



The

# Steward

Streams, Farms, Parks, Forests...Protecting Our Natural Heritage for Future Generations

Volume 14 Number 2

Winter 2005

## Conservation Protects Watershed

Gordon Scott

### White Deer

Years ago when the Lake Louise Road was just a gravel track through the woods, hearty folks from the small city of Bellingham built a rustic summer retreat on land near Austin Creek. The summer retreat was called "White Deer" after the albino deer that lived in the area. As the years passed families spent quiet summers exploring the woods and creeks of White Deer. In the 1960s Rod O'Connor, a woodshop teacher from Bellingham, and his family became owners along with his three sons, Tim, Dan and Mike, the O'Connors became the stewards of the property for the next 40 years.

Over the decades the O'Connor family took good care of White Deer, upgrading the water system, maintaining the small cabin and outdoor kitchen, caring for the streams and forest. Their commitment to preserving the natural environment of White Deer was strong, and in 1997 the three brothers, who inherited the property from their parents, donated a conservation easement to Whatcom Land Trust. As time went on the three brothers ended up living in different parts of the country and visited White Deer less frequently. Late last year the brothers decided to donate the entire property to Whatcom Land Trust and passed on to us the stewardship of White Deer.

A beautiful, mature forest of tow-



photo: Gordon Scott

Portion of Whiskey Creek on the "White Deer" Lake Whatcom watershed property which has been donated to Whatcom Land Trust by the O'Connor family.

ering Western red cedar and Douglas-fir covers the White Deer property. A few small meadows and orchard openings, relicts from the early days of summer retreats, are quickly becoming part of the forest again. A small, old cabin and outbuildings will be removed from the property and recycled. Three creeks, including Austin Creek, traverse the site, pouring over waterfalls and through rocky gorges. The White Deer property is especially sensitive to disturbance. Surrounded by the Sudden Valley development on all sides, the conservation of

White Deer by the O'Connor brothers will help blunt the tide of new development in the Lake Whatcom Watershed.

When I visited the property with Dan O'Connor in December, I was reminded once again of the importance special places have for all of us. Dan told me stories of the adventures he and his brothers had spending summers at White Deer, exploring creeks, building trails, and just being young in the woods. With the gift of White Deer to Whatcom Land Trust, the legacy of the O'Connor family will live on. White

...continued on page four

# WLT News

## Bill Carroll will be missed from WLT Board

The Board of Directors wishes to express its appreciation to Bill Carroll for his nearly ten years of consistent, insightful service to Whatcom Land Trust. One of our strengths as an environmental organization over the years has been having a large number of private businessmen and women on our board who provide connections with the community and economic insights to further our programs. Bill has done that, much of it "behind the scenes." Bill contributed expertise with computers, assisted with fund-raising, was vice-president in 2000-2001, and for years served as our personnel supervisor. Shortly before resigning from the board, he and his wife Jeanne generously established a Whatcom Land Trust endowment with the Whatcom Community Foundation.

"We, of course, respect both of them for devoting more time to their main mission, the Power of Hope," says WLT President Cindy Klein, "but we will certainly miss Bill on our board."

## Greg Aanes donates ad space to promote WLT

In December 2004 Greg Aanes, owner of Greg Aanes Furniture, donated nearly a full page of Bellingham Herald advertising to the Trust, with design work contributed by Rod Burton. Greg Aanes Furniture specializes in hand-made tables and chairs, including what a WLT board member has described as "the most comfortable rocking chair in the world." Thank you, Greg, for the gift.

## Book of nature essays published by former WLT consultant

Former WLT consultant Joe Arnett has published a book of nature essays, *Walking in the Beauty of the World* (2004), now available from the Washington Native Plant Society and through Village Books.

# VOLUNTEERS SHOW THE WAY THROUGH RAINY FALL DAYS

Ann Russell

Saturday November 6, 2004: it was raining—a northwest downpour. I was waiting in the car in the REI parking lot. How will I motivate people to pull out scotch broom in the pouring rain if I can not motivate myself? Volunteers have this way of lifting your spirits though.

For example, two weeks earlier, Saturday October 23<sup>rd</sup>, it was Make a Difference Day. Make a Difference Day is organized by the Whatcom Volunteer Center and this year there were over 1,000 volunteers working on over 30 projects. Whatcom Land Trust recruited some wonderful people to help remove blackberries from the J. Arley Harrison Memorial Wildlife Refuge. It rained that day as well. Wrestling blackberries in the rain takes a special kind of patience, doing it while laughing, joking and telling stories requires amazing character. Having the ability to have fun, get wet and scratched, and restore habitat is a great combination. A combination you would think may come by just once in while. Wrong.

Back to November 6<sup>th</sup>, out of the doors of REI, laughing, smiling and looking wide-awake, emerge 10 new employees ready to work. We drive to the Overby Farmstead and meet Russ Pfeiffer-Hoyt, who gives us some background on the Farmstead. It was pouring. I hand out picks and shovels and start us on a half-mile walk to the work site in a downpour. We begin yanking out large scotch broom shrubs amid mud, rain and



photo: Sandy Hunter.

Volunteers work at the Overby Farmstead — Gini Bunnell with hay fork, Al Hunter and Gary Holloway in the background

once again laughter and stories. After 3 ½ hours of hard work the volunteers did not want to stop. I went to wipe rain out of my eyes and smeared mud on my face. I looked at myself and everyone else, we looked beautifully horrible—wet, dirty, and smiling. Volunteers have this way about them.

An enormous thank you to all those who participated in these projects: Al and Sandy Hunter, Gini Bunnell, Gary Holloway, Mike and Susan Brady, Sarah Vergin, Russ Pfeiffer-Hoyt, Ray Elliot and all the REI November New Hires! And everyone at the Whatcom Volunteer Center!

We have more projects coming up and lots of work to be done on our properties! If you are interested in volunteering please contact Ann or Connie at the office: (360) 650-9470, or [arussell@whatcomlandtrust.org](mailto:arussell@whatcomlandtrust.org).

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# Tree of the Year Celebrates Douglas-fir

story: Bob Langan illustration: Sarah Vergin

Have you seen a Douglas-fir today? From my tree fort where I type, I can see my neighbor's tree, one tall enough that I have to lean forward and twist my head upward to take in its full height and roughly 80 years. The hill above me is covered with *Pseudotsuga menziesii* and the contours beyond the bricks of Bellingham are softened by the crowns of evergreens—most likely Douglas-fir.

While these magnificent trees can be seen throughout Whatcom County, do we really notice them? The word 'notice' comes from the Latin *notitia*, which means "a being known." Do we really know these beings?

Certainly yes, we know the Douglas-fir to some degree. And we can always know more.

The Whatcom Land Trust wants to honor what we know about Douglas-fir and create new ways to know them even better by initiating the "Tree of the Year," a multifaceted celebration of the trees of Whatcom County.

Tree of the Year program will select a different native tree species each year, starting with the Douglas-fir in 2005. From the sacred to the utility, we'll celebrate these trees in all their glory—their grandeur, natural history, human uses, art, stories, their needs and their future.

Throughout the year, this program seeks to increase awareness and appreciation for the Douglas-fir in particular, and trees and forest habitat in general.

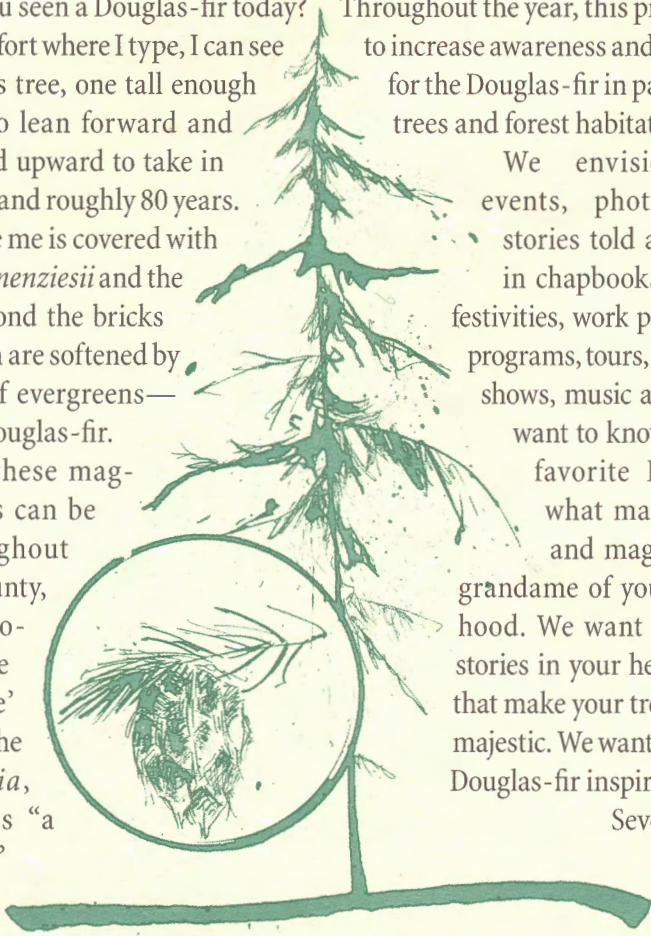
We envision gallery events, photo contests, stories told and gathered in chapbooks, Arbor Day festivities, work parties, school programs, tours, lectures, slide shows, music and more. We want to know about your favorite Douglas-fir, what makes it grand and magnificent, the grandame of your neighborhood. We want to know the stories in your heart, the ones that make your tree stately and majestic. We want to know how Douglas-fir inspires you.

Several local artists were inspired to donate

their Douglas-fir art to our auction. In fact, the Great Outdoors Auction has adopted the Douglas-fir as its theme for the upcoming June 4, 2005, event.

As a framework to encourage Tree of the Year festivities, we have formed a number of committees that include Education, Art, Crowning, Arbor Day, Work Party, Donations, Publications and Marketing. If any of these resonate with you, if you have some ideas not discussed here, or if you want to help shape the Tree of the Year project, please contact the Whatcom Land Trust office at 650-9470 for more information.

We can notice the Douglas-fir in a new way.



## UPCOMING TOURS

### ARCO Heron Reserve

Saturday, February 26

10am – 12:30pm

Leader: Ann Eissinger,  
Wildlife Biologist

Limit: None

Come join us for a slide presentation and talk on great blue herons followed by a visit to the heronry. Call the office to register. Dress for walking through brush, and wear boots that cover the ankle.

### Canyon Lake Creek Snowshoe

Saturday, March 12

9am – 4:30pm

Leaders: Ann Russell, WLT Conservation Specialist, and Roger Weiss, Outdoorsman and Nature Photographer

Limit 12

Come and explore one of Whatcom Land Trust's most ambitious habitat acquisitions, Canyon Lake Creek Community Forest. Located in the foothills of Mt. Baker, this 2,300-acre watershed includes 600 acres of 800- to 1000-year-old trees. One of the oldest native forests remaining in the Northwest, the site is a living classroom of unique plants, animals, and spectacular tropical fossils.

Be prepared for a rewarding and vigorous excursion. Bring snowshoes, water, lunch, and appropriate weather gear. We meet at 3373 Mt. Baker Hwy (mile marker 9), the Whatcom County Parks & Rec. Headquarters, at 9 AM. We will return around 4:30. Call to register.

### Stimpson Family Nature Reserve

Saturday, March 5, April 2, May 7

10am – 12:00pm

Leaders: Stimpson Family Nature Reserve Nature Guides

Limit: None

An all-ages guided walk through the diverse habitats of this 350-acre nature reserve. Listen for birds, watch for native plants, and learn about the cultural history that has shaped this area of the Lake Whatcom watershed. Meet at the trailhead on Lake Louise Road, dress for the weather and prepare for a 2-hour hike. Children must be accompanied by an adult.

Deer will eventually be incorporated into the Stimpson Family Nature Reserve – Olsen Estate watershed complex of protected properties open for passive recreation. Thank you Tim, Dan and Mike O'Connor.

## Anderson Purchase

A couple of miles to the northwest of White Deer a small frog hops off the trail as Ann Russell, our Conservation Specialist, and I inspect the 34-acre Anderson Lake Whatcom Property. In December Whatcom Land Trust helped the City and the County purchase the Anderson tract for watershed protection and passive recreation. Whatcom Land Trust holds a conservation easement over the property that protects the outstanding forest, streams and five-acre pond on the parcel.

The presence of a frog is a good sign because frogs worldwide have been suffering declines in population, possibly from air pollution. The frogs are just one good sign from the Anderson Property. Wood ducks, herons, and kingfishers are busy on a small pond that is fed by water from the Stimpson Family Nature Reserve located southeast of Anderson. This summer Whatcom Land Trust plans to build a connecting trail from the Stimpson Nature Reserve around the Anderson pond, offering visitors even more hiking options. But the best thing about the Anderson property is the conservation of native watershed forests and streams this project brings to the Lake Whatcom area.

With the acquisition of the Anderson property, Whatcom Land Trust continues its productive collaboration with Whatcom County and the City of Bellingham.



photo: Rand Jack

*This five-acre pond on the Anderson Property will become accessible via a trail from the Stimpson Family Nature Reserve.*

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# Community Shopping Day at Food Co-op supports WLT

The Community Food Co-op will support Whatcom Land Trust in April through its Community Shopping Day. On Saturday, April 16<sup>th</sup> the Community Food Co-op will donate 2% of its sales to the Whatcom Land Trust.

## WLT Business Partners

The Whatcom Land Trust would like to thank our 2004-2005 Business Conservation Partners for working with us to conserve land in Whatcom County for future generations.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
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| <i>Pacific Rim Tonewoods</i>           |  |

To become a part of the Business Conservation Partner program, contact us at 650-9470.

# REI Gives Grant for Bridges at Canyon Lake Creek Community Forest

The Whatcom Land Trust received a \$4,000 grant from REI to assist in construction of two bridges at Canyon Lake Creek Community Forest. Plans are underway to construct a 2-mile trail around the 40-acre Canyon Lake. The proposed trail will require the construction of two bridges. The grant from REI will be instrumental in maintaining public access and enjoyment in Canyon Lake Creek Community Forest. **THANK YOU REI!**

*Interested in visiting Canyon Lake Creek Community Forest? Please join us for a snowshoe tour of the park (see the tour schedule on page three).*

## Thank You Donors!

Thank you to everyone who made a donation during our fall campaign. Your generosity is deeply appreciated. In the last two years our membership has increased by 40%. We are now supported by over 700 individuals, families and businesses. With your support, we look forward to another year of conserving land and promoting stewardship in Whatcom County!

## Every Gift Counts

Whatcom Land Trust runs on a fiscal year that begins July 1 and ends June 31. Our Annual Reports reflect the gifts made within the last fiscal year. Purchase of tickets to the Great Outdoors Auction and purchases of auction items at or below market value are not, by law, a tax-deductible donation; however, if an auction attendee pays more than the market value for an item, the amount paid over market value is deductible and is included in our annual report. All donations made to the Save-an-Acre portion of our auction are deductible and are included in the annual report.

We work very hard to assure that all donations are properly recognized. If you feel an error has been made, please feel free to contact the Land Trust at (360) 650-9470.

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# First Farmland Protected by PDR Program

Late last year Whatcom Land Trust partnered with Whatcom County and the US Department of Agriculture in the first ever purchase of development rights in our community. Forty acres of prime agricultural soils are now permanently protected on the Howard Holz farm off the Hemmi Road. The Holz family has been farming their land for three generations, and the purchase of development rights will help future generations of Holz farmers stay competitive in the world agricultural marketplace. As John Gillies describes below, conversion of productive farmland into houses, malls and factories continues to be the primary threat to our food security and the well being of our community. Whatcom County's newly adopted Purchase of Agricultural Development Rights Program is one of the important steps we can make in working to preserve our rural lifestyle.

## Importance of Farmlands

John Gillies, Natural Resources Conservation Service, USDA

Nationally about three acres of farmland are converted to non-agricultural use every single minute of the day. In a year this adds up to 2,464 square miles, equivalent to a block of land almost 50 miles to each side. The population of our country is growing at about 1 percent per year, but over the past 20 years the acreage per person for new housing almost doubled. In other words, land is being developed at twice the rate of population growth. Most of the land that is being developed is outside of existing cities, which is where our best farmland is typically located. Much of this land is high quality, prime farmland capable of growing crops that don't grow well elsewhere. The simple fact is that in Whatcom County the loss of farmland to development is accelerating, our highest quality farmland is the most threatened and our open spaces are in the path of that development.

Washington State and Whatcom County trends do not differ from the national data. In 12 of the 39 Washington counties urban growth increased by 40% or more between 1982 and 1997. Much of the large gains in urban land came at the expense of cropland. In Whatcom County over the past five decades we've lost on average 1,000 acres per year—almost 3 acres per day.

Agriculture in Whatcom County continues to be a large and viable indus-



photo: Ann Russell

*The Howard Holz field and farmstead—third-generation agricultural land.*

try. The value of farm products exceeds \$280,000,000 in Whatcom County, ranking us the highest value farm county in western Washington and 6th highest in the state. The county's production ranks in the top 3% of all farm counties in the US.

As the American Farmland Trust points out it is more than the financial impact when we lose farmland, we also lose:

- *Wildlife—Farm and ranch land provides more than 70 percent of the habitat for America's wildlife;*
- *Scenic views and wide-open countryside—Well-managed farm and ranch land protects soil and water. Farmland*

*loss has visible environmental impacts;*

- *Access to fresh local foods*
- *Millions of jobs both on the land and in secondary services; and*
- *Down-to-earth values and farming character of our rural communities—America was born a farming nation and farms help to define our cultural heritage.*

Whether or not Whatcom remains a viable agricultural county will depend upon the availability of good land, water resources and public support like the Purchase of Development Rights Program.

*The "Agricultural Purchase of Development Rights Program" (or "PDR Program") was established by the Whatcom County Council to enhance the protection of the County's farmland, enhance the long-term viability of the agricultural enterprises within the County and provide public benefit by retaining properties in permanent resource use. Whatcom Land Trust had been contracted to hold and manage the conservation easements on the properties acquired through this program.*

# Opportunities to Help WLT

Please call the office if you are interested in participating in any of the following (650-9470).

**Auction Committee** – The annual auction is WLT's single largest fundraising event. Starting now through the June 4<sup>th</sup> event, the Committee plans the event and procures items.

**Development Committee** – The Development Committee is responsible for maintaining adequate income for the Trust's ongoing operations, and for assisting and supporting the Development Director in achieving this income. It also seeks funds for special projects. The Committee will advise the board, review proposals, examine fundraising procedures, and recommend new sources of revenue.

**Event Support** – We always need people to help the day of an event. We currently need volunteers for our 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Great Outdoors Auction on June 4<sup>th</sup>.

**Office Assistance** – Come help us prepare the newsletter for mailing, or sign up to work in the office on a regular basis.

**Work Parties** – Spend a day working on a WLT property pulling invasive plants, cleaning debris, planting or some other similar activity. Guidance and tools provided by WLT staff.

- The next work party is March 19<sup>th</sup> from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Ennis Creek Property.
- Our Earth Day project will be on April 23<sup>rd</sup> from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Roos property.

**Outreach Committee** – Outreach Committee members create events and projects to build community awareness and are leaders for projects of their choosing.

**Tour Organizer** – This position entails working with the staff and the Outreach Committee to establish tours for various properties owned by Whatcom Land Trust.

**Tour/Nature Guide** – Tour guides have special familiarity with a place or subject (i.e. birds, geology, nature writing). Tours can take place on any of WLT's properties that are open to the public. Nature Guides lead people through the Stimpson Family Nature Reserve on Saturday mornings.

**Outreach Displays** – By talking to the public about the

role of WLT in the community, display operators are critical for growth of our organization. Display operator set up the booth, answer questions, talk with community members, and encourage involvement with Whatcom Land Trust.

**Office Custodian** – This isn't glamorous, but it sure would be helpful to have someone come in once a week to vacuum, take out the trash and haul supplies back and forth from the storage area.

## Land Monitors' Workshop

Part of the backbone of the Conservation Easement program at Whatcom Land Trust is a core group of highly dedicated Land Monitors. These folks dedicate their time every year to looking after our conservation easements, ensuring that valuable habitat and open space is protected. On November 13<sup>th</sup> several of these volunteers gathered together for the annual Land Monitors' Workshop. The workshop was an opportunity to review important aspects of this volunteer position and a great chance to catch up. Thank you to all those who attended and to all Land Monitors—your dedication to conservation is inspiring!

If you are interested in being a Land Monitor, please contact Ann at the office (360)650-9470, or e-mail [arussell@whatcomlandtrust.org](mailto:arussell@whatcomlandtrust.org)



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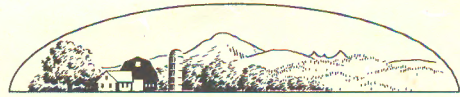
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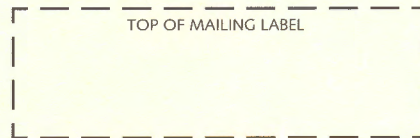
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## Great Outdoors Auction - June 4<sup>th</sup>

*Save the day—June 4<sup>th</sup>—for the fifth annual Whatcom Land Trust Great Outdoors Auction.*

The Great Outdoors Auction has traveled throughout Whatcom County to celebrate the variety of lands protected by the Whatcom Land Trust, from the forested and streamside sites along the Nooksack River to our precious salt water shorelines and urban gems.

This year's auction will be held at the Bellingham Cruise Terminal and will be an event to remember. Tours of Whatcom Land Trust properties and auction offerings will honor the Douglas-fir, this year's species for "Tree of the Year."

Last year's auction sold out early so watch the mail for information on ticket purchase and reservations. Join us for an evening of food, fun, and rousing support for further preservation of lands within this fine County.

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