2024-2030
Strategic Plan
Message from the Land Bank Commission

Over thirty years ago, San Juan County residents had the vision to protect the best of their remaining natural places and farmlands by creating the Conservation Land Bank. During those decades, the Land Bank has acquired and preserved 5,000 acres of land, including 30 preserves that are open to the public and 400 agricultural acres leased to local farmers. More recently, through our meetings and community conversations, we've realized that you, our fellow islanders, want to know more about what we do and be involved in helping us do it.

This 2024–2030 Strategic Plan responds to what we’ve heard through interviews and a survey, as well as discussions at the Land Bank’s recent Strategic Planning Retreat. The clear message from respondents in these processes, and from the Land Bank Commission, is that San Juan County residents appreciate and support the Land Bank but want more from us. This includes better communication, additional opportunities to volunteer, and insight into how we do acquisitions and make stewardship decisions.

The 2024–2030 Strategic Plan is designed to guide the Land Bank through the next six years of its operations, to share that roadmap with you and to invite you to participate in that journey, whether it is as a volunteer steward, an attendee at our monthly public meetings, or simply by enjoying our preserves and appreciating the special places we have. We are proud to be the only county in Washington State which has approved and supported a public land bank three times over the past three decades. We look forward to your comments on this Draft Strategic Plan, and to your continued participation and support going forward into our fourth decade.

Brian Wiese, Commission Chair
# Table of Contents

I. Executive Summary 4

II. Introduction 5
   Purpose of Strategic Plan 5
   Approach to Developing the Strategic Plan 5
   Document Organization 6
   Table 1: Strategic Plan Terms and Definitions 7

III. Background and Overview 8
   Overview of the Lank Bank’s History, Governance Structure, and Mandate 8
   Map of Preserves and Conservation Easements 9
   Key Accomplishments 10
   How Conservation Works in San Juan County 12

IV. Vision, Mission and Core Values 14

V. Goals, Strategies and Year One Priority Actions 15
   Table 2: Goals, Strategies and Year One Priority Actions 16

VI. Next Steps and Implementation 21
I. Executive Summary

VISION  Conserving the Islands’ best places.

MISSION  To protect and steward the islands’ natural and cultural heritage and provide access to nature close to home.

CORE VALUES

1. Collaboration
2. Conservation & Preservation
3. Engagement
4. Integrity & Accountability
5. Service

MAJOR GOALS

The Land Bank has identified five major goals to be achieved over the six-year lifespan of the Strategic Plan. Each goal represents one of the Land Bank’s five program areas.

1. Communications – Build/enhance the community’s understanding of and support for the Land Bank.

2. Community Engagement – Increase community ownership of and participation in the Land Bank.

3. Land Acquisition – Increase conservation to maximize the islands’ resiliency and health.

4. Organizational / Operational – Cultivate an efficient, equitable, and sustainable organization that leverages staff expertise and community partnerships.

5. Stewardship – Manage lands with intention and consistency.
II. Introduction

Purpose of Strategic Plan

The 2024–2030 San Juan County Conservation Land Bank (Land Bank) Strategic Plan (Strategic Plan) reflects the collective vision, mission, core values, and six–year goals of the Land Bank’s Commissioners, staff, key partners, and the broader San Juan community. The Strategic Plan includes a list of strategies to achieve each of the six–year goals, as well as Year One Priority Actions to begin making progress immediately. The Strategic Plan is an essential planning tool that provides clear guidance to Land Bank leadership and staff as they work to fulfill the Land Bank’s legal mandate and represents the Land Bank's commitment to the residents of San Juan County. Because the Land Bank is subject to reauthorization by San Juan County voters every 12 years, the Commission elected to create a six–year plan to enable revisions at the mid–point in the event of reauthorization.

Approach to Developing the Strategic Plan

This Strategic Plan is the result of a year–long process led by a Planning Committee comprised of Land Bank Commissioners and staff. The Planning Committee worked closely with a Strategic Planning consultant, Triangle Associates, and engaged all Land Bank Commissioners and staff throughout the process. The Planning Committee met approximately quarterly throughout the year to determine the scope and scale of the Strategic Plan; design and implement an outreach and engagement process that involved key partners, stakeholders, and the broader San Juan community; and determine an efficient approach to developing a Plan with broad buy–in and support.

The Strategic Plan was developed in two phases.

**Phase 1** involved extensive outreach and engagement of Land Bank partners, stakeholders, and the broader San Juan community. This engagement phase was designed to better understand unique perspectives about the Land Bank’s operations, approaches to communications, and priorities for the future. Two methods of engagement were used:
1. **One-on-one interviews**

Sixty-six key partners and stakeholders were interviewed in one-on-one sessions for approximately one hour each. The 66 interviewees were identified by Land Bank Commissioners and staff and represent diverse interests and sectors across the islands. Each interviewee was asked the same set of questions designed to gauge knowledge/experience with the Land Bank, perspective about the Land Bank’s operations, and ideas/opinions regarding future priorities for the Land Bank.

2. **Online survey**

Once interviews were completed, an online survey was posted on San Juan County’s *Engage* platform. This survey was designed to reach a broader audience on similar topics and questions as those covered through interviews. Almost 600 people responded to the survey (over 90 percent of these were full-time residents).

**Phase 2** involved a publicly advertised, two-day in-person strategic planning retreat from December 14–15, 2023, in Friday Harbor. Retreat participants included all Land Bank Commissioners and staff, additional San Juan County staff and elected officials, former Land Bank Commissioners, and representatives from one of the Land Bank’s partner organizations, the San Juan Preservation Trust. The retreat included facilitated discussions and small- and large-group activities designed to clarify and get buy-in on the organization’s vision, mission, core values, goals, strategies, and Priority Year One Priority.

**Document Organization**

The Strategic Plan is organized as follows.

- A brief overview of the Land Bank, including its background, history, and major accomplishments to date.

- A summary of the Land Bank’s vision, mission, and core values statements.
• An overview of five six-year goals, one per program area: Organizational/Operational, Stewardship, Land Acquisition, Community Engagement, and Communications.

• Strategies and Priority Year One Actions needed to implement each of the five goals.

For reference, Strategic Planning terms (in the order they appear in the Plan) are defined in Table 1.

Table 1: Strategic Plan Terms and Definitions

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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| Vision       | • Answers the question: If your work is successful, what will the world look like?  
|              | • Describes the future.                                                  |
|              | • Timeframe: 20+ years/generational.                                      |
| Mission      | • Describes what is done every day to achieve the vision.                |
|              | • A broad description of the approach or main strategy for addressing the issue. |
|              | • Timeframe: 10–20 years.                                                |
| Core Values  | • The fundamental principles by which an organization fulfills its Mission and Vision. |
| Goals        | • Work towards accomplishing the goals puts the organization on track to achieve the mission and vision. |
|              | • Timeframe: six years (span of Strategic Plan)                          |
| Strategies   | • More detailed statements about how each goal will be accomplished.     |
| Actions      | • Day-to-day activities to implement strategies.                         |
III. Background and Overview

Overview of the Lank Bank's History, Governance Structure, and Mandate

Throughout the 1980s, land development and tourism in San Juan County were on the rise and the population was growing rapidly. Facing the loss of places they loved, a diverse group of locals sought a way to save treasured lands and maintain quality of life.

Their vision led to the creation of the San Juan County Conservation Land Bank. In 1990, San Juan County voters approved funding for the Conservation Land Bank through a 1% real estate excise tax (REET) paid by purchasers of property at closing. In this way the community could protect those special places that brought them here. For over 30 years, the Land Bank, guided by local input, has been conserving exceptional places in San Juan County.

The Land Bank is a County program governed by a Commission of seven volunteers appointed by the County Council for four-year terms. The Commission’s authority is codified in San Juan County Ordinance: Chapter 2.120.030–070. Since 1990, reauthorization of REET funding has occurred twice (every 12 years) via a County-wide vote; the next vote is scheduled for 2024.

The Land Bank’s mandate as defined by the Washington State Legislature is:

*to preserve in perpetuity areas in the county that have environmental, agricultural, aesthetic, cultural, scientific, historic, scenic or low-intensity recreational value for existing and future generations. (RCW 36.32.570)*
Map of Preserves and Conservation Easements

The map below shows the extent of preserves, which the Land Bank owns, and conservation easements, which are privately owned. Labeled properties provide daytime public access for low impact recreation.
Key Accomplishments

Recent notable accomplishments of the Land Bank include:

Acquisitions, Expansions and Restoration

- North Shore property acquisition, Orcas Island, 2022. Like many Land Bank acquisitions, the North Shore acquisition occurred in partnership with the San Juan Preservation Trust, one of the Land Bank’s most important partners, and was done to prevent an ecologically sensitive bluff and beach from being developed, and to expand the limited amount of shoreline available to all Islanders for hiking and recreation.

- Conservation easement over 130 acres of the RR Bar Ranch (Lopez Island). The protection of this scenic farmland property has been a priority since the beginning of the program.

- Additions to Cady Mountain Preserve (San Juan Island) for forestland conservation and public access and Watmough Bay Preserve (Lopez Island) to aid salmon recovery and protect cultural resources.

- Extensive restoration efforts, including on Turtleback Mountain (Orcas Island) and Mt. Grant (San Juan Island) to promote forest health and limit wildfire risk.

- Long-term lease of the Coffelt Farm Preserve (Orcas Island) to a private farmer and additional farmland leasing opportunities on San Juan Island.
Partnerships

- Strong partnerships, including with the San Juan Preservation Trust, which helped bring about important acquisitions, and the other conservation land agencies to more effectively manage Preserves.

Community Engagement

- Many opportunities for community involvement. All Commission meetings are open to the public and have remote access options; these include regular monthly, special, and management plan meetings. Additionally, there have been open houses, tours of newly acquired properties, educational events, and volunteer work parties. In 2023, the Land Bank had roughly 100 such opportunities.

- Inter–island engagement such as the semi–annual Community Conversations, dozens of work parties each year, and helping fund the utilizing the county–wide Youth Conservation Corps.

- An increased number of properties open to the public. Of the Land Bank’s 39 Preserves, 30 are open to the public. This includes nine on Lopez Island, eight on Orcas Island, 12 on San Juan Island, and one on Henry Island.

Programs

- The Salish Seeds program, which provides seeds and plants for restoration efforts, celebrated its 10–year anniversary in 2023.
How Conservation Works in San Juan County

The Land Bank is one of numerous entities working to conserve land in San Juan County. Washington State Parks, the National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the Washington Department of Natural Resources, and the San Juan Preservation Trust all have missions and mandates focused on land conservation and protection. Currently, less than 17 percent of land in San Juan County is publicly owned. The Land Bank owns four and a half percent.

The Land Bank is charged with protecting property by acquiring conservation easements and through outright purchases according to the elements of its mandate. Various criteria are used to help the Land Bank prioritize acquisitions, including:

- Shoreline priorities for salmon recovery.
- Opportunities for low-impact recreation.
- Landscape resiliency to climate change.
- Areas designated as important for agriculture and rural character.
- Rare ecological communities.
- Presence of wetlands.
- Important wildlife habitat.

When opportunities are presented, the Land Bank considers these criteria as well as financial capacity, opportunities for partnership, and the potential for securing additional revenue before agreeing to move forward.
Upon initial approval, staff work to come to agreement with the landowner on the project type (conservation easement on private property or outright purchase) and purchase price and structure. Once terms are reached, the project comes back to the Commission for additional discussion with public input. Ultimately, the Commission includes the project in a budget recommended to the County Council for approval after public hearings in both bodies.

Following a due diligence period where appraised value, title review, and other factors are considered, staff bring the project back to Council for acceptance of the deed. After this last step, the purchase proceeds to closing.

The Land Bank has been exceptionally fortunate to work with a variety of partners on many of these projects, most prominently the non-profit San Juan Preservation Trust. The Land Bank’s ability to match public funds with the Trust’s ability to raise money from private citizens has proved itself repeatedly. Neither partner could have done many of these projects on their own, but the synergy between them has brought seemingly impossible projects to fruition. In total, the Land Bank has been successful in matching its excise tax revenues with other sources of funding on a nearly 1:1 basis.

Guided hike on Watmough Bay Preserve.
IV. Vision, Mission and Core Values

VISION Conserving the islands’ best places.

MISSION To protect and steward the islands’ natural and cultural heritage and provide access to nature close to home.

CORE VALUES
1. Collaboration
2. Conservation & Preservation
3. Engagement
4. Integrity & Accountability
5. Service
V. Goals, Strategies and Year One Priority Actions

Five major goals to be achieved over the six–year lifespan of the Strategic Plan are identified in Table 2 below. Each goal represents one of the Land Bank’s five program areas identified as part of this process.

Each of the five major goals includes numerous strategies. These strategies include more specificity about work needed to keep the Land Bank on track to accomplish the goal. At the beginning of each new year, these strategies will be revisited and refined as needed, and a suite of actions needed to advance the strategy will be developed and prioritized. These detailed actions will be included in separate Work Plan documents.

An afternoon tour at North Shore preserve.

1 Year One Priority Actions were identified during the process to develop the Strategic Plan but have not been pulled into an annual budget with approved funding.
Table 2 includes the Land Bank’s five major goals, accompanying strategies, and examples of Priority Year One actions needed to advance the strategies in 2024.

**Table 2: Goals, Strategies and Year One Priority Actions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal 1 (Communications). <em>Build/enhance the community’s understanding of and support for the Land Bank.</em></th>
<th>Examples of Year One Priority Actions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategies</strong></td>
<td><strong>Examples of Year One Priority Actions</strong></td>
</tr>
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</table>
| 1. Share Land Bank news on actions and events through regular publication and emails, and the Annual Report. | 1. Develop a regular editorial column with seasonal topics to keep the public aware of Land Bank management.  
2. Continue to build the listserv and establish a “blast” list of partners to provide regular updates.  
3. Continue producing and distributing seasonal newsletter. |
| 2. Proactively address misinformation regarding the Land Bank. | 1. Create a communication cohort of citizens who are well-informed about Land Bank activities and initiatives. |
| 3. Ensure adequate resources to support effective communications. | 1. Develop a communications plan to help prioritize actions.  
2. Review communications activities and budget and increase as necessary to implement strategy.  
3. Seek opportunities to support Outreach/Volunteer Coordinator with contracted or internal assistant. |
| 4. Expand efforts to reach people via social media, presentations, open houses, and signage on the Preserves. | 1. Integrate videos and interviews into social media posts.  
2. Give regular presentations to service and professional organizations.  
3. Hold a minimum of one open house on Lopez, Orcas and San Juan islands. |
### Goal 2 (Community Engagement): *Increase community ownership of and participation in the Land Bank.*

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<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Examples of Year One Priority Actions</th>
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| 1. Increase and diversify the number of available activities/events to a broader audience. | 1. Develop a “Friends of the Land Bank” group.  
2. Integrate Land Bank activities into local middle and high school curriculum. |
| 2. Expand and improve the volunteer program.                              | 1. Identify and implement ways to make it easy to get involved with the Land Bank.  
2. Expand volunteer opportunities to include students.                      |
| 3. Improve the overall effectiveness of the Land Bank’s current outreach and engagement activities. | 1. Assess the effectiveness of current engagement activities to inform future priorities.  
2. Celebrate preserve openings and create a sense of community ownership.  |
Goal 3 (Land Acquisition): *Increase conservation to maximize the islands’ resiliency and health.*

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Examples of Year One Priority Actions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Increase collaboration with partner organizations.</td>
<td>1. Build partnerships for specific projects including funding/granting agencies and across organizational boundaries when the Land Bank is not taking ownership of properties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Prioritize strategic projects over opportunistic ones.</td>
<td>1. Continue work to refine and publicize generalized conservation priorities, including creating priority area maps.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Cultivate relationships with key landowners in priority areas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Increase the transparency of the</td>
<td>1. Communicate the Land Bank’s strategic priorities to the broader community.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Land Bank’s approach to land acquisition by better</td>
<td>2. Clarify acquisition criteria and decision making related to conservation easements versus outright purchase.</td>
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<td>articulating the “story” of land conservation.</td>
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**Goal 4 (Organizational/Operational): Cultivate an efficient, equitable and sustainable organization that leverages staff expertise and community partnerships.**

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| 1. Capitalize on existing staff relationships with community members. | 1. Establish consistent messaging; use existing Frequently Asked Question documents to support staff engagement with community members.  
2. Incorporate Land Bank themes into interactions among informal groups (trail users, mountain bikers, etc.).  
3. Actively recruit community members and organizations for Land Bank activities. |
| 2. Seek opportunities to leverage funds to improve adaptability and durability. | 1. Establish a centralized grant opportunity tracking and application process. |
| 3. Build and strengthen staff structure and capacity. | 1. Conduct an outside evaluation of staff structure, job descriptions, capacity, and succession plans.  
2. Support additional staff training and education. |
| 4. Build stronger relationships and collaborations with Tribes and other key partners. | 1. Strengthen relationships with County leadership and other County departments, including the Prosecuting Attorney’s Office.  
2. Continue to build and refine the Land Bank’s partnership with a variety of entities, including but not limited to: San Juan Preservation Trust, San Juan Conservation District, Terrestrial Managers Group, and affordable housing organizations. |
5. Advance the Land Bank’s policy and budgeting protocols, structure, and approach. Refine Land Bank policies and procedures to maximize operational efficiency.

   1. Update budget structure to link expenditures with key elements of mandate.
   2. Better align management plan updates with budget to support project implementation.

6. Expand the Land Bank’s efforts to increase climate resiliency and reduce emissions.

   1. Identify and prioritize climate resiliency actions by district.
   2. Invest in a carbon footprint review.
   3. Investigate the possibility of using Land Bank properties to sequester carbon and/or contribute to emissions reduction.

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**Goal 5 (Stewardship): Manage lands with intention and consistency.**

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<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Examples of Year One Priority Actions</th>
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| 1. Ensure that the management and stewardship of all Land Bank properties continue to adhere to best practices and standards. | 1. Adopt a plan and timeline to ensure that all Land Bank preserves have a current management plan.  
2. Develop standards for recreational infrastructure. |
VI. Next Steps and Implementation

Throughout the six–year timeframe of the Strategic Plan, the Land Bank will hold annual, facilitated discussions to review progress towards achieving each of the listed goals and identify and prioritize the following year’s suite of actions needed to continue making progress. These priority actions will be summarized in an Annual Work Plan.