



Frequently Asked Questions

How much land does the Land Bank own?

About 5,000 acres.

How many acres of land are in San Juan County?

110,127

What percentage of overall land in the County does the Land Bank own?

4.5%

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.

What are the trade-offs and benefits of Land Bank ownership to the community?

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

1. Preserves the island's rural and wild 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 an underlying driver of our visitor/service businesses.
5. Does not create a need for additional taxes as does development (EMS/hospital/schools, etc.)

Does Land Bank ownership mean taking land off the tax rolls?

Yes

What is the impact of Land Bank ownership on the overall property tax valuation?

In any case, our impact is minimal. The taxable value of Land Bank property is less than one-half of one percent (0.44%) of the County's \$12.5 billion in total taxable value. 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. [Click here](#) for calculations.

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?

San Juan County is woefully short of public spaces as compared to most counties in Western Washington. Just over sixteen (16.4) percent of the of the county is owned by the public as opposed to 61% in Skagit and 61% in Snohomish Counties. While we will never be able to match these numbers because so much development has already happened, we can protect the best of what's left.

What is the Land Bank's vision for continuing conservation efforts?

We are about saving special places, keeping the islands rural, giving people the chance to climb a mountain or visit a beach – or provide a public space where people want it. As long as we have funding there will be opportunities to continue doing these things. And as the population continues to grow, and new houses are built, the demand will continue to grow as well.

Do Land Bank acquisitions limit affordable housing?

No. The vast majority of our Preserves are in the rural and wild areas of the islands and not suitable for affordable housing. In addition, there are currently just under 9,300 vacant parcels in the County with the potential for increased density in designated growth areas and rural clusters.

Does the Land Bank work with affordable housing efforts?

Yes. The Land Bank is always willing to consider partnering with affordable housing groups and has done so. In 2017, the Land Bank conveyed the Argyle lots in Friday Harbor for affordable housing. We have worked with Lopez Community Land Trust to facilitate the creation of affordable farmsteads, and with OPAL on satisfying mitigation requirements for one of their projects.

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. However, the County's affordable housing REET is only possible because we have a Land Bank ([Click here](#) for affordable housing enabling legislation). We're the **only County in the state** to have either one, or both, of these.

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.

Does the Land Bank buy land and “lock it up” so people can’t use it?

Absolutely not. Of the Land Bank's 39 Preserves, 29 are open to the public, 8 on Lopez, 8 on Orcas, 12 on San Juan, and 1 on Henry Island, or over 74%. More are on the way!

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. Our partnership has allowed us to complete projects neither could have done on their own like Turtleback Mountain, or Mount Grant.

Can I hunt on Land Bank property?

The Land Bank allows limited Black-tail deer hunting on Mount Grant Preserve (San Juan Island) and Lopez Hill Preserve (Lopez Island). For current hunting access information, [click here](#).

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 nonrecreational sUAS operators to use Land Bank Preserves under certain conditions. To learn more about the Land Bank “drone” policy, [click here](#).

How much does the Land Bank spend on administrative costs?

The Land Bank ordinance requires administrative costs to be less than 10% of its revenues. Over the history of the program these costs have averaged under 5% of revenue. These expenditures include salaries of staff doing administrative work, technology, producing and mailing an annual report, and a variety of other tasks.

How has the Land Bank worked to preserve agricultural lands and active farming?

Purchases of property and conservation easements have protected nearly 1,600 acres of agricultural land, preserving our rural landscape for everyone now and into the future. Additionally, the Land Bank leases nearly 400 acres to local farmers.

How does the Land Bank make decisions about spending its acquisition funds?

The Land Bank is very careful in selecting projects and in determining fair prices. Appraisals are done except where it is clear the purchase is below appraised value, as when there is a partial donation, or where partnering reduces the County share of the acquisition. In fact, the Land Bank has raised nearly \$53 million through partnerships and grants to stretch the funds we receive from the real estate excise tax.

What is the Conservation Land Bank doing to advance climate change adaptation and mitigation?

Global climate change is expected to cause significant environmental, social and economic disruptions across the archipelago of San Juan County and the broader Salish Sea. Multiple reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change^[1] indicate that the actions we take

in the next decades are likely to be crucial in maintaining the planet's life support system for centuries or millennia to come.

Climate change threatens many of the aspects of life in the San Juans that we hold dear, from agriculture, to clean water, to healthy western red cedar trees. The Conservation Land Bank aims to contribute to broader climate resilience through its investments and stewardship.

The ability to preserve functioning natural landscapes through acquisition of preserve areas or of conservation easements on private property is the Land Bank's most significant contribution to climate change mitigation. Using principles supported by academic research and the broader conservation community, we will strive to protect large natural landscapes, habitat for imperiled plants and animals, and ecological connectivity.

On properties we manage we will evaluate climate-change related risks, develop clear goals, and take concrete action to build ecological resilience. In particular, we will prioritize the protection of water resources, use best practices to promote the ability of soils and vegetation to absorb and store carbon, increase forest health and resiliency against severe wildfire, and manage invasive species that threaten ecosystem function. We will also focus on protecting climate refugia at various scales both for flora and fauna and also for the people who inhabit this place.

Finally, as a part of [County government](#), the Land Bank will work closely with the [Department of Environmental Stewardship](#) as well as with the inter-agency Terrestrial Managers Group, to help develop and implement county-wide climate change initiatives.

[1] <https://www.ipcc.ch/>