



Nesset Farm

Our oldest, dearest project

Rand Jack

On August 11, the County Council voted to purchase the Nesset Farm from the Tom and Ingeborg Nesset Foundation for \$980,000, turning a giant page in the story of the longest running project of the Whatcom Land Trust.

This story began 10 years ago when someone at an Acme Elementary School PTA event told me about the Nesses and the desire of Tom and his sister Ingeborg to preserve their farm.

This led to a meeting with Russ Pfeiffer-Hoyt, a Nesset cousin and neighbor. Russ grew up in close contact with the Nesses and their land, and had come to know and love it as they did. As the Nesses became older, Russ was their most trusted adviser and an indefatigable helping hand, always available in every way imaginable.

Russ introduced me to Tom and Ingeborg. Russ, Bruce Smith and I met regularly with them for over a year to talk about the future of the farm.

From the beginning it was clear to me that with even the slightest hint to Tom, Russ could have inherited this property. Instead, Russ enthusiastically supported the Nesses' wish that the farm become a park. Without that support and Russ's tireless work to make it happen, the story of the Nesset Farm project would have

been short and no page of that story would have been on the County Council August 11 agenda.

Tom shares pioneer memories

When we walked around the 106-acre farm talking about what kind of park it might be, Tom shared his memories.

He told tales of going fishing with Nooksack Indians in their canoes on the South Fork. Once his cousin Aadne hooked a king salmon so big that Tom had to hang on Aadne's ankles to keep him from being towed down the river. At least that's what Tom told us.

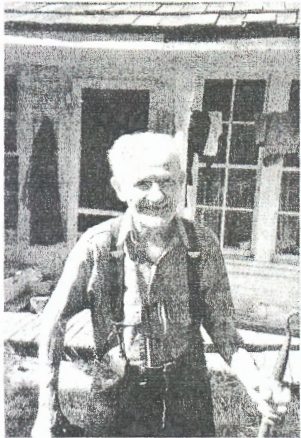
Tom showed us a big, clunky homemade sled that all of the kids had piled onto for a downhill run that was interrupted when they ran into a cow.

He pointed out two 100-foot tall fir trees that he said they would bend to the ground and ride like a whip when he was a boy.

Twice the house was moved back from the river to protect it from flooding. Once it



Ingeborg "Johnnie" Nesset



Tom Nesset

Photos by Rand Jack

(Continued on page 4)

1998 Land Steward of the Year Award

Russ Pfeiffer-Hoyt honored at membership meeting

"If someone asked me what it means to be a land steward, I would say 'let me tell you about Russ Pfeiffer-Hoyt,'" Rand Jack, WLT board member said about the Trust's 1998 Land Steward of the Year.

The Land Trust's second annual Land Steward Award was presented to Russ Pfeiffer-Hoyt during the WLT membership meeting on Friday, September 11. Nominated by WWU professor Wendy Walker and recommended by the Land Trust Outreach Committee, Russ was a unani-

mous selection by the WLT Board of Directors.

Russ, a neighbor and distant cousin to the Nesses, has been instrumental in guiding the long process of the Nesset Farm towards becoming a county park. (See Nesset story this page.)

None of the Nesset siblings had children. As Tom and Ingeborg Nesset got older and it became harder for them to care for the farm themselves, they cared for the farm through Russ. His tireless efforts to preserve the original farm buildings, coordinate projects to rehabilitate

Why should we preserve 800-year-old trees?
(See reflection, pg. 7).

Annual Campaign kicks off. (See pg. 6.)

(Continued on page 3)

We've moved!

We're in the same building, 301 W. Holly Street, but our office has moved down the hall. The new space is nearly twice as big; large enough for conferences with land owners and Land Trust committee meetings.

Thank you **WLT members Scott Stodola and Bill Randolph** for helping with the move. We also appreciate the extra muscle from our neighbors at **Option Snowboards: Chad Perrin, Byron Seegers, and Tim Carlson.**

Also, thank you **Wade Marlowe, Blue Horse Gallery** for the donated office furniture. We are still in need of a legal size file cabinet and extra chairs for meetings. If you have any items you would like to donate, please call the Trust office, 650-9470.

Fair volunteers provide support

Thank you board members and land trust volunteers who worked at the Land Trust booth during the Northwest Washington Fair in Lynden: **Cindy Klein, Carl Batchelor, Joan Casey, Tom Burton, Hilda Bajema, Dick Beardsley, Sharon Digby, John Gillies, Tom Wood, Richard Eggemeyer, Ann Yow, Seth Fleetwood, Herman Miller, Steve LeCocq, Chris Moench, Pete Kremen, Gordon Scott, Rod Burton, Cindy Franklin, Scott Stodola, Aurora Fox, Bob Carmichael, Kerry Thallhofer, Margaret Eames, Elaine Gold, Wendy Walker, Mike Finger, Patricia Wenke, Henry Bierlink, Ron Polinder, Julie Carpenter, and Michael Durbin.** Also, thanks to **Yarrow Moench, summer intern, for making phone calls to secure the long list of volunteers.**

This important community outreach event added 89 names to our mailing list, introduced our new photographic note cards, (*see article on note cards, page 6*), and gave us the opportunity to tell people about the Canyon Lake Creek Community Forest project. Without the folks listed above, this would not be possible.

New advertising sponsor added

Businesses advertisers in *The Steward* continue to underwrite our printing and mailing expenses.

This issue we added **CGK Wordsmith** to this group of supporters. Thank you **Cheryll Kinsley.**

Congratulations to **John Morgan Service**, another Newsletter sponsor, for receiving the 1998 EPA "Evergreen Award." They are the first small business in this four-state region to win this award. John said he considers this an honor and appreciates the recognition for this industry.

Message from the President

Land stewardship for the long-term

*Chris Moench, President
Board of Directors*

Recently, I took a group of Whatcom County business people up to see the Canyon Lake Creek old growth forest. It was near the end of our long dry spell of summer. As we drove up the mountain, the dirt road thoroughly filled our vehicle and lungs with dust, offering me a new understanding of what it means to be "close to the land."

Bringing us closer to the land

Perhaps to be a steward of the land one must allow it to become a part of you as you will eventually become a part of it. Because it is only from ourselves (people) that we seek to protect the land, we must learn to move as intuitively to the needs of the land as we do to our own needs. Indeed, the needs of land and people must be the same.

I think most land conservation supporters agree that we are a long way from achieving such intimacy with our landscape. To be sure, many aspects of our society work against it. I don't have space to enumerate them all here.

However, many forces are working to draw us closer to the land, and land trusts are among the strongest. Using current legal tools and concepts of private property ownership, land trusts are creating direct responsibility for the protection of specific natural amenities on parcels of land. This is a long-term visionary approach to incrementally shifting a community's relationship with the land. It recalls a quote of Dorothy Richards from her book *Beaversprite* ... "man (or woman) can fit himself in. Like a beaver, he can build the structure of a new life. One stick at a time, he can stem the flood of materialism that is threatening to sweep him off the face of the earth."

It is a big beaver dam we are building through the Trust. Though the root of the Trust's work is our legal responsibility for protecting the land "in perpetuity," there are many branches that must grow to make the vision come true. First among them is community support and involvement.

To nurture our relationship with the land, the Land Trust must also nurture its place in the hearts and daily lives of the people who live here. Ideally, the Trust would be supported as willingly as people give to and work for their church or school. For long-term success the Trust must become that kind of community organism.

Building community, sharing the message

In this issue of *The Steward*, you will find articles on how the Trust is striving to bring us all into closer intimacy with our landscape, helping us be better stewards, and building a community of stewardship in which all residents of Whatcom County can participate. I hope you find it thought provoking and encouraging.

This summer's membership survey (*See page 6*) revealed that more than 70% of our members learned about the Trust by word of mouth. Please talk about the Land Trust with your friends and neighbors. If you, (or they) have any questions, suggestions, or would like to volunteer, please call our office or a board member.

The Mission of the Whatcom Land Trust is to preserve and protect unique natural, scenic, agricultural and open space land in Whatcom County through acquisition of perpetual conservation easements or other land interests that insure the protection of the resource value. The Steward is published three times each year by the WLT.

Newsletter Committee Chair Chris Moench

Contributors Gordon Scott, Chris Moench, Rand Jack, Cindy

Franklin, Brett Bauton, Dick Beardsley

Desktop Publishing Sheri Emerson

Membership meeting celebrates land stewards

(Continued from page 1)

the stream, enhance wildlife habitat, lead tours of school children to study and appreciate the beauty and history of the Nasset farm exemplify the qualities of a dedicated steward of the land.

"It was never an obligation," Jack said. "Russ recognized what it meant to be a

steward, shared that responsibility with Tom and Ingeborg and eventually assumed the responsibility."

In accepting the award, Russ emphasized the importance of the WLT members' support for this organization. He then deflected attention away from his own participation in the Nasset Farm stewardship and shared his reflections on the Land Trust's impact in the lives of the Nassetts. Two things in particular stood out: One speaks to the profundity of the commitments we make; the other links Tom Nasset to our current work on the Canyon Lake Creek Old Growth Forest.

Norwegian farming tradition

The Nasset family moved from Norway to Whatcom County in 1905. Russ explained to the WLT audience that in Norway the family farm was not just land to be bought and sold - the farm is an extension of the family. The farm defines and provides continuity to the family and is something to be passed down from generation to generation.

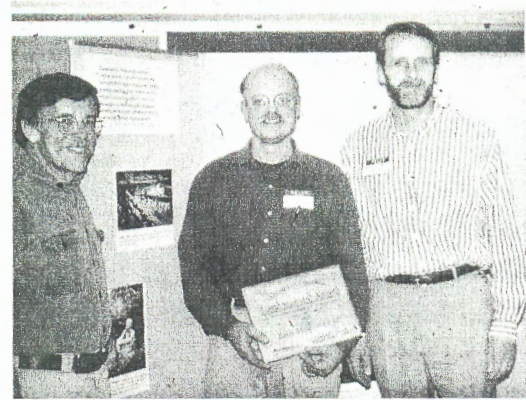
Without a next generation to care for the farm, Russ said Tom and Ingeborg wondered what would happen to the farm in the future.

"I heard Ingeborg tell Tom 'we have to think of something to do,'" Russ said. He explained how the Land Trust filled this need in their lives. The Trust's promise to protect the farm with a conservation easement provided that the continuity would not be broken.

"I've never seen Tom happier than the day he sat at the



Left photo: Whatcom County Parks and Recreation Director Roger DeSpain, land donor Ruth Kelsey, and land monitor Steve Irving attend WLT's membership appreciation evening.



Right photo: WLT Board members Rand Jack (left) and Bruce Smith (right) congratulate this year's Land Steward, Russ Pfeiffer-Hoyt. (Photos courtesy of Cindy Klein and Julie Carpenter.)

dining room table with Ingeborg and signed the conservation easement," Russ said. After he signed his name, Russ said Tom looked up with a big grin.

"He said 'There! That's done.' It was that sense of relief knowing the farm would be cared for," Russ said.

A lasting memory

Russ shared another story about Tom that was one of the most memorable of the evening and links Tom's memory to the Land Trust's current project: the Canyon Lake Creek Old Growth Forest. Russ reflected on Tom's musings about what it would be like to be an old growth tree.

"Tom said 'that sure would be something,'" Russ said, "'to stand in one place for that long, out in all that weather - the snow, rain and fog - and see everything pass by.'"

It was Russ's observation, and an image that many took home from our WLT membership event, that in his final years Tom spent long periods of time sitting motionless in the living room, looking out the window of the house where he had spent his life.

"Tom became more and more like an old growth tree," Russ observed.

Congratulations, Russ, on your 1998 Land Steward of the Year award, and thank you. Your dedication and commitment are an inspiration to all.

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Future park will share pion

(Continued from page 1)

The Nessets were true stewards of their farm. They knew the land intimately; they loved it and cared for it.

The Nessel Farm will join with neighboring parcels of land and become part of a planned county park consisting of four contiguous miles of frontage on the South Fork of the Nooksack River. (Map by Premier Graphics.)

was taken apart like Lincoln logs and reassembled on a new site. The other time it was moved on log rollers. Tom laughed as he described his mother immersed in housework forgetting the house was up on rollers and walking out the back door.

Today not only are the original farm buildings still there, but so are some of the tools that built them. The broadax used to hue the farm house's dovetailed cedar beams is still sharp as a razor. In the same shed with generations of farm implements, we found four strange, round snowshoe-like objects - snowshoes for a horse brought by the Nessets from Norway.

Living a conservation ethic

Tom moved from Norway to the farm with his family in 1905. As a young boy he watched the hillside behind the house logged bare of giant old growth trees. Though he worked in logging at times himself, Tom said he never wanted to see the hillside cut like that again. The legacy of that experience is a majestic 60-acre stand of 90-year-old Douglas fir that will be part of the Nessel park.

Long before the term environmentalist was coined, the Nessets lived a conservation ethic. A tiny salmon stream that runs through the farm would sometimes get choked with over 300 spawning coho salmon. Still visible on a post in the barn, inscriptions made each year by the Nessets record the date of the first salmon's return to the stream.

As early as the 1940s, they enhanced the stream habitat by creating pools where returning fish could rest and hide from predators. If low water impeded salmon fry going back to

the river, Tom and George had a little net they would use to scoop up the fry and help them on their journey. The little dip net still hangs on the wall in the tool shed. The park will inherit this healthy, functioning spawning stream, cared for in recent years by the Fourth Corner Fly Fishers.

The Nessets were true stewards of their farm. They knew the land intimately; they loved it and cared for it. They became part of the land and the land part of them. Ingeborg (most people called her Johnnie) was born on the farm in 1909. She died there 81 years later in the same bed she was born.

Trust, understanding play important roles

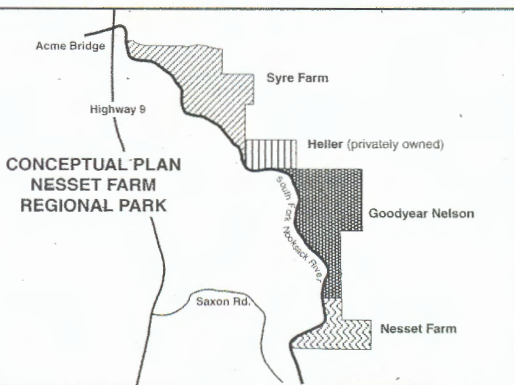
One day when Tom was talking to Russ, a question came up about the future park. Tom told Russ, "I'm not going to worry about that. The fellas will take care of it." "The fellas" referred to me and Bruce. When Russ told me that story, I knew that Tom had come to trust us and felt that we understood what he and Ingeborg wanted for their land.

On July 31, 1989, Tom and Ingeborg signed a conservation easement protecting forever their farm from development, restricting the cutting of the forest on the hillside behind the house, and providing for the eventual use of the farm as a public park. The easement stipulates that if the land becomes a park, buildings will be restored to their original condition and "used for educational and museum-like purposes.... The eagles, fish, and other wildlife will be protected and the integrity of the land respected."

The Nessel Farm was placed in a family trust, and when Tom died at the age of 94 in 1992, Russ



Tom Nessel often enjoys forested hillside near h



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ear memories



ing through the
on the South Fork.

Pfeiffer-Hoyt, as trustee, assumed full responsibility for the care and upkeep of the farm, a responsibility he has discharged with legendary devotion.

Nearby land acquisitions put park plans in place

Because of a provision in the conservation easement to protect the privacy of neighbors, the land could not become a park until public access could be provided from the north through property owned by the Goodyear Nelson timber company.

In 1993 the Land Trust facilitated a major exchange and purchase of land that involved the Trillium Corporation, the Department of Natural Resources, State Parks, Whatcom

county and several other entities. As part of this transaction, DNR agreed to acquire the Goodyear Nelson property north of the Nessel Farm and convey to Whatcom County. Unfortunately, at the last minute it did not happen.

In the aftermath of the land exchange, the David Syre family made a very generous gift to Whatcom County of 262 acres about a mile and a half north of the Nessel Farm. The Syre property is separated from the farm by the 200 acres owned by Goodyear Nelson and a small parcel owned by the Hellyer family.

After years of urging by the Land Trust and Whatcom County, in 1998 DNR acquired the Goodyear Nelson property. At its October 6 meeting, the state Board of Natural Resources will vote to convey this property to the county providing public access from the north so that the farm can become a park. Unfortunately, DNR allowed Goodyear Nelson to retain the right to cut much of the timber on the

property, a problem with which we will have to deal in the future.

Council votes to buy Nessel Farm

Last year the Land Trust established the Tom and Ingeborg Nessel Foundation, which has five directors, two from the Land Trust, two from County Parks and Russ Pfeiffer-Hoyt. Russ transferred the farm to the Foundation, which agreed to sell it to the county for \$980,000.

On August 11, the County Council voted to purchase the farm using money from the Whatcom County Conservation Futures Fund and a \$64,000 state grant.

The Nessel Foundation will devote all of the money it receives from the sale to restoring farm buildings and to long-term maintenance of the Nessel park. All of the funds that Whatcom County spends to buy the Nessel farm will be returned to the county for the purpose of making the farm into a park and taking care of that park. Thus, the public gets an incredible, historic farm and all of its money back.

The next chapter

When the county acquires the Hellyer property, the Syre, Hellyer, and Goodyear Nelson properties will be linked to the Nessel Farm. The county will have 600 acres and four contiguous miles of frontage on the crystal clear South Fork of the Nooksack River, the makings for what some people say will be the finest county park in the USA.

Sharing with Tom the closing years of his life and his deep, ethical love of the land is an experience I will always treasure. Though the story of the Nessel Farm project is far from over, it has been a pretty exciting story, one which the Land Trust is proud of helping write.



Tom and Ingeborg Nessel sign their conservation easement at the dining room table.

Photos courtesy of Rand Jack.

For more Nessel history, see the Land Steward of the Year article on page 1 in this newsletter.

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Membership support crucial to conservation successes

Once a year we ask both our new and returning members to support the Land Trust financially. This year our Annual Campaign begins in October.

As our members know, the Land Trust's work is supported with membership contributions. Our ability to continue providing conservation options to the community relies on our members donating generously every year. Thanks to this support, and a grant from the Wilburforce Foundation, we have been able to continue staffing our office and providing conservation resources to local landowners.

WLT members are invited to special members-only activities such as conservation property tours and field trips. This year, members who join or renew with a contribution of \$50 and up can receive special premiums, including a set of our new note cards, (see article on below), our book *Whatcom Places*, or a trip to the Canyon Lake Creek Old Growth Forest.

But the most important membership benefit is knowing you are helping to preserve Whatcom County's special qualities for future generations.

Please watch for your Annual Campaign letter in the mail and read how we have used our membership support to preserve special places in Whatcom County. We hope you'll agree that the work of the Trust is important for everyone who lives here.

New: note cards feature book photographs

Photographs from our book, *Whatcom Places*, have been reprinted in a set of note cards. Patty Nelson and members of the outreach committee selected eight photographs and arranged to have sets of note cards printed at Premier Graphics.

The eight-card sets went on sale in September at stores around the county. Paper Dreams in Fairhaven and The Inside Passage at the ferry terminal are the first to carry them. Card sets retail for \$8 per set and, just like the book, 60% of the purchase price goes directly to conservation.

If you are interested in purchasing a large quantity for your business, please contact board member Joan Casey, 647-2346, or Sheri Emerson at the Land Trust office, 650-9470.

Survey results show support for Trust work

Last June, 122 Land Trust members spent time on the phone answering questions and offering their opinions and ideas about the work of the Whatcom Land Trust. Thank you!

The results from this survey gave us direction in setting goals and re-affirmed that the mission set by the WLT board of directors is in line with our members' philosophies, and values. It was reassuring and exciting to get feedback that our members agree with the priorities assigned to potential and ongoing conservation projects.

We thank the volunteers and board members who helped make calls to other members: **Kathy Dunbar, Anne Kauffman, Sheryl Hockett, Judie Wilgress, Sue Blackadar, Kathy Zaiser, Intern Nehalam Breiter and Laura Leigh Brakke.** Board members: **Joan Casey, Bill Carroll, Hilda Bajema, Sharon Digby, Bob Keller, Cindy Klein, Chris Moench and organized by Cindy Franklin.**

Survey findings:

Newsletter feedback was positive. Many of our members take the time to read this publication.

42 members offered to volunteer their time and talent.

29 members surveyed (24% of those contacted) think that "public education and outreach" are the most important work of the Land Trust. This is a vote of confidence for the board's decision to establish an education and outreach committee two years ago.

How did you first hear of the Land Trust?*

- Friends, relatives or personal contact by WLT members = 75
- Newspaper/Herald article = 30
- From a land "deal" = 10
- From a mailing = 8
- From the book *Whatcom Places* = 5
- Contacted at the Farmer's Market = 1
- Film Series = 1

What work of the WLT is *most* important to you?*

- General comments/need to protect land in Whatcom County = 45
- Wildlife and/or salmon habitat = 34
- Public education and outreach = 29
- Conservation of forests = 25
- Agricultural Land = 22
- Projects ensuring health of our streams and bay = 18
- Acquiring land/properties = 14
- Public access to shorelines = 8
- Parks and scenic areas = 7
- Stewardship of private land = 1

*Some gave multiple responses



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Why protect the ancient forest?

Rand Jack, Board of Directors

For the past five years I have worked and dreamed with the Whatcom Land Trust about protecting the 800 to 1000 year old Canyon Lake Creek Old Growth Forest. To my surprise, yesterday someone asked me for the first time why, *in my heart*, I really wanted to preserve that forest.

I knew and believed all of the right answers - biodiversity, endangered species, natural heritage, future generations, water quality. These are all substantial, compelling reasons, but not what convinced my heart. As I ruminated with Sheri, our office administrator who had asked the question, two reasons took shape as to why protecting this ancient forest is so important to me. The reasons are spiritual and moral, and thus not easy to articulate. The words did not come easily then and they do not come easily now.

*From the moment
that I walked into the ancient
Canyon Lake Creek Forest,
I felt an intense respect
and an obligation
not just to refrain
from harming the forest,
but to protect
and care for it.*

other living things, of my place in the scheme of things.

This forest reminds me of the ancient cathedrals of Europe - the soaring space, the mottled light, the smell of antiquity, the connection to the past, the promise of the future, the shared experience across generations of looking for something greater than ourselves. For both the cathedral and the nature reserve we use the same word. Sanctuary. This is space inviolate.

To have an ethical relationship with someone means that we have a special respect for them and a special

obligation of care. We see this most readily in our relationship with family and neighbors. I believe that ethical relationships can also extend to other living things. From the moment that I walked into the ancient Canyon Lake Creek Forest, I felt an intense respect and an obligation not just to refrain from harming the forest, but to protect and care for it.

Anything that has lived for eight hundred, a thousand years, has a moral imperative in favor of being left alone. Nature has so proven her abilities and wisdom here that only incredible arrogance could lead to disturbing this forest.

Stewardship opportunity

My second heartfelt reason for protecting this forest has to do with community. The Land Trust envisions that the upper Canyon Lake Creek watershed, including the 600 acres of old growth, 1600 acres of young, regenerating forest, and the 45 acre lake, will be known as the Whatcom County Community Forest. Jointly held by Whatcom County and Western Washington University, the Community Forest will provide opportunities for public recreation, environmental education and scientific research. It will also provide an opportunity for us as a community to grow in our understanding of our stewardship responsibility.

Like the cathedrals of Europe and the village commons of New England, the Community Forest can help give us a sense of shared meaning and common purpose. Given the

(Continued on back page)

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Natural sanctuary

The first reason has to do with awe and humility. I can not be sure that there is a God, but when I stand in the presence of 800 year old yellow cedar trees, I know that there is something bigger, more enduring, more whole and harmonious than I am. I experience a new understanding of my relationship to

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Suite #U-4

Phone: 650-9470

Fax: 650-0495

Email: wltrust@nas.com

Benefits of a "community forest"

(Continued from page 7)

rich role forests have played in the history of Whatcom County, an ancient forest is an appropriate symbol and geographical space to help bring us together.

From the Community Forest, the Whatcom County community will have the opportunity to learn and practice a stewardship ethic. From the old growth forest we can learn about the wonders of nature, our relationship to the environment, the rewards of caring for a venerable forest and

the benefits of restraint. We can watch the new forest grow to maturity and recover its grandeur and complexity. Though I will not live to see it, perhaps my great grand children will one day not be able to easily locate the sharp divide that now exists between the fifteen year old trees and the eight hundred year forest. Perhaps a photo exhibit at the museum will document the transition with pictures taken every twenty years (the trees grow slowly in this high forest).

Community will celebrate old growth

Besides its geographical location, the forest will be made very much a part of the community. Trails will be built and residents of Whatcom County will be able to experience first hand the power of walking among these

ancient trees. Visitors will come to share this rare opportunity. Children from all over the county will have this landscape available as an

environmental education laboratory. I foresee students from Western working with students at Mt. Baker High School on joint science projects. Since it will be our forest, what is being learned through research will be described in local papers. We will publish a Community Forest calendar with

photographs from the forest. Together, these activities can help create a shared feeling of ownership, participation, responsibility and celebration.

Consider the potential

A Community Forest, even if it is one of the oldest forests in the Pacific Northwest, cannot cure the feeling of divisiveness that so many feel in our society. But becoming stewards of this forest may be a step in that direction. A Community Forest that dates back to the last millennium may give us some clearer focus as we look to the future.

While ideas like biodiversity drive my mind to protect the Canyon Lake Creek Old Growth Forest, feelings like awe, humility and the potential for community drive my heart.

*Given the rich role
forests have played
in the history of Whatcom County,
an ancient forest
is an appropriate symbol
and geographical space
to help bring us together.*



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