

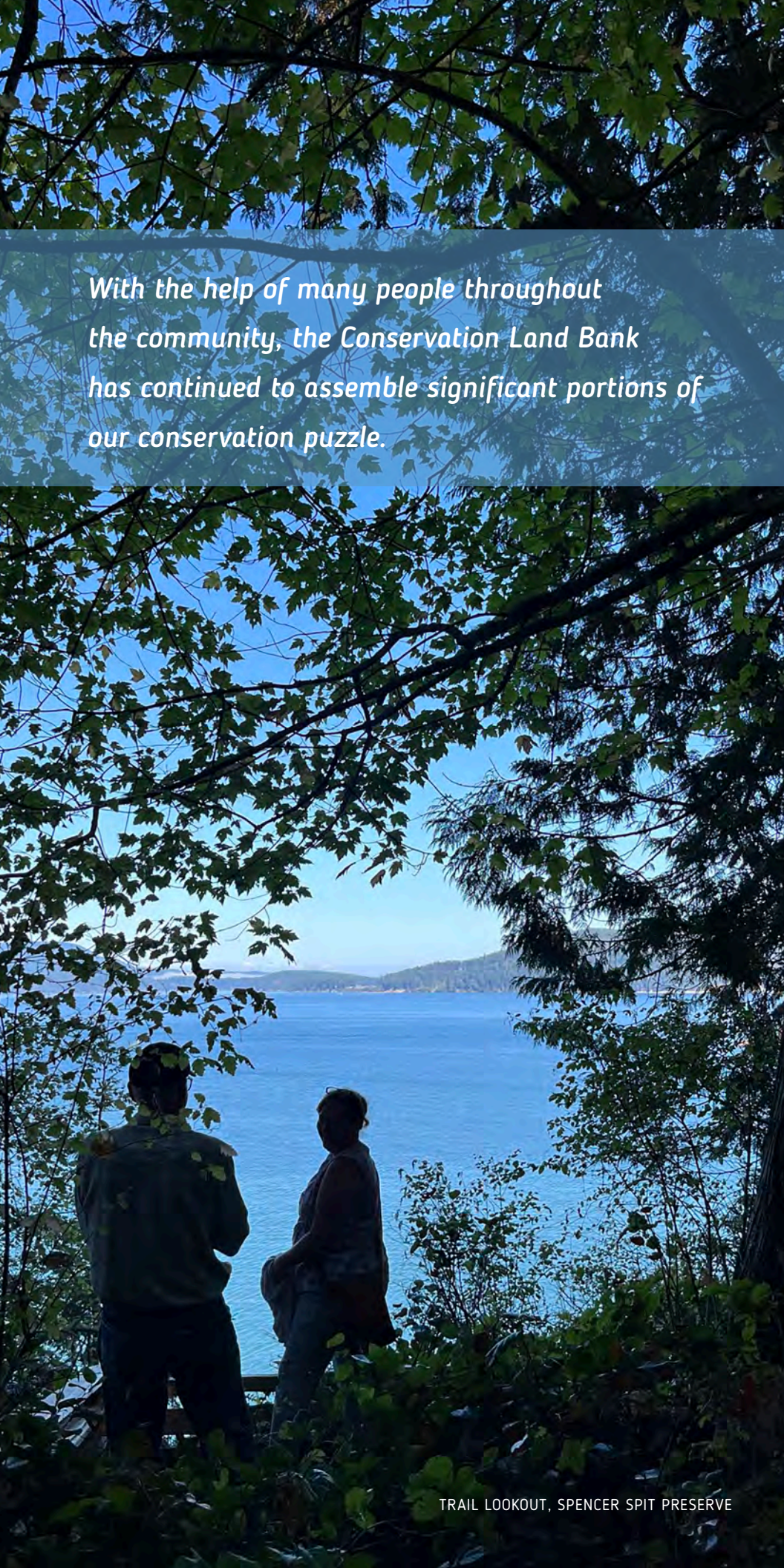


## Bringing the Pieces Together

San Juan County Conservation Land Bank  
Annual Report 2023







*With the help of many people throughout the community, the Conservation Land Bank has continued to assemble significant portions of our conservation puzzle.*

## From the Chair:

Christa Campbell, San Juan County  
Conservation Land Bank

In 1990, San Juan County started on a conservation puzzle when voters approved the creation of the San Juan County Conservation Land Bank and its Real Estate Excise Tax (REET). Since then, the community reaffirmed their support in 1999 and 2011 and will be asked to do so again this November.

Imagine starting a puzzle where the image on the box provides boundaries but not a fully completed picture. You know the pieces will include forests, prairies, farmland, wetlands, salmon, wildfire, native and non-native species, watersheds, people, wildlife, and weather. Unlike typical puzzles, though, this one's pieces evolve over time.

A meaningful puzzle requires time and patience—time to understand the colors and shapes, and patience to wait for opportunities to reveal themselves and connections to be made. Initially, the Land Bank focused on building relationships and creating operational practices to guide its work. Over time, with the help of many people throughout the community, the program has continued to assemble significant portions of our conservation puzzle. As of December 2022, the Land Bank owns approximately 5,000 acres (about 2 acquisitions per year) and has secured 49 conservation easements across seven islands (about 1.5 easements/year).

Much has changed over 34+ years, but there are many constants; the San Juans are a place of wonder and we islanders love it fiercely. Now, with robust community input through the 2023 Strategic Plan, the Land Bank can take a refreshed look at our puzzle as it continues to address the challenges faced by our unique and beloved part of the world.





VIEW FROM  
CADY MOUNTAIN PRESERVE

## Conservation Puzzle:

### Piecing Together Properties for a Healthy Community

Conservation efforts include the assembly of various properties, each playing a role in preserving natural areas, protecting plants and wildlife, and helping maintain islanders' quality of life. Assembling this conservation puzzle is a thoughtful process of patience and strategic thinking—every property represents a unique piece contributing to the larger picture of our Islands' conservation goals.

The protection of undeveloped natural areas is a central tenet of the Land Bank's mandate. Just as a puzzle begins with sorting through different shapes and colors, key attributes the Land Bank looks for include high quality forests, wetlands and shorelines which provide essential habitat; connections across the landscape to accommodate wide ranging species, such as owls and Pileated woodpeckers; and key systems components like wetlands filtering water, beach bluffs that provide essential nutrients to the near shore, and forest snags that provide homes for so many different animals.

Over the last few years, the Land Bank secured key pieces of the puzzle. Acquisitions such as Watmough Head on Lopez, North Shore Preserve on Orcas, and additions to Cady Mountain Preserve on San Juan, create contiguous habitats and buffer zones, bridging fragmented landscapes for better ecological resilience.

SHOOTING STARS, CADY MOUNTAIN PRESERVE



### CADY MOUNTAIN PRESERVE, SAN JUAN

encompasses some of the most diverse landscapes in the islands with rare Garry oak savannah, old growth stands of Douglas fir and Western red cedar, extensive wetlands and open “bald” areas that feature abundant spring wildflowers. Assembled through six separate transactions over the last twenty years, Cady connects to the largest remaining natural area on San Juan Island.



## NORTH SHORE PRESERVE, ORCAS

protects critical shoreline dynamics, habitats for salmon and forage fish and provides the local community with access to shoreline, wetlands, and forest.

NORTH SHORE PRESERVE

PURPLE SEA STAR



## THE WATMOUGH HEAD ADDITION, LOPEZ

hosts pocket beaches and rocky headlands with its nearshore dominated by eel grass and bull kelp beds. The pristine quality of the bay and its shoreline makes it a critical area for salmon recovery in the islands – over 2,000 feet of shoreline on the bay and Rosario Strait. This property was the last unprotected parcel on Watmough Bay.



Assembling a puzzle often requires teamwork. Land Bank conservation efforts thrive on collaboration with local non-profit San Juan Preservation Trust, as well as partner agencies—the Bureau of Land Management, National, State and County Parks, Washington Department of Natural Resources, Federal and State Fish and Wildlife agencies—all working in tandem to connect properties for conservation, pooling resources and expertise.

Partnership fuels progress—the Land Bank is opening TWO preserves to public access this year, Cady Mountain and North Shore. It's a good reminder that even the most daunting challenges can be overcome when we work together, one piece at a time, to preserve the beauty and diversity of our natural world. In the grand puzzle of conservation, every piece counts, and together, we can create a masterpiece worthy of generations yet to come.

EAST BEACH, WATMOUGH BAY PRESERVE





## 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.

ZYLSTRA LAKE PRESERVE

## Join Us!

### GUIDED TOURS:

**North Shore Preserve:** June 7, 8, 20; July 5, 13, 18; August 2, 10, 15

**Turtleback Mountain Preserve:** July 14; September 8

**Watmough Bay Preserve Addition:** June 13; July 12, 23; August 21; September 14

### PRESERVE OPENING CELEBRATIONS:

**Cady Mountain Preserve, San Juan Island:** June 15

**North Shore Preserve, Orcas Island,** September 28

### NEW TRAIL OPENING CELEBRATIONS:

**Redtail Trail at Beaverton Marsh Preserve and John O. Linde Community Park:** August 2024

**Watmough Trail Addition:** Fall 2024



- Land Bank Preserves
- Conservation / Historic Preservation Easements

Labeled preserves provide public access.





# Engaging Community

## for a Sustainable Future



In 2023, the Land Bank kicked off our **first strategic planning process** to better align with the varied voices and goals of our Islands' community. The Land Bank launched a month-long online survey and conducted one-on-one interviews with 66 key community members, resulting in a **wealth of insights and perspectives** that are shaping the future of conservation and land management across San Juan, Orcas, and Lopez Islands.

One-on-one interviews served as the cornerstone of this comprehensive engagement strategy. Sixty-six individuals, carefully selected to **represent a spectrum of interests and sectors within the county**, both supportive and critical of the Land Bank, participated in hour-long sessions. Guided by a standardized set of questions, interviewees shared their knowledge, experiences, and visions for the Land Bank. From long-standing supporters to opponents with varied perspectives, each voice contributed to a rich tapestry of community input.

Taking cues from these interviews and referring back to the legal mandate, the Land Bank and consultants Triangle Associates, designed and launched an online survey on the county's Engage platform. **The response was considerable**—nearly 600 individuals, predominantly full-time residents, provided valuable feedback! This approach helped guide the strategic planning process to incorporate the sentiments of a broad cross-section of the community.

Several key themes emerged from the interviews and survey responses, clarifying priorities and concerns of San Juan County residents—notably **enhancing outreach and communication efforts**. While there was clear support for Land Bank

PUBLICATIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA ARE KEY TO COMMUNICATING THE LAND BANK'S WORK.



conservation initiatives, many community members expressed a desire for **greater clarity regarding our programs and partnerships**. Addressing this communication gap emerged as an important objective for the Land Bank moving forward.

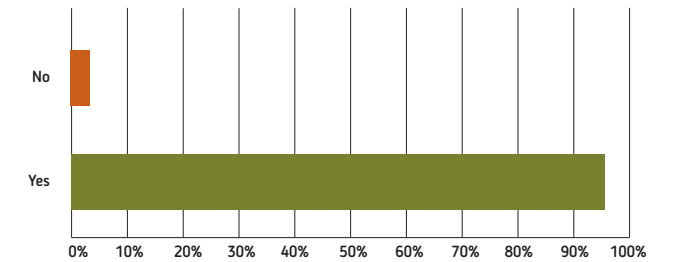
In terms of programming priorities, the community's commitment to environmental stewardship was heard loud and clear. Protection of ecological resources, including wildlife habitats, watersheds, and wildfire mitigation, emerged as the top priority. This sentiment underscores the community's deep-rooted connection to natural places and its collective resolve to safeguard it for future generations. Additionally, **preserving agricultural lands** and promoting low-intensity recreational activities garnered significant support, reflecting a holistic approach to land management that **balances conservation with sustainable use**.

## Protection of ecological resources, including wildlife habitats, watersheds, and wildfire mitigation, emerged as the top priority.

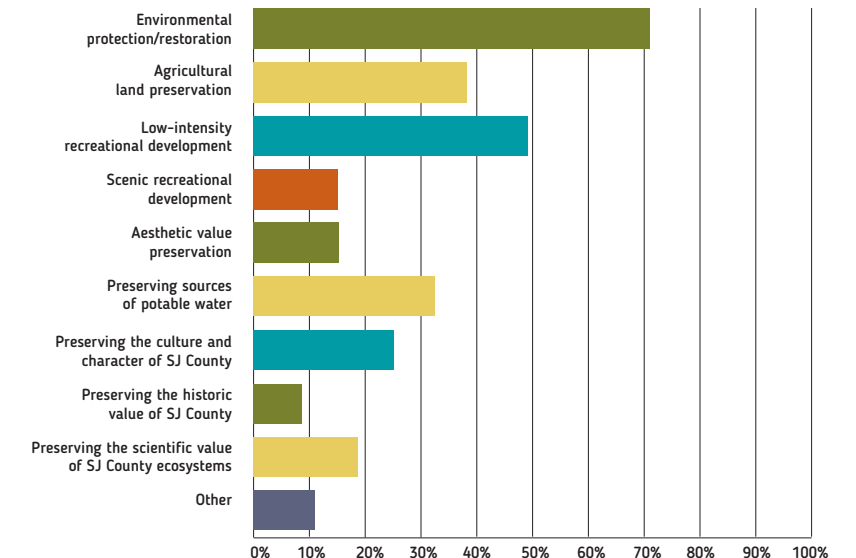
Another notable outcome from the surveys is the community's satisfaction with current recreational opportunities the Land Bank provides. With increased desire for outdoor activities, the consensus among participants was the Land Bank is meeting community needs. This affirmation underscores the **Land Bank's ongoing success in fulfilling its mandate** to provide accessible and sustainable recreational amenities for residents and visitors alike.

## A Sampling of Survey Questions and Responses\*

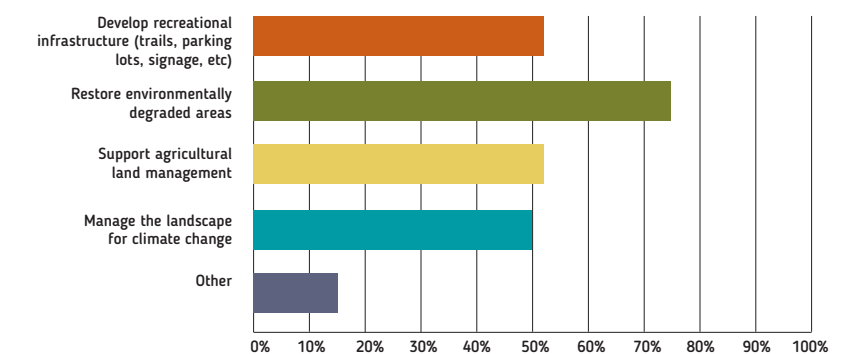
Q: Have you visited any Land Bank properties?



Q: What programming do you think the Land Bank should prioritize going forward?



Q: What types of land management (stewardship) activities would you like the Land Bank to prioritize in the future?



\*based on 596-598 number of responses

# Stewardship:

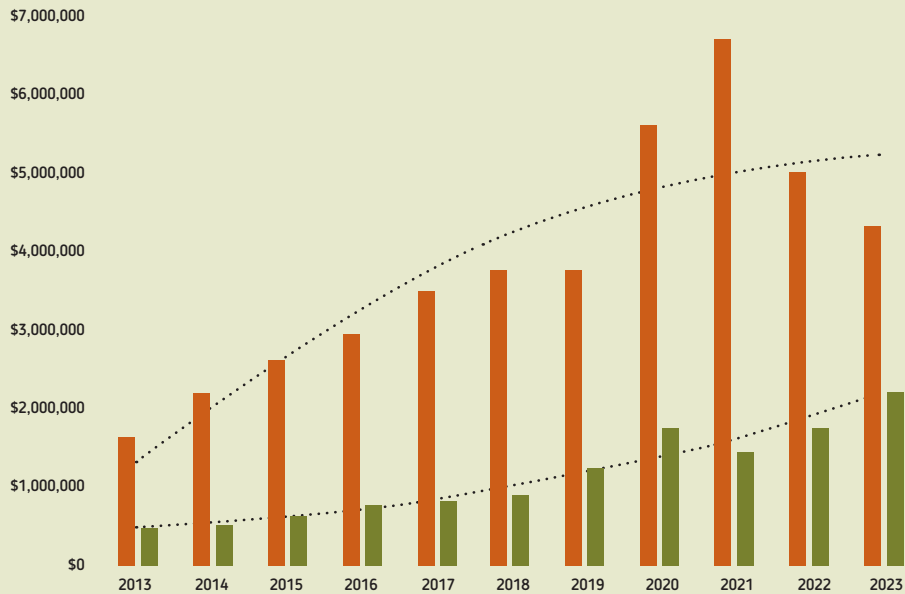
## Increasing Our Commitment



SPENDING TIME IN NATURE HAS BEEN SHOWN TO IMPROVE MOOD, MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING.

# \$4.34 M

2023 REAL ESTATE EXCISE TAX (REET)



■ REET vs  
■ Stewardship Spending

Over the last decade, the Land Bank has stepped up its stewardship spending relative to what it spends on acquisitions to address growing conservation needs. This rise in expenditure reflects a proactive approach to preserving and maintaining natural resources, habitats, and recreational areas. As we face increasing climate challenges and increased Preserve use, management costs have gone up. These costs include activities such as habitat restoration, trail maintenance, and non-native species control. The increased spending ensures the Land Bank can sustain the ecological health and accessibility of its properties, meeting the demands of both environmental preservation and public enjoyment.

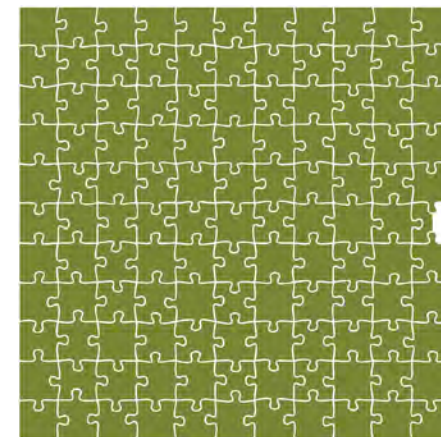
For additional financial details, visit [www.sjclandbank.org/about/financial-information](http://www.sjclandbank.org/about/financial-information)

# Your Property Taxes:

## Minimal Impact at Significant Value

We are often asked if Land Bank acquisitions “take land off the tax rolls,” resulting in higher property taxes for other landowners. The answer is yes, but very little. The taxable value of Land Bank property is **less than one-half of one percent** (0.41%) or \$60 million of the County’s \$14.15 billion in total taxable value. If all Land Bank property were taxed, and the tax rate lowered as a result, the savings to property owners would be roughly \$2 per \$100,000 in value, **reducing the annual tax on a \$750,000 property by only \$15.00. What a bargain!** In return, you get 31 Preserves open to the public, 400 acres leased to local farmers, hundreds of acres of forests restored, and iconic landscapes protected from mountaintops to coastlines.

**\$14,146,780,553** TOTAL TAXABLE VALUE IN COUNTY<sup>1</sup>



**0.41%**  
TAXABLE VALUE OF  
LAND BANK PROPERTY

■ = \$115 MILLION

AVG. TAX ON \$750,000 PROPERTY **\$4,102**



TAX SAVINGS<sup>2</sup> OF  
**\$15**

<sup>1</sup> SJC Assessor / 2023 Statement of Assessments with taxes to be collected in 2024

<sup>2</sup> \$2.00 per \$100,000 in value, adjusting the tax rate to yield the same total tax figure. This does not account for the impact on properties near Land Bank Preserves. Being near conservation land boosts property values by up to 20% according to multiple analyses.



## BY THE NUMBERS:

In 2023, the Conservation Land Bank hosted over **65 events**, opened a new public preserve on Lopez Island, and worked to restore 50 acres of forestland. We celebrated the return of Coho salmon and the first ever sighting of **Chinook fry** at Coho Preserve on Orcas Island, as well as a first-time discovery of an endangered **Island Marble Butterfly caterpillar** in a San Juan Island preserve habitat enclosure.



## 2023

- 1** new preserve opened: Spencer Spit on Lopez
- 1** new trail built: Pintail at Beaverton on San Juan
  - 1** beaver dam and lodge at Fowlers Pond
- 3** new volunteer commissioners welcomed
- 30** lbs of native seed produced by Salish Seeds Project
  - 48** conservation easements monitored
- 49** swans on Zylstra Lake annual bird survey
- 101** tires removed from North Shore Preserve
- 600** responses received on the Strategic Plan survey
  - 1,588** volunteer hours
- 7000+** Garry oak acorns planted across the islands





SAN JUAN COUNTY  
CONSERVATION  
LAND BANK

(360) 378-4402  
sjlandbank@sjlandbank.org



NORTH SHORE  
PRESERVE

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

**Commissioners 2023**

- Peggy Bill, District 3, position 3
- Christa Campbell, at large, position 7, Chair
- Sandi Friel, District 2, position 2
- Amy Trainer, at large, position 6
- Marilyn O'Connor, District 1, position 1
- Mike Pickett, at large, position 5, Finance Officer
- Brian Wiese, at large, position 4, Vice-Chair

**Staff**

- Lincoln Bormann, Director
- Shauna Barrows, Field Assistant
- Charlie Behnke, Agricultural Program Coordinator & Field Steward
- Sara DeRoy, Seasonal Field Assistant
- Margo Thorp, San Juan Island Seasonal Nursery Assistant
- Mary Gropp, Seasonal Field Assistant
- Peter Guillozet, Orcas Island Preserve Steward
- Eliza Habegger, Land Steward
- Erin Halcomb, Stewardship Coordinator
- Andrew Jansen/Tyler Goodman, Field Assistant
- Doug McCutchen, San Juan Island Preserve Steward
- Aaron Rock, Office Manager/Fiscal Clerk
- Amanda Wedow, Lopez Island Preserve Steward
- Jacob Wagner, Field Assistant
- Tanja Williamson, Outreach/Volunteer Coordinator

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