

# **Watmough Addition Preserve**

## **Interim Stewardship and Management Plan**



**August 2022**  
**San Juan County Conservation Land Bank**  
**350 Court Street No. 6**  
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# **Watmough Addition, Lopez Island Interim Stewardship and Management Plan**

## **Table of Contents**

<b>A. INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>B. PRESERVE OVERVIEW.....</b>	<b>3</b>
ACQUISITION HISTORY .....	4
INFRASTRUCTURE .....	5
<b>C. ECOLOGICAL RESOURCE OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>D. CULTURAL RESOURCE OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>E. HISTORIC RESOURCE OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>F. PUBLIC ACCESS OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>G. COST PROJECTION.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>H. PLANNING PROCESS AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>I. REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>12</b>

## **A. Introduction**

The Watmough Addition, located on the southern tip of Lopez Island, was long considered as the last unprotected property on Watmough Bay, and one with immense ecological and cultural significance. In February of 2022, the Conservation Land Bank purchased the 11.6-acre property from the Higgins Family Estate. This acquisition completed a conservation area that features approximately 450 acres of protected lands and 1.67 miles of shoreline.

The protection of undeveloped natural areas is a central tenet of the Land Bank's mandate, and establishing interconnected natural areas is one approach to mitigating the global crises of biodiversity loss and climate change.<sup>1</sup> After acquiring a property, the Land Bank creates a Stewardship and Management Plan (SMP) to guide decision-making and work planning, and to promote transparency. SMPs identify future management priorities and summarize annual, five-year, and ten-year maintenance activities and/or improvements. SMPs are adopted by the Land Bank Commission following a public hearing and then ratified by the San Juan County Council, typically as part of the County's budgetary process.

This Interim SMP for the Watmough Addition will temporarily satisfy the above requirements. Interim management periods are often dedicated to gathering pertinent information about a new preserve to aid development of a comprehensive long-term plan, and to eliminate immediate risks to ecological health and human safety. Interim management periods can range from 1-3 years, depending on the complexity associated with a new acquisition.

The interim period for the Watmough Addition may extend two years. During this time, the Preserve's invaluable ecological, cultural, recreational, and historic resources will be assessed; partnership support to offset the costs of acquisition will be sought; and opportunities for public comment regarding long-term management will be provided. Public access will be restricted to guided tours and volunteer events.

### **Summary of Interim Plan Objectives:**

- **To protect and assess the area's natural, cultural and historic resources;**
- **To seek funding partnerships to offset acquisition and management costs; and**
- **To provide avenues for the community and Tribes to engage in long-term stewardship plans.**

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<sup>1</sup> The Land Bank's mandate is 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."

## B. Preserve Overview

The Watmough Addition encompasses 11.6 acres on the south end of Lopez Island. The property is surrounded by public lands as well as private lands that have been encumbered from further development by conservation easements (Figure 1). Adjacent public lands and trails in the vicinity include 400 acres within the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) San Juan Islands National Monument and 13 acres within the Land Bank's Watmough Bay Preserve. Boulder Island, designated as a San Juan Islands National Wildlife Refuge, is 500-feet offshore and closed to public access.

The property has scenic views of Watmough Bay, Chadwick Hill, and across Rosario strait to Anacortes and the Cascades. The Preserve features 2,053 feet of rocky shoreline and two pocket beaches, remnant patches of coastal bald/prairie, and a mixed conifer forest. Bald eagles perch on several mature Douglas-fir trees; river otters utilize the nearshore and banks for foraging; and patches of chocolate lilies grow along the headland. This area is also designated as a high priority for salmon recovery within San Juan County.

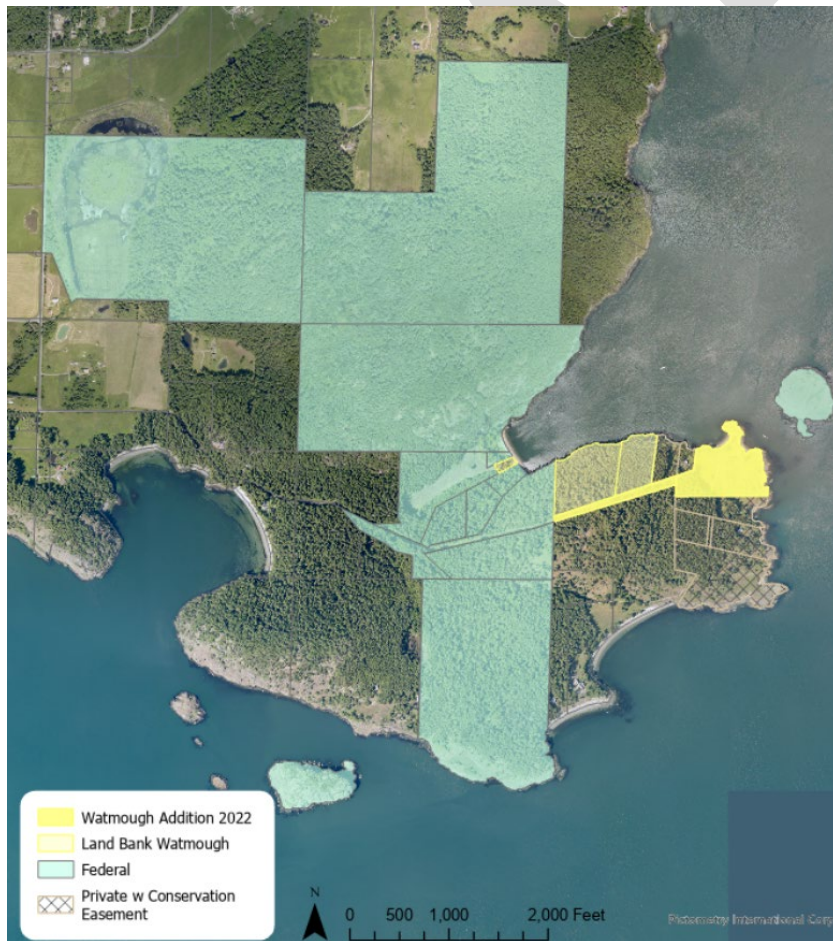


Figure 1. South Lopez Island, Preserve Context

The property is comprised of two parcels. The first parcel is a narrow two-acre strip that runs east to west.<sup>2</sup> This parcel contains mixed conifer forest and a powerline and connects to existing BLM and Land Bank properties. The bulk of the Preserve (9.6 acres) is on the headland parcel that forms the outer, southeast point of Watmough Bay.<sup>3</sup> This shoreline parcel includes a small portion of tidelands, an extensive shell midden, and numerous structures, one of which is the homestead built in 1876 by an early settler, Sampson Chadwick.

This landscape has been home to Coast Salish peoples since time immemorial. Euro-American use of the Preserve area dates roughly to the 1870's. In recent history, including at the time of purchase, the property was occupied and owned by the Higgins Family. The name "Watmough Addition" is considered temporary. A permanent name will be adopted, in accordance with the Land Bank's Preserve Naming Policy, prior to opening the Preserve for public access.

### **Acquisition History**

The Conservation Land Bank acquired the Watmough Addition from the Higgins Family estate in February of 2022. The purchase price was \$2.55 million. Prior to fee-title purchase, the Land Bank explored other avenues of protection as well as partners in funding. However, no agreements could be reached within the seller's timeframe, and pressure to secure the property before market listing necessitated quick action. A competing, private offer was also on the table and fortunately the seller favored conservation.

The Land Bank has been a key player in the protection of Watmough Bay since 1993. Transactions over the years, in the form of fee-title purchase, conservation easements and private donations, have sought to safeguard the area's rich nearshore and marine resources. The original Land Bank Watmough Bay Preserve was roughly .4 acres on the beach donated by the Oles family. In 2007, another nearly 13 acres were added with partnership support from the Salmon Recovery Funding Board, the San Juan Preservation Trust, and community donations. Subsequent conservation easements encumbered development on the adjacent private lands. The Higgins property was long considered as the last unprotected property on Watmough Bay, and one with extraordinarily high ecological and cultural resource value.

Now that protection has been achieved, the Land Bank will continue to seek opportunities to offset the steep cost of acquisition. To date, grant applications have been submitted to

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<sup>2</sup> Tax Parcel Number 142113001000

<sup>3</sup> Tax Parcel Number 142114001000



the State's Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB) and the Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account (ALEA). If awarded, these grants could potentially fund up to \$1.5 million, or somewhat more than half the purchase price. The SRFB grant application was submitted in June 2022, with a notification date of late 2022. The ALEA grant cycle begins in 2022 and award notifications will occur in late 2023.

The Land Bank will also continue to explore potential resale of the property to Bureau of Land Management. This strategy, which would utilize the nation's Land and Water Conservation Fund, was discussed prior to the Land Bank's purchase. Resale to the BLM could help the Land Bank recover the full cost of acquisition, and therefore free \$2.55 million for other conservation projects within the County.

The BLM's Resource Management Plan (RMP) is expected to be released in late 2022, and to clarify what activities will be allowed within the San Juan Islands National Monument. The Land Bank will review the RMP and host public meetings before any decisions are made related to retainment or resale of the property. This process may take up to three years as more information, including public input, is gathered. During the interim period, activities on the Preserve will seek to align with either path forward.

### **Infrastructure**

As an early homestead with continual residential use, the Watmough Addition possesses a variety of infrastructure including buildings, utilities, and fencing. Determinations about the Preserve's infrastructure will be made as more information is gathered. Maintenance, replacement, and repair of infrastructure can be a significant expense, and one goal of the interim period is to identify and analyze associated costs to inform long-term planning and management.

Structures: Structures on the property include: a 965 square-foot house, a 540 square-foot carport, a shed, chicken coop, outhouse and pumphouse. Many of the structures are old and in need of maintenance, replacement, or removal. The primary building onsite is the former residence associated with the homestead era and the Chadwick family. Preliminary evaluations of the historic cabin are provided in Section E.

Road: Access to the former residence is by a private road. Land Bank staff will use this narrow, graveled lane for maintenance purposes. On a few occasions, this driveway may be used to provide access for guided tours.

Utility Access Easement: A powerline runs through the upper parcel, and OPALCO has an access easement to service these transmission lines.

Well: A drilled well serves the property. Repairs to the well head have been initiated. At this stage, the water system will be maintained.

### **Preserve Caretaker**

The Preserve may benefit from an on-site presence due to its remote location yet proximity to a popular recreation area. During acquisition of the property, the Land Bank initially considered utilizing the cabin as a caretaker residence. While the current condition of the cabin is not suitable for that use, the existing utilities could support a recreational vehicle (RV) or tiny home. During the interim period, a preserve caretaker position may be developed to assist with maintenance, monitoring and outreach. This position may be modeled on similar programs at local State and National Parks.

## **C. Ecological Resource Overview and Objectives**

Habitat and resource protection is a guiding principle of the Land Bank's stewardship program. Maintaining or restoring an area's ecological health also typically preserves or enhances its scenic and open space character. The interim management goals for the Watmough Addition are to assess, maintain and develop plans to protect the area's ecological resources. Restoration activities may also be identified and initiated.

The southeastern shore of Lopez Island is known to be a significant area for fish, and the only area in San Juan County that consistently hosts wild, juvenile Chinook from U.S. waters. Watmough Bay currently supports sub-yearling Chinook, pink and chum salmon as well as forage fish. Species data from beach seines at Watmough Bay, set approximately 2,000 feet from the new addition, resulted in a total catch of 53,038 fish from 44 different species.<sup>4</sup> This included five different species of salmon and three species of forage fish. Watmough Bay is also a documented spawning site for surf smelt and it is currently a one-egg site for Pacific sand lance.

The Preserve's nearshore marine environment supports extensive beds of eelgrass and kelp. Its low-bank, rocky shoreline extends for 2,053 feet and pocket beaches have formed on either side of the headland. Pocket beaches are high-value habitat for juvenile salmon and forage fish; and both beaches will be sampled for evidence of forage fish spawning. The Preserve's terrestrial habitats include: a remnant coastal bald, a small herbaceous wetland, and mixed conifer forest (Figure 2). All show signs of human modification. A mix

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<sup>4</sup> [http://skagitcoop.org/wp-content/uploads/Fish\\_Summary\\_for\\_Watmough\\_Bay.pdf](http://skagitcoop.org/wp-content/uploads/Fish_Summary_for_Watmough_Bay.pdf)

of native and introduced plant species grow on the headland and a developed area surrounds the former residence and exhibits evidence of previous excavation and grading.

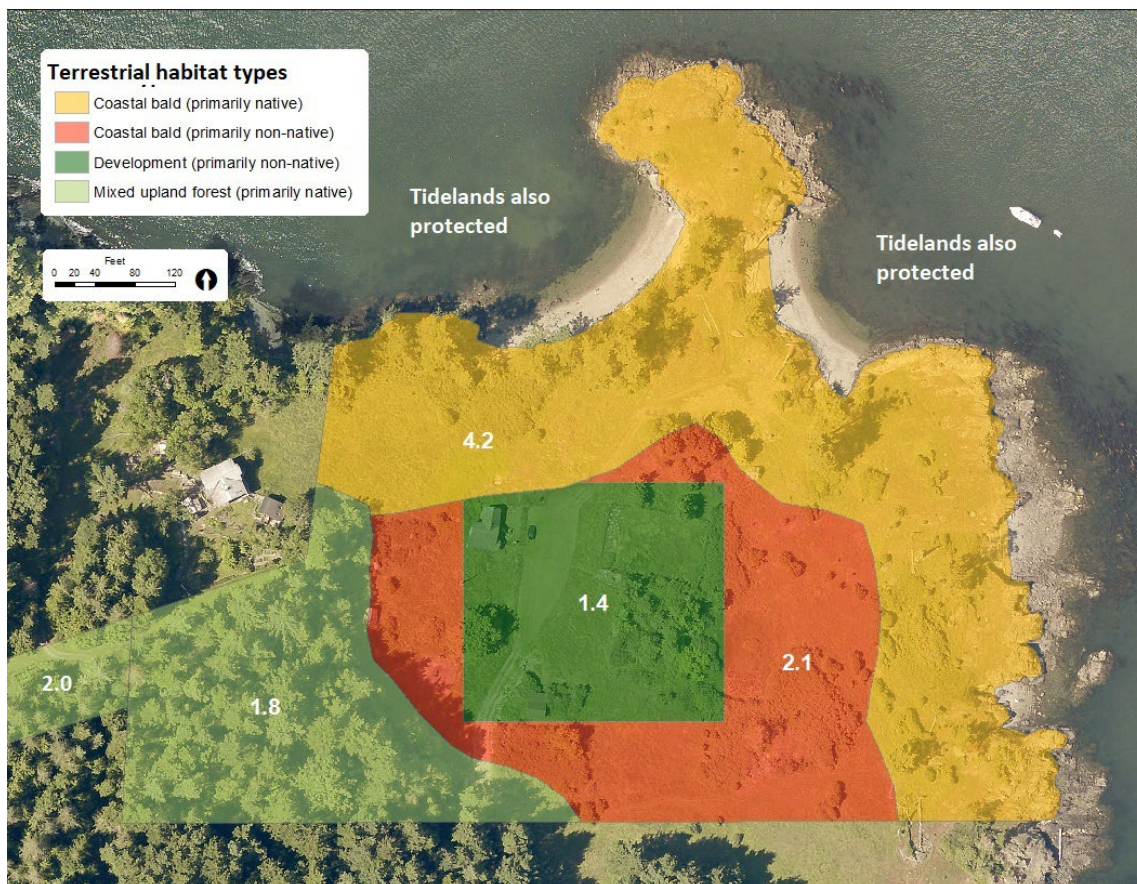


Figure 2. Generalized Habitat Areas for the Watmough Addition

A primary goal for the interim period is to complete an ecological assessment that documents species (flora and fauna) and habitats, for both the terrestrial and the marine nearshore, and discuss the important linkages in between. The assessment will identify any sensitive species or features that may require special management consideration, suggest opportunities for restoration or enhancement and list potential impacts from public access and use. This task is expected to be concluded in the end of 2022.

There are numerous noxious weeds on the Preserve and efforts to control these, in collaboration with the County Noxious Weed Board, will be an emphasis of the interim period. Initial efforts will focus on control of poison hemlock, bull thistle, Canada thistle, blackberry and introduced invasives such as periwinkle (vinca) and sweetbrier rose. In general, the Land Bank's weed management efforts focus in areas of greatest priority and vulnerability, and where actions have the greatest chance of success. Methods follow the



Land Bank's Integrated Pest Management approaches.<sup>5</sup> A vegetation management plan that covers developed and undeveloped areas will be drafted.

**Summary of Ecological Resource Objectives:**

- **Complete an Ecological Assessment**
- **Sample pocket beaches for spawning of forage fish**
- **Control noxious weeds**
- **Establish a vegetation management plan for developed and natural areas**

**D. Cultural Resource Overview and Objectives**

Native American tribes and First Nations of Canada have used the San Juan Islands as part of their ancestral territory since time immemorial. Coast Salish people gathered in the Islands to harvest shellfish and salmon from the sea, camas in the prairies, berries along streams and in forests, and other flora and fauna for food and traditional uses. These ancestral lands and waters are still utilized today, and are protected under inherent, ancestral, and tribal treaty rights.

The BLM has conducted a cultural resource assessment for lands within the San Juan Island National Monument, including Watmough Bay. Other archaeological research indicates that fishing, shellfish harvesting, and hunting were extensive in the area. A reef net site was located at the kelp beds between Boulder Island and the Preserve. A large shell midden exists also on the Preserve, though its full extent is unknown at this time. The Land Bank will consult with a resource specialist and have a cultural resource assessment performed on the Preserve, with the goal being to identify and protect any significant features.

Tribal outreach and engagement are also a high priority during the interim period. Correspondence with associated Tribes, specifically the Lummi, Tulalip, Samish and Swinomish, has been initiated. Communication to date has focused on notification of the Watmough Addition acquisition, acknowledgement of the importance of this area to Tribes, and an open invitation to participate in future management.

**Summary of Cultural Resource Objectives:**

- **Complete a Cultural Resource Assessment**
- **Invite associated Tribes to participate in management discussions**
- **Develop education and interpretation materials**

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<sup>5</sup> For further details see the Land Bank's *Guidance for Integrated Pest Management*.

## **E. Historic Resource Overview and Objectives**

Euro-American settlement at the Watmough Preserve is documented and evident. Sampson Chadwick, an immigrant from Canada, built the cabin in 1876. He farmed sheep, established a small orchard, and received a land patent in 1888 for 169.7 acres around Watmough Bay. In the 1970s, descendants of the Chadwicks gifted the property to Higgins family, and most recently the Land Bank purchased the property from the Higgins Family Estate.

Chadwick family history is documented at the Lopez Historical Museum. A historic property inventory was completed for the house in 1980 and did not result in a preservation listing. However, many original features such as, single-pane windows, varying rooflines, and a shingled roof remain. The Land Bank will continue to gather more information on the cabin, structures, as well as the heirloom orchard through an historic resource assessment.

Although the house has been consistently occupied, the overall condition indicates a need for maintenance prior to future use. Preliminary evaluations of the old house have revealed: structural needs on the foundation, interior lead paint, an outdated electrical system, and needed repairs to the bathroom and kitchen. During the interim period, the Land Bank will seek professional evaluations of the cabin, attain cost estimates for repairs, and review potential funding sources. The Land Bank acknowledges the community's interest in this historic structure and will share information gleaned from further assessment and gather public input prior to making any determinations.

### **Summary of Historic Resource Objectives:**

- **Complete a Historic Resource Assessment**
- **Attain a cost analysis for repairs to the cabin to help inform long-term plans**
- **Explore partnerships and future funding for cabin repairs**
- **Seek public input on the desired future use of the cabin**
- **Develop education and interpretation materials**

## **F. Public Access Overview and Objectives**

One component of the Land Bank's mandate is to provide opportunities for low-intensity recreation. A majority (76%) of Land Bank's preserves feature trails as well as opportunities to picnic and observe wildlife. Recreational activities are designed to minimize effects on a preserve's other conservation values and its neighboring communities.

During the interim period, the Watmough Addition is closed to the public. This closure affords staff the necessary time to meet with Tribes, neighbors, and other interested parties; assess and establish an ecological baseline of conditions; and work uninterrupted. The property also has numerous safety hazards related to its infrastructure. Signs will be posted to notify the public that the Preserve is temporarily closed to protect neighbor privacy, natural resources, and personal safety.

However, guided opportunities to visit the Watmough Addition, via hikes and volunteer events, will be provided throughout the interim period. The Land Bank is eager to share the Preserve's many highlights, its scenic views of Chadwick Hill and across Rosario strait to Anacortes and the Cascades, and to provide in-person updates about the project. The Land Bank will also arrange volunteer work parties and a monitoring program. Volunteer efforts help extend the abilities of the Land Bank's small staff, engage the community in stewardship of the property, and provide additional opportunities to access the Preserve during its closure.

Once all major work identified for the interim period is complete, the portion(s) of the property deemed appropriate for public access will be opened. This may take two years due to various regulations related to permitting, contracting and resource protection. Any future recreational activities and site improvements will also be evaluated for concurrence with potential funding sources. Access is currently envisioned as hiking-in from the established trailhead at Watmough Bay, and the guided, public tours will provide an example of this.

#### **Summary of Public Access Objectives:**

- **Connect with immediate neighbors and notify them of public ownership**
- **Post signage**
- **Provide periodic guided public tours**
- **Establish a volunteer program**

#### **G. Cost Projection**

This cost projection is intended as a financial planning tool and is not a commitment of resources. All figures are approximate. Actual expenditures will be reviewed and revised during the Land Bank's budgeting process.

Table 1. Cost projection

Year	General Operations		One-time Costs		Annual Subtotal
2022	\$15,000	General stewardship, maintenance, monitoring, noxious weed removal, site cleanup, planning	\$5,000	Ecological Assessment	\$46,500
			\$20,000	Cultural & Historic Resource Assessment	
			\$5,000	Well System Repairs	
			\$1,500	Signage	
2023	\$15,000		\$10,000	Structure assessment, stabilization	\$25,000
2024	\$15,000	General stewardship, maintenance and monitoring, noxious weed removal	\$10,000	Public Access Improvements	\$25,000
2025	\$10,000				\$10,000
2026	\$10,000				\$10,000
2027	\$10,000				\$10,000
2028	\$10,000				\$10,000
2029	\$10,000				\$10,000
2030	\$10,000				\$10,000
2031	\$10,000				\$10,000

Total 5-yr costs (2022-2027) \$116,500  
Total 10-yr costs (2022-2031) \$166,500

## H. Planning Process and Public Engagement

The Land Bank will share information gained during the interim period and seek public input on management directives. A scoping meeting to provide updates on the various resource assessments and to solicit input on future ownership and use(s) will be held in 2023. Prior to any opening, the Preserve will be named in accordance with the Land Bank's Preserve Naming Policy. Public comments and questions are always welcome. The Conservation Land Bank can be contacted at:

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