



FARMS

PAST AND FUTURE

*The farm is a thread of life
weaving together the family and land
over a span of generations.*

Russ Pfeiffer-Hoyt, Co-Founder,
Neset Trust

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Photo: Meghan Payne, Wild Rose Farm

THE Steward

Volume 25, Number 1 Summer 2017

Dusty Williams Grows More Than Vegetables – He Grows Farmers

Colleen Carroll, Ed.D., Communications & Outreach Director

Since 2000, Whatcom Land Trust and Whatcom County have worked together with willing landowners to protect the rural nature of the landscape. Today 18 farms covering 905 acres of farmland in the agricultural core of the northern-most corner of Washington State are protected from development. The primary tool for protection of these lands is the Agricultural Purchase of Development Rights (Ag PDR) Program.

Dusty Williams learned about the Ag PDR program from County Planner, Chris Elder. After pondering the idea in his careful manner, Dusty decided it was the right choice for his family, since his grown children are not considering returning to the farming lifestyle, but he wanted to see the farm continue to thrive. The PDR option provides funds for operational expenses, but most important to Dusty, the knowledge that the land will remain in farming for years to come. In May 2017, Dusty Williams placed 37 acres of farmland into the Ag PDR program, protecting the land from development into perpetuity.

Thirty years ago Dusty Williams set foot on Broadleaf Farm for the first time and he has never looked back. Over the years the quiet farmer has cultivated a diverse array of crops and livestock — everything from peas, cabbage and garlic to heifers and chickens. In 1996, he planted his first fully organic seed corn crop and to this day continues to use exclusively organic farming practices.

While Dusty continues to till the soil, he also sows the seeds of connection to the land with young farmers. His formula for encouraging a love of the land in a new generation is to plant kernels of knowledge, demonstrate sound farming practices alongside younger farmers on a daily basis, and then watch the farmers grow.

Dusty leases land to four farms: **Spring Time**, **Terra Verde**, **Wanderwood** and **Wild Rose**. All the farmers working at Broadleaf start with a lease they can afford and the opportunity to carve out a living on the land. Broadleaf has the infrastructure needed for success, from cleaning stations to coolers, along with the comradery and exchange of ideas that is so valuable in an entrepreneurial farming community.

According to the *Agricultural Economist*, one of the most well-known trends in American farming is the ever-increasing age of



Photo: Alan Fritzberg

*Farming is not something one does for the money,
farming is something one does for the love of it.*

Dusty Williams, Broadleaf Farm

the contemporary farmer. Today, the largest group of producers are older than 65 years. In 2012, those under 45 years only represented 16% of total producers. Dusty sees things differently. From his vantage point near Everson in Whatcom County, the landscape is filled with robust young entrepreneurs with a love of the land.

The immediate draw to farming for the owners of Wanderwood Farm was the chance to grow food for themselves, to be self-reliant. After farming for a year they found that this was a life that suited them and they ventured into creating a one-acre market garden. Wanderwood Farm owners are a picture perfect example of Whatcom County's new generation of farmers. This generation looks at agriculture with a fresh perspective – rather than seeking to have large scale operations, they want to stay small, be sustainable and unique.

Asked about the future of farming here in Whatcom County, Dusty sees farming as something that just fits in the County as a natural part of the lifestyle that will continue long into the future. The Ag PDR gives the young farmers a secure knowledge that the land they tend so carefully will remain in farming throughout their lifetimes and longer.

Young farmers bank on Dusty Williams. Pictured: Jen Finch & Colin Fischer, owners, Wanderwood Farm (Photos: Alan Fritzberg and Meghan Payne)



Dusty is the landowner and mentor that raised Wild Rose Farm. Dusty has an inconspicuous tradition of raising farmers; a large handful of Whatcom County farmers started at Broadleaf Farm under his careful eye. Dusty is the hidden treasure of Whatcom County. Anyone who knows him understands the irreplaceable value that he offers to this community.

Meghan Payne, Owner, Wild Rose Farm

Protected LANDS

Whatcom Land Trust manages agricultural easements on 18 farmlands, covering 905 acres. The Dusty Williams Ag PDRs on the outskirts of the city of Nooksack remove two development rights, permanently protecting 37 acres of prime farmland.

Generally, the purpose of an agricultural easement is to:

- Protect the present and future ability to use the property for agricultural purposes
- Preserve the soil as a valuable resource and prevent activities that will impair the ability, now or in the future, to use the soil to produce food and fiber
- Enable the property to remain in agricultural use to produce food and fiber by preserving and protecting in perpetuity its agricultural values, character, use and utility, and to prevent any use or condition of the property that would significantly impair or interfere with its agricultural values, character, use or utility

To learn more about the Whatcom County Ag PDR program contact Chris Elder, Whatcom County Planner (360) 778-5932 or Gabe Epperson, Whatcom Land Trust Conservation Director (360) 650-9470.



HOW DO OUR FORESTS **Feed Our Farms?**



Farms & Forests

Nick Sky, Environmental Educator

The beautiful landscapes of western Whatcom County are a picturesque mosaic of agricultural scenes framed by forested backdrops. Forests and fields are complementary in creating a pleasing scene, but more than that, the rich agriculture of this region is intimately tied to the health of riparian, valley, slope, and montane forests in a multitude of ways.

Forests profoundly impact the supply, timing, and rates of groundwater release. From our forested lands, clean, cold water is available for human, animal, and plant inhabitants of farms and nearby communities. Forest canopies comb the clouds for moisture and cushion the surprisingly powerful impact of falling raindrops. Massive trees, like Douglas firs, hold huge volumes of water in their trunks. The entire forest system slows the flow of water through soils and in rivers and streams allowing it to enrich the depth and breadth of complex living systems. Picture an ancient Western red cedar overhanging a rushing stream, shading the water with its feathery foliage and holding the bank together with its massive web of roots. These moderating effects of the forest reduce floods and soil erosion, which is especially important because many farms are on floodplains and deltas.

In the lowlands, the fluttering golden-tinged leaves and smooth trunks of the black cottonwood line the rivers. The complex webs of life in these riparian forests of cottonwood, alder and willow help to protect waters and farmlands by holding and slowing nutrient and chemical flows from agricultural lands. In fact, trees are the first line of defense in slowing agricultural and other nutrients from reaching streams and the Salish Sea.

Forest edges and patches within a healthy forest mosaic, especially an ancient forest mosaic, nurture healthy populations of predator insects, spiders, and an even greater number and variety of parasitic insect species that together keep agricultural pest populations in check. Forests also support many bird species that feed on insect pests. Fewer pests means more efficiency and higher

yields for farmers and less need for application of ecologically disruptive pesticides.

Additionally, and of great importance to agricultural production, forest ecosystems provide habitat for Whatcom's great diversity of native pollinators. The beneficial foraging of native bees, butterflies, moths, hummingbirds, beetles, and flower flies ensure healthy, tasty, nutritious, and abundant crops.

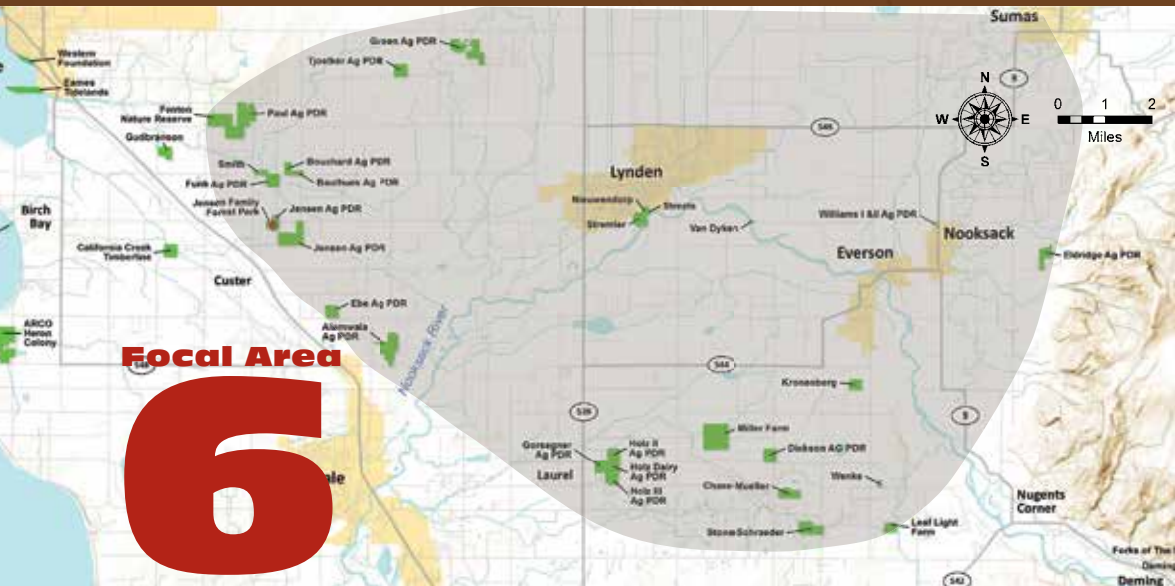
Forests also moderate winds, preventing valuable soils from blowing away, especially on fallow fields, and protecting crops from being uprooted or damaged by strong winds. By buffering the erosive impact of water and wind, forests are crucial in the formation of healthy soil ecosystems, which are fundamental to any form of agriculture.

In truth, the importance of ecologically complex soil systems to agriculture, and to the resilience of the larger human and natural communities, cannot be overstated. Well-developed and protected forest soils have a structure that holds huge amounts of water to be used by an immense number of soil microorganism species that create the necessary conditions for healthy crops. In addition, healthy forest and agricultural soils absorb large amounts of carbon from the atmosphere. Finally, healthy forests provide a breeding ground for the vital mycorrhizae fungi. These dynamic fungi are the literal web of life for plants, helping them grow faster, larger and healthier.

While forests might seem distant and separate from our farms, they are actually crucial in maintaining the range of environmental conditions that have allowed agriculture to develop and endure.

Nick Sky has been immersed in the forests of the Pacific Northwest since he was a boy and today is a local leader in environmental education and sharing stories of the land via interpretive walks and talks.

TIMELINE - PROTECTED LANDS IN THE AGRICULTURAL CORE



Whatcom Land Trust divides its land conservation goals into 7 geographic focal areas.

In Focal Area 6 the lands protected are representative of the agricultural core of Whatcom County — working farms and historic farmlands — but also reflective of other land characteristics of the County: open space, riparian zones, forests and wetlands.

Whatcom Land Trust—Working cooperatively with farmers and land owners to protect the rural landscape in Whatcom County.

Whatcom Core Agricultural Zone

Whatcom Land Trust's principle goal for agricultural protection in the county is to protect large tracts of productive farmland that are under significant threat of development.

Whatcom Land Trust has clearly defined goals for land conservation across Whatcom County. Protecting Farmland topped the list in 1984 and was the catalyst for the creation of the Land Trust. Protection of farmland remains a primary focal area to this day, particularly in the agricultural core in the northern county. Whatcom Land Trust protects 33 properties totaling over 1400 acres. (Data: June 2017)

Timeline



Photo: David Scherrer

1990		ACRES	
1996	Chase-Mueller	45	Ten Mile Creek Open Space
1997	Stremler	38	Lynden Open Space
1998	Nieuwendorp	8	Lynden Open Space
1998	Streets	3	Lynden Open Space

1980		ACRES	
1986	Miller Farm	160	Dairy Farm



2010		ACRES	
2010	California Creek Timberline	41	Drayton Harbor Watershed
2011	Jensen Family Forest Park	107	Crops: Ag PDR
2013	Holtz III	37	Dairy: Ag PDR
2013	Eldridge	12	Organic Dairy: Ag PDR
2014	Funk	39	Berry Farm: Ag PDR
2017	Gudbranson	35	Forest & Forested Wetlands
2017	Williams I & II	37	Organic Crops: Ag PDR

2000		ACRES	
2000	County Begins Agricultural Purchase of Development Rights (Ag PDR) Program		
2001	Wenke	5	Mid County Open Space
2002	Stone-Schraeder I	25	Ten Mile Creek Open Space
2003	Stone-Schraeder II & III	40	Ten Mile Creek Open Space
2004	Holz I	40	Dairy: Ag PDR
2005	Gorsegner	40	Former Dairy/Now Berry: Ag PDR
2005	Leaf Light Farm	25	Anderson Creek Open Space
2005	Paul Farm	157	Farming: Ag PDR
2005	Kronenberg	30	Forest & Open Space
2006	Fenton	77	Nature Reserve (Beaver Ponds)
2006	Alamwala Farm	91	Raspberry Farm: Ag PDR
2006	Jensen Family Forest Park	23	Douglas Fir Forest
2007	Groen	95	Dairy: Ag PDR
2007	Holz II	39	Former Dairy/Now Berry: Ag PDR
2007	Dickson	40	Dairy: Ag PDR
2008	Van Dyken	1.5	Nooksack River Waterfront
2008	Tjoelker	39	Dairy: Ag PDR
2008	Bouchard	20	Crops: Ag PDR
2008	Bauthues	11	Crops: Ag PDR
2008	Ebe	40	Crops: Ag PDR



Protected Land Agricultural Core Focal Area 6
33 properties
totaling over 1400 acres of land

Photo: Meghan Payne



Partners In Farmland Protection





Photos courtesy Whatcom Land Trust unless otherwise noted.

Farms Past and Future

Rich Bowers, Executive Director

As a past history major, I am fascinated by the time lines and issues that set our lives in motion and that define who and what we are. Here at home, farming and agriculture has played a large role in making Whatcom County such a wonderful and unique community, so I am pleased that this Steward documents a part of the important story from 1903 (original purchase of the Nessel Farm) until today. It is equally interesting that the theme of passing land, intact, to the next generation runs throughout this 114-year history.

This Steward highlights the value and role of conservation easements in protecting farmland. A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement that permanently limits the uses of land in order to protect its conservation values. Landowners retain many of their rights, including the right to own and use the land, sell it and pass it on to their heirs.

Whatcom Land Trust works with 33 individual conservation easement donors across the County, and in each relationship the motivating factor for the donor is to protect their values and land and to see those preserved for future generations. Our cooperative relationships with these donors have protected more than 6,400 acres of land for future generations, with 1,600 acres of that in farmland, and an anticipated 1,200 acres of farmland protected under Whatcom County's Purchase of Development Rights program. To provide a larger perspective, non-governmental organizations in Washington State have permanently protected more than 47,600 acres of land through voluntary conservation easements.

Whatcom Land Trust has been a critical partner in the Agricultural Purchase of Development Rights program from the beginning. The level of protection offered by the Trust allows Whatcom County to expand the protection offered to important farmlands with confidence. When we purchase an Ag PDR we have the guarantee that the land will be in protection forever.

Chris Elder, County Planner

The motivating factor for the farmer is to protect their values and land and to see those preserved for future generations.

—**Rich Bowers**, Executive Director

If you are interested in protecting your land and exploring a permanent conservation easement as part of a financial or estate plan, please give the Trust a call (360-650-9470). The easements accepted by the Trust must have a clear public benefit for protection of farm land, wildlife habitat, recreation and water quality. We can provide successful examples and outline the steps you can take to examine the available options. Easements make sense for some landowners and not for others, and it is important that landowners fully understand all of the legal implications, risks, and how it will affect future land use and values. The Trust cannot provide legal or financial advice, or guarantee the success of any plan, so it is wise to seek independent, qualified attorneys or tax planners familiar with the laws pertaining to charitable gifts of land and easements.

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- Whatcom Family Farmers
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November 9

Business Partner Appreciation Breakfast

CELEBRATE the strong connection between good business and protecting local lands at **Whatcom Land Trust's Business Partner Appreciation Breakfast at 7:30 a.m. on Thursday, November 9 at Boundary Bay Brewery. Everyone is invited to join us in a hearty meal** as we thank our business supporters and share why Whatcom Land Trust is having positive impact on our community's health, economic prosperity and quality of life. Tickets go on sale in October.



Protecting Farmlands in Whatcom County

Gabe Epperson, Conservation Director

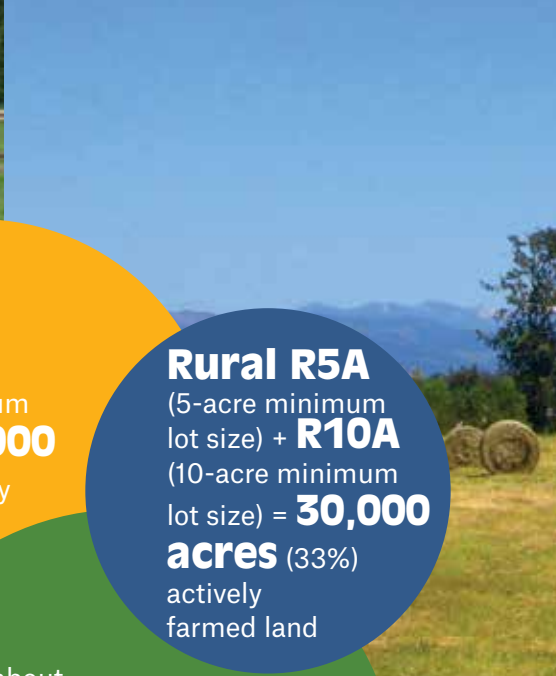
In July of 2016, the Whatcom County Council approved \$710,000 in funding from the Conservation Futures program to permanently protect six farms covering 400 acres of prime agricultural land in Whatcom County. These farms characterize the diversity of agricultural production across the county ranging from large cattle ranches and organic livestock producers to market and niche farms covering smaller acreage filled with vegetables and flowers.

Whatcom Land Trust has a contract with the County to manage conservation easements on these properties. Critical to managing these easements is the cooperative relationship that develops with each property owner. We meet at least once a year to walk the property together, ensuring that the terms of the easement are being met. This is a great opportunity to engage with land owners and answer questions about how the easements are monitored and enforced.

In the 1990s concerned representatives from the County and the Land Trust recognized the need for additional tools to protect farmland from the ever-increasing pressures of residential development, urban sprawl and other market forces. The developments were steadily eroding and fragmenting Whatcom County's prime farmlands. In 2000, the County adopted the Agricultural Purchase of Development Rights (Ag PDR) program, in partnership with the Land Trust to protect the precious rural landscape.

The Ag PDR is one of the pillars of farmland protection, while zoning is by far the greatest tool we have, the Ag PDR program allows us to strategically protect land vulnerable to development. Currently 115,000 acres of land in Whatcom County are farmed 87,000 of those acres are zoned for agriculture, the other 30,000 are in rural zoning and are at risk of conversion.

Chris Elder, County Planner



AG zone
 (40-acre minimum
 lot size) = **87,000**
acres actively
 farmed land

Rural R5A
 (5-acre minimum
 lot size) + **R10A**
 (10-acre minimum
 lot size) = **30,000**
acres (33%)
 actively
 farmed land

Today about
115,000 acres of land
 are actively farmed in
 Whatcom County
 in the Ag and
 Rural Zones.



What is the Agricultural Purchase of Development Rights Program?

The Ag PDR program is designed to protect soil as a resource for future farm owners and the residents of the County by placing limits on the amount of infrastructure that can be built on a property. In exchange for monetary compensation interested landowners sell specific property rights, such as the right to develop future homes or subdivide the property. The one-time payment to a farmer is determined through an appraisal that compares the property to recent comparable sales. On average, the County spends several hundred thousand dollars each year to purchase farm easements through the Ag PDR program. The funds to purchase easements are generated from the Conservation Futures property tax levy collected countywide.

As of July 2017 there are 18 Ag PDRs covering 905 acres of prime farmland in the county. The newly approved funding, when applied to the purchase of the six new conservation easements, will increase the amount of land protected through this program by nearly 50%. The expected 1,268 acres of land protected through the Ag PDR program represents just 1% of the total actively farmed land in the County.

Whatcom County Agricultural Plan—the 100,000 Acre Goal

Whatcom County has seen a reduction in actively farmed land from an estimated 200,000 acres in the 1940s to 116,000 acres in 2012. The County has a goal to maintain a critical mass of at least 100,000 acres to sustain a viable agricultural sector. This is not just a catchy slogan or nice round number. Studies by the American Farmland Trust and United States Department of Agriculture have demonstrated that 100,000 acres is a threshold required for a viable agricultural sector to thrive in a given county. With fewer than 100,000 acres there is simply not the critical mass of farms and production to support the infrastructure and processing facilities required for farming to be profitable.

One tool critical to the accomplishment of this goal is the County's Agricultural Purchase of Development Rights (Ag PDR) Program. Working with willing landowners, the County, in partnership with Whatcom Land Trust, maintains agricultural conservation easements to permanently protect agricultural properties for local food and farmers. Whatcom County's priority in the working core is to protect soils and water resources to maximize food production.

Whatcom County's Ag PDR program, administered through Planning and Development Services, points to the existing threat posed by the development potential in the Rural R5A and R10A zones in particular. If market conditions change and proposals to provide technical or legislative fixes to address the rural development moratorium, these "small lot" farms could continue to be converted to rural estates, threatening the viability of the County's stated goal of 100,000 acres of active farmland.

Whatcom Land Trust, for over 30 years, has been proud to work diligently to protect and conserve farmland throughout Whatcom County and we look forward to continuing this legacy. To learn more about our impacts over the years please see the timeline on pages 5 & 6 as well as the historical article on Nessel Farm, one of Whatcom Land Trust's original protected farms and a vital snapshot of Whatcom County's history.



The mission of Whatcom Land Trust is to preserve and protect wildlife habitat, scenic, agricultural and open space lands in Whatcom County for future generations by securing interests in land and promoting land stewardship.

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CALIFORNIA CREEK ESTUARY

Protected Land in the Drayton Harbor Watershed

On June 30th, 2017 the Whatcom Land Trust announced the purchase of 11.5 acres of the California Creek Estuary, located in the Drayton Harbor Watershed. The California Creek Estuary property is a critical link in protection of bird and salmon species in northwest Washington. This property includes the mouth of the estuary and thus is a vital link to Drayton Harbor and the protection of its tidelands and vulnerable wetlands ecosystems.

KEY PARTNERS: Blaine-Birch Bay Park and Recreation District #2; The Conservation Fund

Photo: Alan Fritzbeg



Nesset Farm History

By Rand Jack—A Recollection

Whatcom Land Trust Steward Volume 25, Number 1 Summer 2017



Louie Sinnes homestead. House shown in second location. Purchased by Nessets in 1905. 1903.

Three years after Lars and Anna Nesset moved

in 1903 from Norway to Whatcom County, they purchased a 106-acre homestead on the banks of the Nooksack River South Fork from cousin Louie Sinnes for \$1,500. The house is made from hand-split cedar timbers smoothed with a razor sharp broad axe. At the same time Sinnes sold the farm to the Nessets, he sold all of the old-growth Douglas fir and cedar trees on the farm to the Ferguson Logging Company for \$9,000.

The Nessets were able to obtain the farm due to a horse race - a race between a horse and a boat. When Louie Sinnes arrived in the South Fork Valley from Norway in 1887, homesteaders had taken all of the river bottom farmland. In Acme, Louie heard that the original homesteader of what is now the Nesset Farm had left, fed up with clearing land in the rain. Another fellow heard the same story at the same time, and they set off in a race to the land office in Bellingham to claim the now deserted homestead - the other fellow by horse around the north end of Lake Whatcom and Louie, a sturdy Norwegian, down the lake in a six person rowboat. Louie won the race and claimed the prize.



Calves standing before split rail fence - logged hillside in background. ca. 1920.

At age six, Tom Nesset moved with his family to the Sinnes

homestead where he grew up in the shadow of the hillside behind his home logged bare by the Ferguson Logging Company. This made a lasting impression on Tom, who later confided that he never wanted to see it happen again.

The Nessets brought from Norway what they thought they would need in America - a special tool for hollowing out wooden shoes, round, rawhide snowshoes for horses, hand painted wooden storage chests, a portable knitting machine. Three young children accompanied their parents from Norway; George 1908, and Ingeborg 1909, were born in America. None of the five siblings married or had children.

Pulling old-growth stumps with a hand crank winch, the Nessets slowly converted a "stump farm" into a successful, largely self-sufficient dairy farm, milking 20 Guernsey cows by hand. They kept milk cool for market by circulating creek water through copper coils in the

milk shed. The Nessets grew grain and hay for the cows. The garden and orchard produced vegetables and fruit; the South Fork produced salmon, steelhead and trout. The family canned, smoked and stored fruit, vegetables, fish and abundant venison. By 1926, much of the hard labor of creating the dairy farm was done, and the Nessets could afford a pump organ for the living room.



Ingeborg Nesset on workhorse held by her father Lars. ca. 1914.

Stewardship for the natural environment went hand in

hand with establishing a successful farm in a virtual wilderness. Each year, Tom and George recorded the date that the first Coho salmon arrived in Nesset Creek. By late fall, the creek flowed with more fish than water. To create the complex habitat needed for the salmon to successfully reproduce, the Nessets deposited woody debris into the creek, a practice only recently adopted by fish biologists. When falling water levels in Nesset Creek marooned salmon fry, Tom and George used a hand-made dip net to transport little fish downstream.

A Nesset family friend first brought the Nesset Farm to Whatcom Land Trust's attention at an Acme Elementary School function in 1988. She described the Nesset Farm to me and said that Tom Nesset was adamant that the farm along the South Fork not be broken up and developed. Apparently someone was trying make that happen, and when Tom sought advice, he was told, "Tom, you just



Ingeborg with her pet rabbit. ca. 1917.



Lars and wife Anna with daughters Alice and Gertie load hay wagon. ca. 1920.

can't stop progress." Tom saw things differently. The family

friend asked if the Land Trust could help and introduced me to Russ Pfeiffer-Hoyt, a cousin and neighbor. With a boundless generosity, Russ had long looked after the Nessets, doing whatever needed to be done, increasingly so as the Nessets got older. They returned Russ's devotion with love and trust. I agreed to meet with Tom and Ingeborg, the two then surviving siblings, if Russ would join us.

For over a year I met with Tom and Ingeborg, often accompanied by fellow Whatcom Land Trust board member Bruce Smith and always with Russ present. From the outset, Tom was clear. He did not want the farm broken up and developed. He did not want the hillside cut bare like he had seen it as a young boy. And then one day Tom made clear what he did want - a place where children could come and learn about the natural world and the experience of ordinary farm families who emigrated from Norway to America. With a nod of his head, Russ could have owned the farm, but instead, he supported Tom



Taking milk from their dairy to market. ca. 1920.

and Ingeborg's dream.

One day when Bruce and I were working through the details of a conservation easement with the Nessets and Russ, a small unresolved issue came up. As Bruce and I were leaving, Tom said, "I'm not going to worry about that. My boys will take care of it." I understood that Tom was referring to Bruce and me, but did not then understand the significance of what he



Sled clearing the road at Nessett Farm. 1920.



Planting potatoes. ca. 1930.

said. Only years later did Russ explain the significance. The primary moral obligation of a Norwegian farmer is to pass his farm on intact to the safekeeping of the next generation, to preserve the continuity of land and family. Because the Nessel siblings had no children, Tom and Ingeborg worried for years about how they would meet this obligation. In Whatcom Land Trust, they found a way.

Tom and Ingeborg signed the Nessel Conservation Easement on July 31, 1989. The stated intent of the



New barn nearing completion replacing original barn destroyed in flood. ca. 1920.

easement is "to preserve the natural scenic beauty of the Nessel property, to protect it as a relatively natural habitat for wildlife and plants, to conserve the significant aesthetic and ecological values and characteristics of the property for public benefit, to protect the integrity of the land, and to preserve the possibility of the land being used in the future as a public park."

The conservation easement accomplishes the Nesses' hopes for the future of their home and farm. The forested hillside, with trees now over 100-years-old, will never again be stripped, and the farm will never be subdivided or developed. The easement protects the natural environment, including the spawning salmon in Nessel Creek. Traditional farming is permitted. Under carefully drawn restrictions, the conservation easement allows the farm to become a park, continuing the Norwegian and Nessel custom of welcoming both friends and strangers



Lars operates hand-crank cable crossing over Nooksack River to trail for Nessel children to walk to Saxon School. ca. 1920.

to the farm. The easement specifies that the primary themes of the park will be

"education and historical and ecological preservation."

As described by Russ, "In Norway the family farm was not just land to be bought and sold. The farm is an

extension of the family. It defines and provides continuity to the family and is something to be passed down from generation to generation. The farm is a thread of life weaving together the family and the land over a span of generations. Establishing a conservation easement was a great relief for Tom and Ingeborg. The provisions of the conservation easement will help preserve both the land and the fruits of much of the labor to which the Nessel lives have been dedicated."



Temporary bridge across S. Fork at Nessel farm. Nessel barn and recently logged hill in background. ca. 1915.

Russ remembers, "I've never seen Tom happier than the day he sat at the dining room table with Ingeborg and signed the conservation easement. After he signed his name, Tom looked up with a big grin."

Ingeborg died in 1989, at the age of 80. She died in the same bed where she was born in the split timber cedar house on the South Fork of the Nooksack.

Russ recalls Tom one day musing about what it would be like to be an old growth tree: "That sure would be something to stand in one place that long, out in the weather - the snow, rain and fog - and see everything pass by." 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. In Russ's mind, "Tom became more and more like an old-growth tree."



Nessel children George and Ingeborg in S. Fork Nooksack River. ca. 1914.

Tom and Ingeborg put the farm and family possessions into a family trust, with Tom and Russ as trustees. When Tom died in 1992 at the age of 94, Russ, as the remaining trustee, took responsibility for the care and upkeep of the farm. Russ in 1997, established the Tom and Ingeborg Nessel Foundation, with five directors, two appointed by the Land Trust, two by County Parks and Russ.

Russ transferred title to the Nessel Farm Foundation, and the Foundation agreed to sell the farm to Whatcom County, committing the proceeds of the sale to the restoration, development and operation of the Nessel Farm Park. In August, 1998, the County agreed to buy the Nessel Farm for \$980,000. The Purchase and Sale Agreement obligates the County to develop the property as a park in compliance with the provisions of the Nessel



Lars pulling old growth cedar stump behind Nessel barn. 1919. ca. 1920.

Conservation Easement, and it obligates the Foundation to use the proceeds of the sale for the benefit of the Nessel Farm Park. In effect, what the County paid for the farm was returned to the County.



Lars shows his prized Guernsey dairy bull. The hand-painted picture still hangs in the Nessel living room. 1926

In 2012, Whatcom County Council approved the 603-acre South Fork Park with 3 miles of frontage on the Nooksack River's South Fork. The Nessel Farm will be the cornerstone and crown jewel of the park. Work is now underway restoring the 130-year-old Nessel home. In addition to the Nessel Farm, Whatcom Land Trust has been instrumental in adding to the park the Galbraith Farm and the Overby Place to complete what people have said will be one of the finest county parks in the nation. None of this would have been possible without the determination, foresight and moral courage of Tom and Ingeborg Nessel, the initiative, generosity and hard work of Russ Pfeiffer-Hoyt, and the support so many have provided to Whatcom Land Trust - and, of course, the sturdy Norwegian Louie Sinnes who rowed across Lake Whatcom in 1887 to win the race to the courthouse and claim the homestead that became the Nessel Farm and now the Nessel Farm Park.



Anna harvests oats with a sickle to feed her animals. ca. 1915.