and an average \$500,000 value, this means the Preserves are currently yielding \$25 million in additional taxable value. Factoring this in, the reduction in taxes would only be \$3.50 for a \$500,000 property.

These are the numbers for today. But we think further questions warrant discussion such as, are there other tangible benefits that our preserves provide? And how will we come to quantify the impact and the value of conserving open spaces and other species in the future?

FOR ADDITIONAL FINANCIAL DETAILS, VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT
WWW.SJCLANDBANK.ORG/ABOUT/FINANCIAL-INFORMATION.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO SAN JUAN COUNTY'S
“CITIZENS CONSERVATION LAND BANK.”

2020 REAL ESTATE
EXCISE TAX (REET)

\$5.7M

TOTAL
TAXABLE VALUE
IN COUNTY¹

\$8,843,262,742

TAXABLE VALUE
OF LAND BANK
PROPERTY

.4%

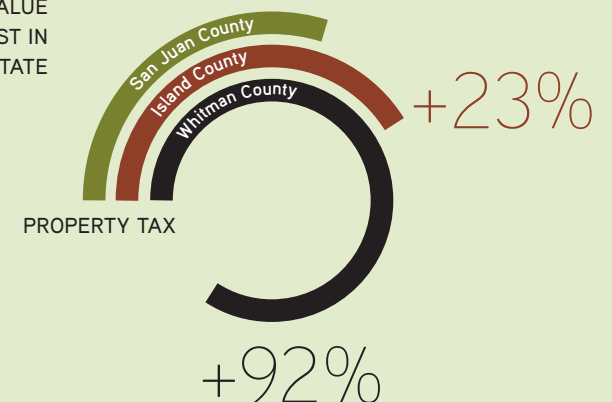
AVG. TAX ON
\$500,000
PROPERTY

\$3,670

TAX SAVINGS² OF

\$15

SAN JUAN COUNTY'S
PROPERTY TAX
RATE OF .0734
PER \$1,000 IN VALUE
IS THE LOWEST IN
THE STATE



¹ Approximately 1,000 properties; 300 adjacent parcels and, roughly estimated, 700 nearby parcels.

¹ SJC Assessor / 2020 Tax Year Statement of Assessments

² \$3.00 per \$100,000 in value, adjusting the tax rate to yield the same total tax figure.



STEWARDSHIP 2020

BY THE NUMBERS

2

NEW PRESERVES OPENED FOR PUBLIC BENEFIT

23,000

NATIVE PLANTS GROWN AT THE
SALISH SEED NURSERY

1000+

POUNDS OF MARINE DEBRIS REMOVED
FROM LOPEZ SHORELINES

1,260

HOURS OF STEWARDSHIP PERFORMED BY
THE YOUTH CONSERVATION CORPS ON
LAND BANK PRESERVES

\$645,000

AWARDED IN GRANTS FOR
HABITAT ENHANCEMENT

8,200

SEEDLINGS—DONATED BY 'ONE TREE PLANTED'
AND 'PROMISE THE POD'—PLANTED ACROSS
ORCAS PRESERVES

1000+

HOURS OF VOLUNTEER EFFORTS INVESTED BY
THE CONSERVATION AGRICULTURE RESOURCE TEAM
(CART) FOR COFFELT FARM PRESERVE.

The CART team included members of agricultural agencies,
stakeholders, and farmers. Their evaluation and assessment
of Coffelt Farm Preserve and subsequent report and
recommendations will help guide future farming activities.

THANK YOU, CART!



"When we were building trail at Ihiya, there was a special
spot where we would have lunch most days.
It was at the overlook and we would sit
on the moss and watch red-winged blackbirds."

LUCIE BRAHIC-KUSNER,
Youth Conservation Corps, 2020

MOMENTS OF AWE



"The day I helped with amphibian surveys, we peeked
between the leaves of skunk cabbage to look for frogs.
Connecting to nature is an active thing for me. It's not
just about looking, it's about learning and growing
my desire to care for life."

BELLA BLEDSOE,
Land Bank Intern, 2020



SAN JUAN COUNTY

LAND BANK

(360) 378-4402
sjclandbank@sjclandbank.org



350 Court Street, No. 6
Friday Harbor,
Washington 98250

Commissioners 2020

- Miles Becker, District 3, position 3
Christa Campbell, at large, position 7, Chair
Sandi Friel, District 2, position 2
David Meiland, at large, position 6
Jim Skoog, District 1, position 1, Vice-Chair
Douglas Strandberg, at large, position 5, Finance Officer
Brian Wiese, at large, position 4

Staff

- Lincoln Bormann, Director
Charlie Behnke, Agricultural Program Coordinator & Field Steward
Sarah Benson, San Juan Island Seasonal Nursery Assistant
Carlton Burns, Field Steward, San Juan Island (Jan-Apr)
Judy Cumming, Office Manager/Fiscal Clerk
Peter Guillozet, Orcas Island Preserve Steward
Eliza Habegger, Land Steward
Erin Halcomb, Stewardship Coordinator
Eric Nelson, Orcas Field Steward (Jan-Aug)
Doug McCutchen, San Juan Island Preserve Steward
Kayla Seaforth, Field Steward
Amanda Wedow, Lopez Island Preserve Steward
Tania Williamson, Outreach/Volunteer Coordinator

Photos contributed by staff and volunteers unless otherwise noted.
Printed on 30% post-consumer waste stock.

Design by Partners in Design

PRSR STD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
SEATTLE, WA
PERMIT NO. 744

ECRWSSDDM
POSTAL CUSTOMER