



35 YEARS OF CONSERVATION

SAN JUAN COUNTY CONSERVATION LAND BANK
ANNUAL REPORT 2025



FROM THE CHAIR

Looking Back, Looking Forward

When the calendar page flipped from 2025 to 2026, I officially “retired” from the Land Bank Commission. It has been my great honor and privilege to be part of our County’s Conservation Land Bank over the past ten years. 2025 was an especially banner year for us because it was the 35th anniversary of the Land Bank’s authorization by the

people of San Juan County in 1990. Since that time, the Land Bank has conserved some 4,700 acres of natural wildland and 400 acres of farmland, across 41 preserves. County residents have ratified it and voted to continue taxing property sales to support natural land conservation three additional times, most recently in 2024; and seven years ago, under the same state enabling legislation, Islanders added an Affordable Housing Bank. Many people don’t realize that, as a *public* agency, we are the only land bank in the state of Washington, and one of very few in the country—a uniquely farsighted idea to conserve the best of our natural environment.

Over my decade tenure on the Commission, the Land Bank has made a number of landmark acquisitions—Mount Grant and the Cady Mountain and Beaverton Marsh additions on San Juan Island, Watmough Bay addition on Lopez, and Coho and North Shore Preserves on Orcas. Our new Strategic Plan, adopted two years ago, puts a major emphasis on resource stewardship and native habitat restoration within our preserves; and, although our preserve holdings have grown by over 1,200 acres in that time, our land stewardship staff remains small—eight people across our three main islands. I’m constantly impressed at the knowledge, skills and abilities of our stewards to do their work. But I shouldn’t overlook the great assistance we get from community volunteers!

Looking forward to 2026, the Land Bank is celebrating another big anniversary – the 2006 acquisition of Turtleback Mountain Preserve on Orcas – a daunting financial lift at the time, but one made possible by the entire community coming together to support preservation of this iconic place.

Finally, I want to express my gratitude to Land Bank staff and co-commissioners, past and present, with whom I’ve been privileged to work. The Land Bank began 2026 with two new, highly qualified commissioners; and with the continued support of community members, I’m confident that the care of our natural preserves remains in good hands.

**Brian Wiese, Chair
2025 Conservation Land Bank**

White-crowned sparrows commonly lay 3-7 greenish-blue eggs, heavily spotted with reddish-brown, in ground nests tucked into dense vegetation, like this one observed on Turtleback Mountain Preserve.





2025 ACQUISITIONS

Land Bank Preserves Now Extend Across Five Islands!

In spring, the 3/4 mile trail from Watmough Bay to Watmough

Head officially opened, offering hikers additional scenic views of Watmough Bay, Chadwick Hill, and across Rosario strait to Anacortes and the Cascades.

The second half of 2025 brought exciting additions to the Land Bank program—Orcas Island gained an additional 1,300 feet of undeveloped shoreline and the County expanded conservation efforts to include a fifth island—Blakely Island!

Western pocket beach at Watmough Head that forms part of Watmough Bay.



Dolphin Bay Road Property **Orcas Island**

In August, the Land Bank acquired a 23.8-acre waterfront property located on Orcas Island's East Sound which hosts 1,300 feet of undeveloped shoreline, including a 260-foot pocket beach, a small intermittent stream, open fields and forest.

The property lies within a high priority area for salmon recovery, hosts multiple forest species including yew and cedar, and adds another public access point to saltwater.

Public shoreline access is particularly scarce on Orcas Island, with none along this section of East Sound. This acquisition, and its 260ft pocket beach, will provide visitors a new view and access point, as well as a resting spot for kayakers and paddleboarders. The addition of this Preserve will be the sixth Land Bank property with shoreline access on Orcas Island.

(opposite) Pocket beach located on western shore of East Sound. The addition of this preserve marks the Land Bank's sixth shoreline access property on Orcas Island.

(below) Aerial view of the property's upland forest.



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School Trust Land Parcel **Blakely Island**

A September surprise punctuated the start to a quiet fall—the Land Bank received a 225-acre parcel on Blakely Island from the Washington Department of Natural Resources. The property is located on the island’s eastern edge and has shoreline frontage on Rosario Strait. It is one of the first places people see from the ferry as it approaches the County.

The land is entirely forested with a mix of conifers—and some areas may have never been harvested due to steep slopes and difficult access. The property’s extensive shoreline also provides important marine habitat, such as kelp forests and eelgrass beds for salmonids. State Trust Land properties have a legal responsibility to generate revenue for their designated beneficiaries, such as schools, counties, and critical local services. Transfer to the Land Bank, through the State’s Trust Land Transfer Program (TLT), protects this significant area from timber harvest or any other activities designed to generate income.

“The Land Bank has been very interested in this property for years because of its ecological importance,” stated Director Lincoln Bormann. He added, “This property is the last major State Trust Land property in the San Juans. It’s been a great success for the community.”

Bormann has worked over the last 20 years to support transfer of State Trust Lands in the County to other public land entities. Once totaling 2,450 acres across the archipelago, all but 40 acres is now in conservation ownership. Previous projects have entailed long-term leases from the State as well as outright purchases. On Lopez, lands previously in the TLT program have included Shark Reef and Odlin South (County Parks), Lopez Hill (Land Bank), and Chadwick Hill (Bureau of Land Management). On San Juan, the National Park Service acquired the Mitchell Hill area adjacent to English Camp, and WA State Parks increased their acreage on Orcas.

Blakely Island’s School Trust Land Parcel is the last major State Trust Land properties in the San Juans Islands. Located on the Blakely’s eastern edge, with shoreline frontage on Rosario Strait, it is one of the first places people see from the ferry as it approaches the County.



Low tides revealed sea cucumbers, urchins, chitons and starfish to students from Friday Harbor Middle School Science Class on Deadman Bay's rocky shoreline.



OUR MANDATE:

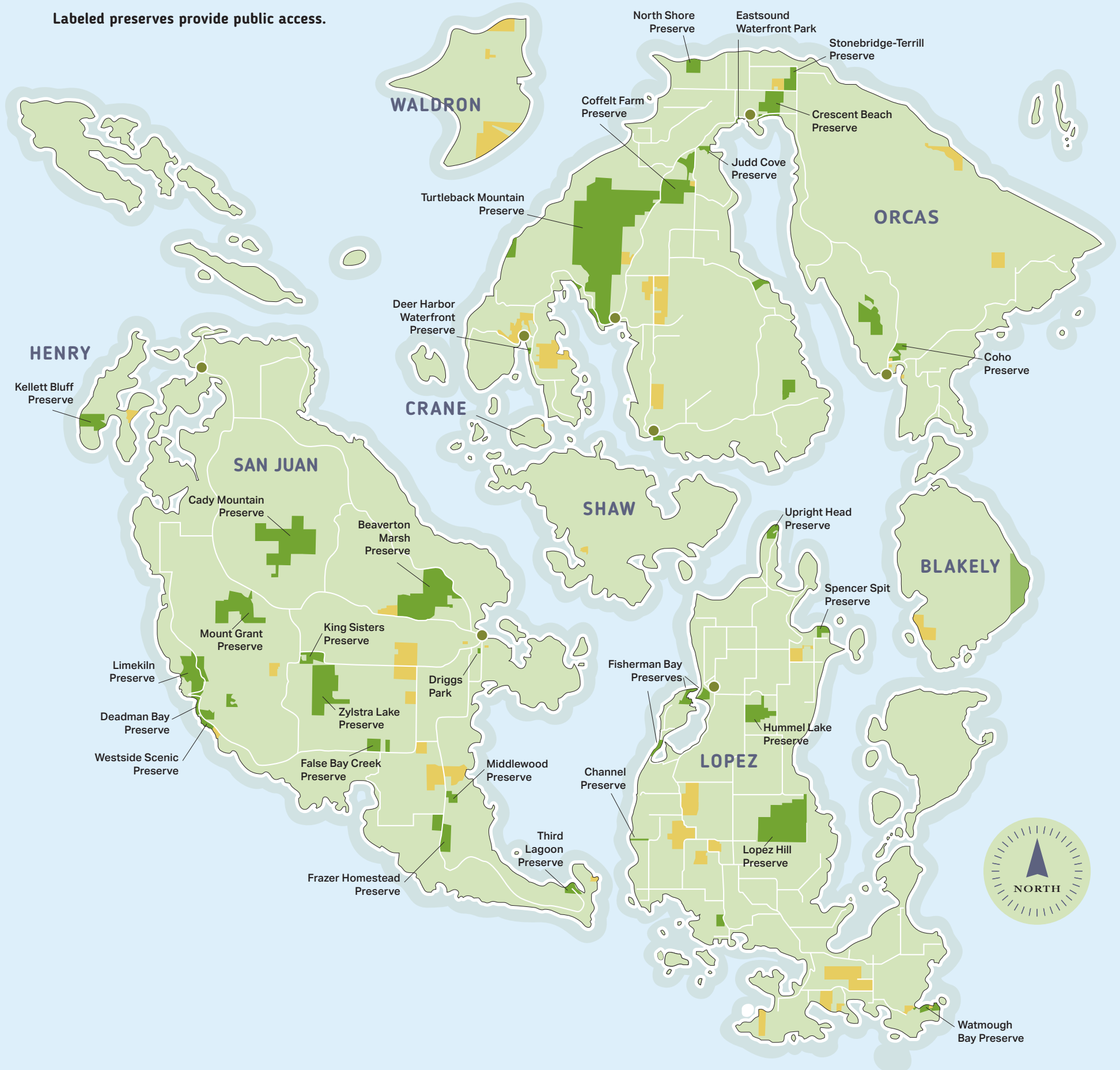
To preserve in perpetuity areas in the county that have environmental, agricultural, aesthetic, cultural, scientific, historic, scenic or low-intensity recreational value and to protect existing and future sources of potable water.



Sea stars seen during low tide at North Shore Preserve.

- Land Bank Preserves
- Conservation / Historic Preservation Easements

Labeled preserves provide public access.



GROWING GREEN THINKERS

Salish Seeds Project held outreach programs on all three islands in 2025!

Salish Seeds Project Nursery Assistant, Margo Thorp, shared plant activities with multiple summer camps across the County.

Educational programming centered around native plants, including hands-on seed activities. Staff discussed the importance of native plants, how seeds germinate and how seeds move around. They also played an informative seed-to-plant matching game, guided campers in cleaning and prepping native seeds for planting, and created bookmarks decorated with native wildflower designs.

Interested in incorporating the Salish Seeds Project into your local school curricula or arranging field visits? Contact Tanja Williamson at the Land Bank office at tanjaw@sjclandbank.org or call 360-378-4402.



SALISH SEEDS TURNS 10!

Plants and seeds of species native to coastal grasslands, oak savannahs, and rocky meadows are produced at the Salish Seeds Project nursery located at Red Mill Farm on San Juan Island. Most of the plants and seed are used to restore Land Bank preserves, and other conservation lands.



Happy Birthday Salish Seeds Project!

The San Juan County Conservation Land Bank celebrated the 10-year anniversary of The Salish Seeds Project, a native plant nursery dedicated to producing plants and seeds for habitat restoration in the islands.

The Salish Seeds Project is a partnership between the Land Bank, who runs the program, and the San Juan Preservation Trust, who owns the nursery facility. Grants and private donations have funded all the nursery infrastructure. Master Gardeners and other volunteers support the program at monthly work parties.

Since 2015, the Salish Seeds Project has produced 120 pounds of native wildflower seed and 200,000 plants. Many of these plants and seeds now bloom on Land Bank Preserves. Others have been sold to partner organizations and individuals in support of a growing array of restoration projects county-wide.

Anyone can reap the benefits!

An annual Fall Native Wildflower Sale which goes "live" in mid-September offers over 20 native plants to beautify backyards and feed pollinators. Other program offerings include nursery tours, workshops, and demonstration gardens at Driggs Park (at the Land Bank office located on San Juan Island). A helpful how-to guide, "Growing Native Wildflowers in the San Juan Islands" (photo, right), written by Nursery Manager and Salish Seeds Project creator Eliza Habegger, is available for free at the Land Bank office in print, or online at sjclandbank.org.

The Salish Seeds Project has fueled rewilding and renewal far beyond the Land Bank's boundaries. We offer sincere thanks to the many volunteers, donors, and organizations who have made this possible.



The living roof at Salish Seeds Project demonstration gardens.



\$4.31 M

2025 REAL ESTATE
EXCISE TAX (REET)

\$ 5,688,826

ENDING CASH

\$ 8,718,308

STEWARDSHIP
ENDOWMENT

New stairs at
Coho Preserve,
Orcas Island.

YOUR PROPERTY TAXES

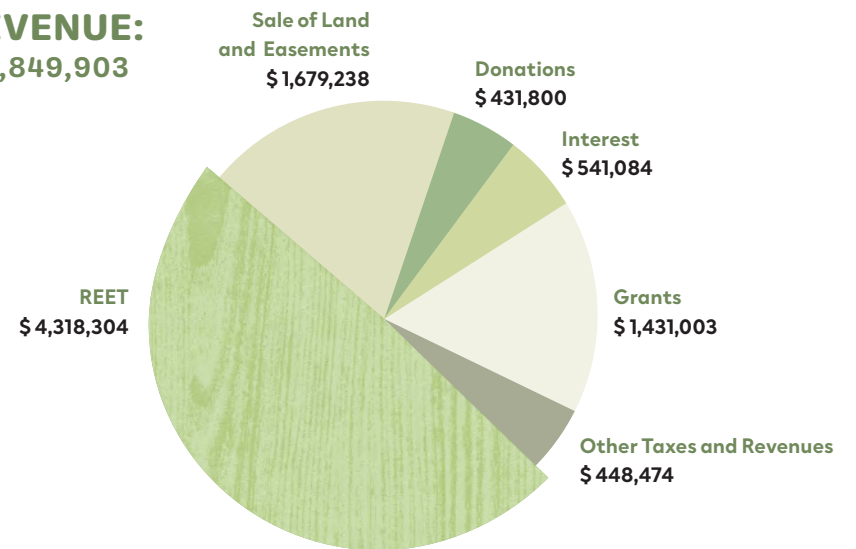
Minimal Impact at Significant Value

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 Preserves is **less than one-half of one percent** (0.46%) of the total taxable value in the County (roughly \$68 million of the total \$14.8 billion).

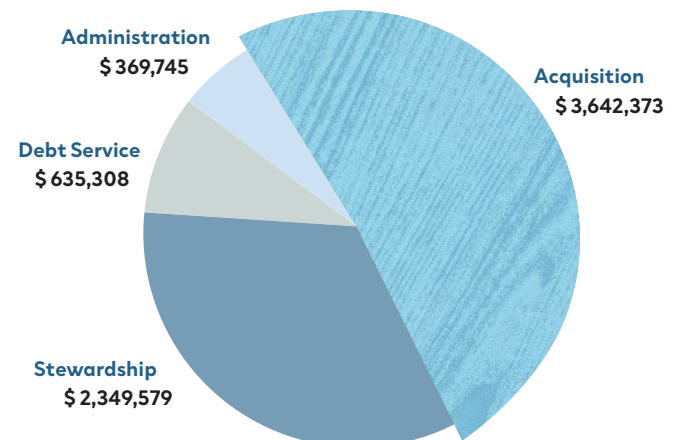
If this amount were added back to the total, and the tax rate adjusted to keep the total amount collected the same, it **would reduce the annual tax on a \$750,000 property by only \$22.50.**

What do you get for this? To start, 32 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.

REVENUE: \$ 8,849,903



EXPENDITURES: \$ 6,997,005



2025 HIGHLIGHTS



Golden eagle
nest sighting at
Turtleback
Mountain Preserve.

Field Assistant
Tyler Goodman
measures
salmonids during
the annual fish
seining survey in
Cascade Creek at
Coho Preserve.



Six major habitat
enhancement
projects completed,
from large scale
restoration
plantings, a native
demo garden, and
the Land Bank's
first "micro-burn"
and State Certified
Burner training.

15 Island Marble
Butterfly eggs
discovered at
Frazer Homestead
Preserve.

Photo courtesy: USFWS—
Pacific Region,
Public Domain

1-year anniversary
of the collaborative
Overmarsh Farm
Commons on
San Juan Island—
34 participants
and 24 plots in
cultivation.

Photo courtesy:
Overmarsh Farm Commons



43 partners
participated in 84
Land Bank events,
including Lopez &
San Juan Island
Family Resource
Centers, Orcas &
San Juan Island
Senior Centers.



Lopez Preserve
Steward Amanda
Wedow "island
hops" to help plant
hundreds of native
shrubs, grasses,
and wildflowers in
the new Land Bank
native Demo Garden
in Driggs Park.

8 bat species
detected by
Kwiäht Center
for the Historical
Ecology of the
Salish Sea at
Limekiln Preserve,
including the
following:
171 Hoary, 538
Silver-haired
and 79 Big-brown
bats along with
479 California,
903 Yuma,
431 Little Brown,
35 Long-eared,
and 12 Long-
legged Myotis!



Three-year
Institute of
Applied Ecology
study completed on
treatment options
for invasive Italian
Arum, including
at Fisherman Bay
Preserves.



The new platform
at Lopez Island's
Weeks Wetland
Preserve, one of
many preserve
access improvement
projects completed,
along with expanded
parking at Turtleback
Mountain and new
stairs at Coho.





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CONSERVATION
LAND BANK

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(cover)
Golden eagle nest
in fir tree

Original woodcut design
by Charles Spitzack:
charlesspitzack.com

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

Commissioners 2025

- Peggy Bill, District 3, position 3, Vice-Chair
- Tim Clark, at large, position 7
- Marilyn O'Connor, District 1, position 1, Finance Officer
- Mike Pickett, at large, position 5
- Anne Marie Shanks, District 2, position 2
- Amy Trainer, at large, position 6
- Brian Wiese, at large, position 4, Chair

Staff

- Lincoln Bormann, Director
- Shauna Barrows, Field Assistant
- Charlie Behnke, Agricultural Coordinator & Field Steward
- Scott Devereaux, Seasonal Field Assistant
- Rachel Dietzman, Special Project Manager
- Margo Thorp, San Juan Island Nursery/Outreach Assistant
- Peter Guillozet, Orcas Island Preserve Steward
- Eliza Habegger, Land Steward
- Erin Halcomb, Stewardship Coordinator
- Tyler Goodman, Field Assistant
- Doug McCutchen, San Juan Island Preserve Steward
- Aaron Rock, Operations Coordinator
- Claire Waterman, Seasonal Field Assistant
- Amanda Wedow, Lopez Island Preserve Steward
- Jacob Wagner, Field Assistant
- Tanja Williamson, Outreach/Volunteer Coordinator



Photos contributed by staff and volunteers unless otherwise noted.
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POSTAL CUSTOMER

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