



## **FACT SHEET**

### **ACQUISITION – HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?**

The question of how much conserved land is “enough” comes up fairly regularly in casual conversations around the Islands. Often there is a misperception about how many acres the Land Bank owns, how much it costs the community, and how it competes with other land uses such as affordable housing. In any case, how much is enough is legitimate question.

#### **1. The Conservation Land Bank Owns 39 Preserves Totaling Just Over 5,000 Acres. This is Roughly 4.5% of the County’s Land Area.**

Thirty preserves are open to the public with over 50 miles of trail. The Preserves encompass mountain (and hill) tops, rare wetlands, shorelines, forests and fields. (400 acres are actively farmed).

#### **2. Wildlands, Water and Farms Give us Life. Much of Our Islands Remains Unprotected.**

To better withstand increasingly unpredictable weather conditions such as heat waves and drought, and wild temperature swings, scientists are recommending 30% of land areas be conserved.<sup>1</sup>

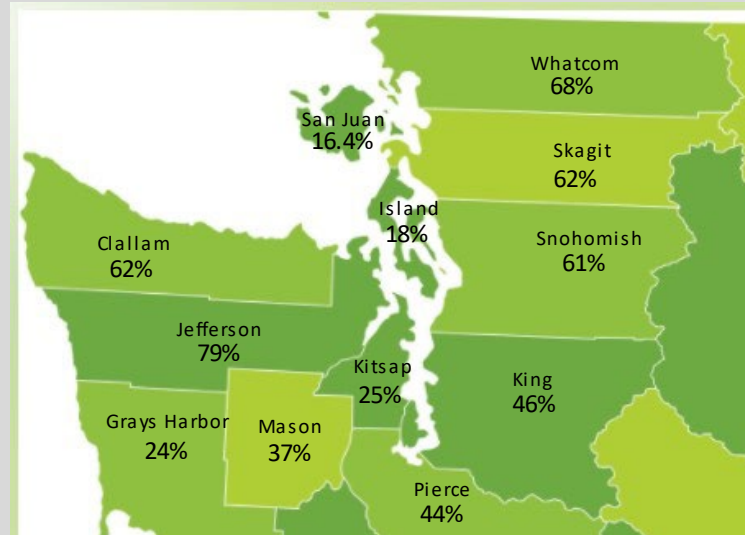
Our forests provide wildlife habitat and clean water. Our farms give us fresh local foods. Our shorelines create the connection from land to sea and the nursery for salmon -- and the fish and insects they eat – and ultimately support marine mammals including our iconic Orcas.

With just 16.4% in public ownership lands, the County is among the lowest in Western Washington. The Land Bank owns just 4½% of that.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://sdg.iisd.org/news/scientists-call-for-protecting-30-percent-of-lands-by-2030/>

## Percent of Public Land in Western Washington Counties



Source: WA Recreation and Conservation Office Tribal and Public Lands Inventory



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While there are extensive federal lands in many of these mainland counties, San Juan still lags behind Island and Kitsap counties. Additionally, the city of Anacortes has 30% of its area in public ownership.

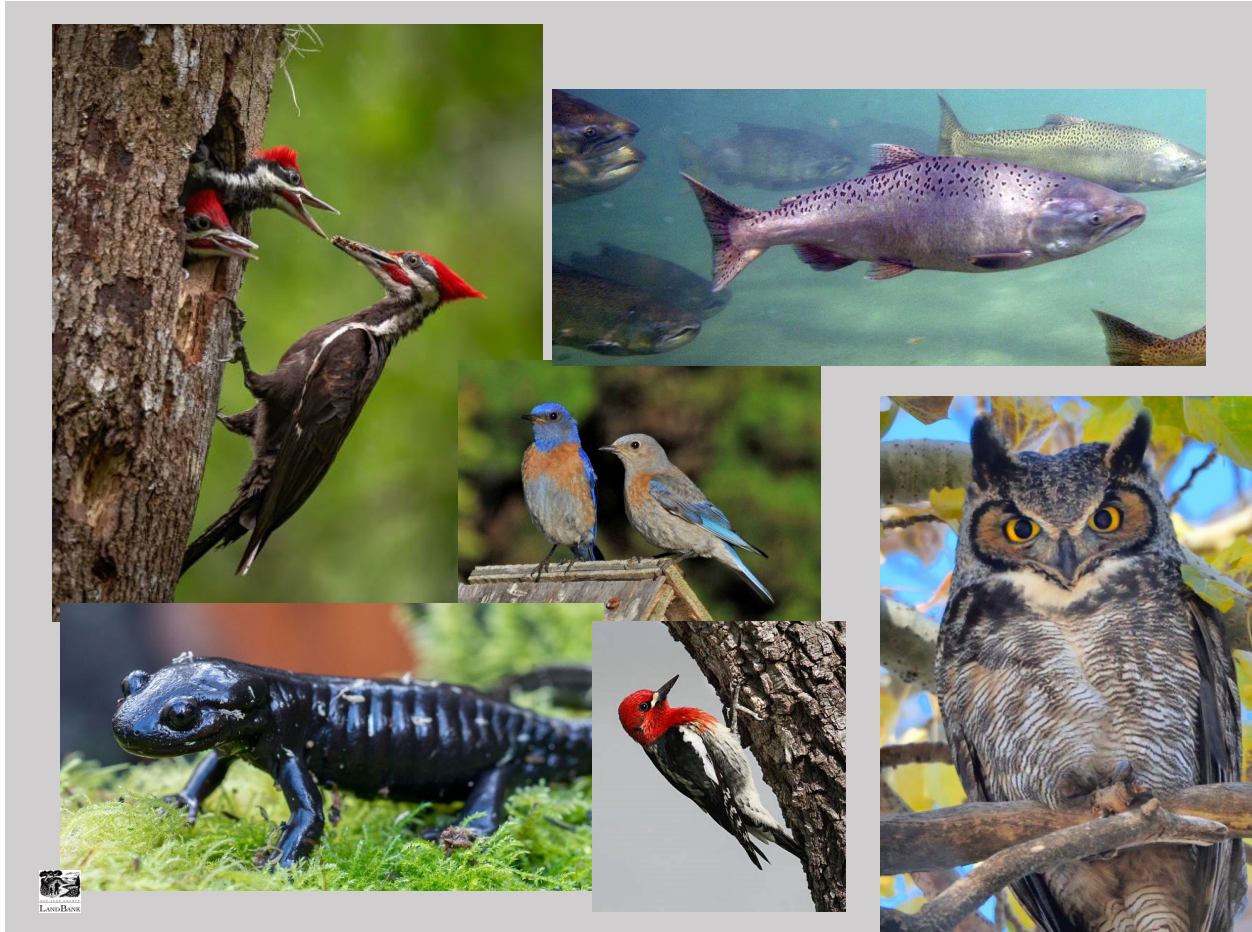
There are between 7,650 (current) and 9,650 (potential) undeveloped parcels in the County and the Council has the authority to create more density in urban growth areas (see our Affordable Housing Factsheet). Those vacant spaces are filling quickly. **In 2022, 1,200 building and 700 stormwater permits were issued and 405 structures were built with a taxable value of \$130M.**

The reality is that we have a chance to push past the 20% mark with reauthorized funding – perhaps another 3,000 acres (7% Land Bank). By the end of the end of the Land Bank’s next reauthorization cycle in 2038 there will be much more limited opportunities for conservation of larger properties or shoreline areas. Currently 65% of the land area on the three most populated islands is already developed or has vacant lots hemmed in by development (San Juan - 72%, Orcas - 66%, and Lopez - 52%). By that time, the County could see its population cross the 25-30,000-person threshold<sup>2</sup>, and conservation

<sup>2</sup> Assuming an annual growth rate of 2%, the County would pass 25,000 residents at the end of 2038.

emphasis will likely shift to stewardship and smaller parcels within developed areas.

### 3. Have You Saved Enough for Us?



Pileated woodpeckers require areas of forest with large trees, standing snags and other old growth characteristics. For each breeding pair, this means at least 200 acres of high-quality habitat. They remain in these territories for their entire lives and may pass them on intergenerationally. We have very limited habitat that meets their requirements, and it will be critical to conserve core areas for them to survive. Pileateds are critical to many other species as well; they excavate new nest cavities each year and the old ones provide homes for many other bird species as well as mammals like flying squirrels.

Red-breasted sapsuckers are declining throughout the Northwest and in the Islands as well. Also requiring large standing snags for nesting and foraging conserving our intact forest areas will be increasingly important.

Great Horned owls and barred owls have large home ranges, and nest typically deep in the forests of Orcas (Moran or Turtleback) or the western areas of San

Juan. As we continue to develop in and around these areas, populations will decline and with that our nights become silent.

Western Bluebirds, Northwestern salamanders, and Chinook salmon also depend on very particular places and characteristics: unpolluted wetlands, open fields with abundant insects, natural shorelines with feeder bluffs and pocket beaches. We know wildlife is diminishing and we have to do what we can to save the most critical areas and processes.

## **5. Land Bank Preserve purchases have a quite small impact on overall property taxes paid.**

While outright purchases do remove properties from the tax rolls, over 75% of our acquisitions are of property already in reduced tax categories where the landowner has paid very little. For example, properties such as Turtleback Mountain which are in the Designated Forestland category, are taxed at roughly 35 cents per acre/year. In other cases, we are purchasing or receiving property from other government agencies, such as the Department of Natural Resources school trust lands that were already tax-exempt. These properties were not protected and could have been harvested for timber or sold for development.

The taxable value of Land Bank holdings are a tiny fraction of the total taxable value of real estate in the County – less than one half of one percent. In any case, the County's property tax rate is the lowest in the state.