

The



Newsletter of Whatcom Land Trust
Whatcom County, Washington

Steward

Whatcom Land Trust: Preserving the Nature of Whatcom County since 1984

Volume 18 Number 3

Fall 2009

Giving Canyon Creek Elbow Room



photo: John Thompson

Heavy equipment is used to remove 13,000 yards of large boulders and fill from the dike along Canyon Creek.

Sometimes public policy decisions can seem inconsistent, especially in times of quickly changing attitudes. Restoring salmon habitat damaged at Canyon Creek by working with Whatcom County to remove a section of flood control dike is just the latest example of undoing the works of man to help salmon. Since 2000, Whatcom Land Trust and Whatcom County Public Works have been working together to restore 4.1 miles of spawning grounds for threatened Chinook salmon in the North Fork Nooksack watershed. In 2004, the County and the Land Trust completed

the first phase of the Canyon Creek project when we purchased the Logs Resort and 26 vacant lots in Glacier Springs in order to restore valuable spawning habitat and protect it in its natural state for future generations to enjoy. This summer the County completed the second phase of the project when it removed 520 feet of the massive rock dike built on Canyon Creek in 1994. The section removed was no longer needed to protect the resort and was restricting the channel and hindering salmon from reaching their native spawning grounds upstream.

Canyon Creek is one of the largest tributaries to the North Fork Nooksack and historically one of the most productive Chinook salmon spawning streams in the entire watershed. Data from 1981 North Fork spring chinook population spawner surveys show that 181 of the 317 (57%) chinook carcasses in the North Fork were recovered in the lower 1.2 miles of Canyon Creek. In recent years, returns to lower Canyon Creek have ranged from a low of 22 to a high of 344 fish. The mouth of Canyon Creek is also one of the most

...continued on page four

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WLT Store Opens

WLT now has a store! Check out our online store at www.whatcom-landtrust.org for mugs, totes, books, cards, etc.

Donations from 542

Thank you to NorKa Recreation for once again including WLT as one of the recipients of the 542 Festival green fee.

The annual 542 Festival includes a cyclo-cross race, an 8.5-mile run, and a road bike ride up to Artist Point. This year's event took place September 12th and 13th.

Welcome Laura

WLT welcomes AmeriCorps volunteer Laura Wallace from Wichita, Kansas. Laura will be working on volunteer coordination for Outreach and Land Stewardship. You may see her at work parties and events around town. Introduce yourself and welcome Laura to Whatcom County!

Bellingham Traverse

The Bellingham Traverse is September 19! This multi-sport event follows the life cycle of the salmon and benefits local non-profits, including Whatcom Land Trust. Come and support the athletes who support the environment.

Holiday Market

The Multi-Faith Holiday Market will be November 22 from 1-4pm at Bloedel-Donovan Multipurpose room. Whatcom Land Trust will be there with its gift items of mugs, totes, books, and memberships.

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Whatcom Land Trust

P.O. Box 6131

Bellingham, Washington, 98227-6131

(360) 650-9470

info@whatcomlandtrust.org

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President's Message

Dear Friend,

As part of the Whatcom Land Trust community, we share an appreciation for the core values that guide the Trust. To me, the overarching principle is that "...the land and the ecosystems it supports are fundamental to the welfare of all living beings in Whatcom County." As you read this fall edition of the *Steward*, you will see examples of each of our values in action, including land acquisition, restoration and protection, community trust, volunteerism, and support:

Land Protection – This summer, we said good-bye to our friend Jake Steiner, who with his family and throughout a decades-long relationship, worked with the Trust to provide a permanent gift to the community.

Community Relationships – Partnering with Whatcom County to first purchase land along Canyon Creek, and more recently, working with them to address flood control, habitat restoration and fish passage by removing aging infrastructure.

Land Acquisition – Permanent protection of an additional 18 acres of wetland and forest along the Samish River.

Thank you for celebrating the success of the Whatcom Land Trust and being an advocate for our future. Enjoy this edition of the *Steward*!

Sincerely,



Rich Bowers, President

A Big BrewHaHa is coming!

Gather your friends and come raise a glass of 'Stew Brew' in commemoration of the 25th anniversary of Whatcom Land Trust at the **BrewHaHa!**

Boundary Bay Brewery has developed the finest Stewardship Brew: a hearty, harvest beer perfect for enjoying during the darkening days of autumn with your favorite chowder, stew, cioppino, or chili! The 'Stew Brew' will make its debut accompanied by a festive atmosphere, a performance by the good folks from Idiom Theatre, toe-tapping live music, and a silent auction. All proceeds raised support the stewardship of the 10,000 acres we have preserved.

October 29, 2009

6pm to Midnight

Market Depot Square

Fun coupled with our supporters' generosity—what could be better?

We need volunteers to help before and after. If you'd like to volunteer for this event, please call Connie or Jerry at the WLT office: 650-9470.

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Jerry DeBacker, Virginia Hoyt, Gordon Scott, Steve Walker

Remembering Jake Steiner



photo: Virginia Hoyt

Jake Steiner and an old-growth Sitka spruce on his land.

For more than a century, it has been the custom in the foothills of Mt. Baker, along the North Fork of the Nooksack River, for old-timers to show the newcomers around. Nobody could do that like Jake Steiner. When you recovered from the vertigo and white knuckles from jouncing casually with him in his pickup over precarious backroads through some of the most spectacular mountains on the continent, you realized how intimately Jake brought you into the heartbeat of this land.

A mile-long stretch of the Canyon Creek Road has been sinking and collapsing ever since it was built. That is because the road passes over a stretch of blue clay, brought down from Canada some 14,000 years ago by the Fraser Ice Sheet and deposited there in a gargantuan glacial hiccup. Or, up the Glacier Creek Road, the elegantly draping Alaska cedars are all quite small—still recovering, at their icy elevation, from logging more than sixty years ago. During World War II, their rock-hard wood protected the bows of minesweepers patrolling the North Atlantic. Traveling with Jake, you learned to read the stories the land speaks.

The Steiner property was the only one that survived in the 1960's when developers came to buy up old homesteads along the North Fork. At the last moment, even for the fortune offered, Jake could not bring himself to sign away the land his parents settled as pioneers. He protected the forests there with great understanding, harvesting sustainably to raise his family.

But there was no such hesitation in 2007 when he signed papers to convey his family's land to the Whatcom Land Trust. Included were two of the places he loved best. One is a thriving stump garden forest where old growth had been logged by horse around the turn of the last century and where new trees now grow out of the ancient stumps. The other is the Sitka spruce grove, a stand of venerable patriarchs Jake never had the heart to cut. Now everyone around the North Fork rejoices that his magnificent land is in the keeping of WLT. Virginia Hoyt

First Jr. Stewards Program Connects Kids to the Land

- *A scavenger hunt for natural items at Deming Homestead Eagle Park*
- *Investigating the landscape at Squires Lake*
- *Identifying ecotones at Point Whitehorn Marine Reserve*

These were some of the activities in Whatcom Land Trust's first Jr. Stewards program. The program, designed and created by volunteer Randy Levanthal, WLT staff member Connie

Clement, and WLT board member Rod Burton, was an effort to get kids and their families outside to discover the wonder of the outdoors.

The program started with a kick off on June 26th that featured the beautiful birds of prey featured in Sardis Raptor Center's Hunters of the Sky program. At the kickoff, kids received a booklet with activities to complete at 4 different sites. At the end of the summer, they returned their

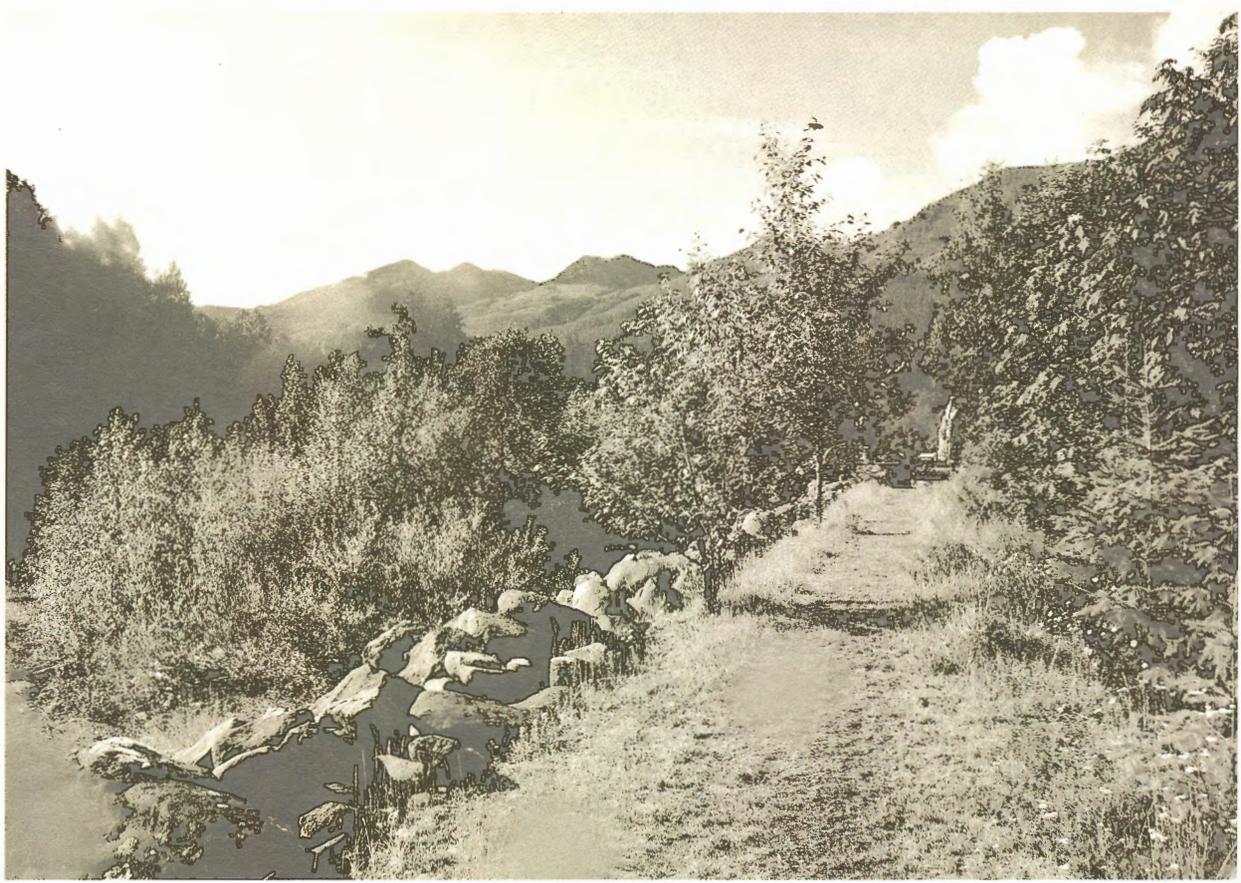
Reflect & Respond page and received a Mallard Ice Cream coupon and entry into a drawing for prizes. The initial program involved approximately 200 children.

Do you know kids who would enjoy this program next year? Give us a call or email and we'll include them on the email list to receive future Jr. Stewards information. (This email list is not used for other purposes, and WLT never shares its email lists.)

Canyon Creek Dike Removal Will Help Endangered Puget

scenic spots in the North Fork Valley with clear cool water, quiet forests and spectacular vistas of Mt. Baker. But a silent danger lurks on Canyon Creek every winter.

Three back-to-back floods in the Canyon Creek watershed in 1989 and 1990 wreaked damage and destruction to homes and roads in the Glacier Springs subdivision and the Logs Resort, all located on the alluvial fan of Canyon Creek at its confluence with the North Fork Nooksack. Rip-rap was placed to control bank erosion after the massive 1989 flood but was quickly washed away or buried during the two large floods in November 1990.



Left: Large boulders, at left, channeled Canyon Creek through a man-made notch that made it difficult for salmon to pass. Right: The removal of the lower 520 feet of the dike allows Canyon Creek to move and spread out along the floodplain.

In 1994, Whatcom County Flood Control Zone District responded to requests from Glacier Springs property owners by building a 2,400 foot long rock dike 20-30 feet high to keep Canyon Creek pinned to the eastern side of its floodplain and away from human settlement and the Mt. Baker Highway. Bedrock was also dynamited away to create a “notch” that would train the creek to stay in one channel. Unfortunately, the dynamited notch created a barrier in subsequent years that inadvertently prevented migrating salmon from reaching about 3.9 miles of historic habitat.

When Puget Sound Chinook were declared threatened in 1999, the passage barrier on Canyon Creek jumped up to near the top of the list for restoration. If there is a chance to save naturally spawning wild salmon in the North Fork Nooksack, an unimpeded Canyon Creek would play a major role in keeping the populations alive. Whatcom County recognized the priority of Canyon Creek for salmon habitat and also realized that the 1994 dike, as big and massive as it was, may not hold up to another flood like 1989 or 1990. Furthermore, policy direction at the County was evolving to favor approaches that would reduce the future need for public funds to control the flooding. In 2004, the County River and Flood Division and the Land Trust teamed up on two grants, one from FEMA to buyout flood-damaged houses

and another grant from the Washington State Salmon Recovery Funding Board to protect and restore salmon habitat along Canyon Creek. The Glacier Springs lots and the Logs Resort were acquired and the buildings removed. Not only did this take folks out of harm’s way, the need for the lower portion of the dike lessened and the options to restore free flowing access for spawning Chinook salmon appeared.

Using salmon recovery funds received in 2008, Whatcom

“This project builds on past successes and guides our next steps to get Canyon Creek, and its salmon, back to a healthier condition.”

John Thompson, Sr. Planner, Whatcom Co. Public Works Natural Resources Division

County Public Works, Natural Resources and River and Flood groups, under the direction of the Endangered Species Coordinator John Thompson, worked with Herrera Environmental Consultants on a design for the removal of the lower 520 feet of dike containing approximately 13,000 yards of fill material and rock from the floodplain of Canyon Creek. The consultants’ work included a risk assessment to ensure that private properties would not be negatively impacted by the project. The excavated fill material was used to re-



photos: John Thompson

sh to pass this point to get to their spawning grounds.
flood plain in a natural way.

contour the site while the large armor rock was stockpiled for future use. With the removal of this section of dike, Canyon Creek now has the opportunity to spread out during floods and may relocate itself this winter and, hopefully, by-pass the salmon barrier. According to John Thompson, "After watching the habitat be confined and its condition worsen for almost 15 years, it is great to give the creek some elbow room. This project builds on past successes and guides our next steps to get Canyon Creek, and its salmon, back to a healthier condition."

Paula Cooper, River and Flood Manager had this to say about the work: "This project illustrates how we can work together to integrate salmon recovery and flood hazard management to the advantage of both. It is our hope that not only will the salmon thrive, but that ultimately the public will be safer and that the need for future expenditures of public flood funds to manage flood risks on the Canyon Creek alluvial fan will be reduced."

The removal of the no-longer-needed section of dike demonstrates the flexibility and determination of the Land Trust in working with County government to cooperatively bring back the North Fork Chinook. Though it took a long time and was expensive, these initial steps along the continued path toward restoration of Canyon Creek has great benefit for both people and fish.

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Samish River Preserve Grows



photo: Eric Carabba

Skunk Cabbage understory dominates the red alder-forested wetland on the Mulka property.

In August 2009, Whatcom Land Trust acquired from David and Shirley Mulka 18 acres of wetland pasture and forest land along Samish River in Whatcom County near Wickersham. The Land Trust paid fair market value using the \$13,000 raised at the 2009 Great Outdoors Auction and a small North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA) grant through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This acquisition provides the critical link to connect three parcels owned by WLT, now forming a 138-acre preserve. This special wetland complex serves multiple types of wildlife, including migratory and resident bird populations, waterfowl, and fish. Over the past year North Cascades Audubon volunteers have identified over 80 species of birds and waterfowl in the wetland complex, and with continued monitoring, we expect the list to grow.

The upper Samish River watershed contains a large complex of forested and open marsh wetlands, and small tributary streams supporting multiple fish and wildlife. Migratory birds in the Pacific Flyway utilize the wetlands for resting, feeding, nesting and rearing. The Samish River and its many small but dynamic tributary streams situated on alluvial fans support Coho, Chum, winter steelhead, and both resident and sea run cutthroat. These volatile tributary streams provide great spawning habitat, while young fish rear in the large adjacent wetland complex.

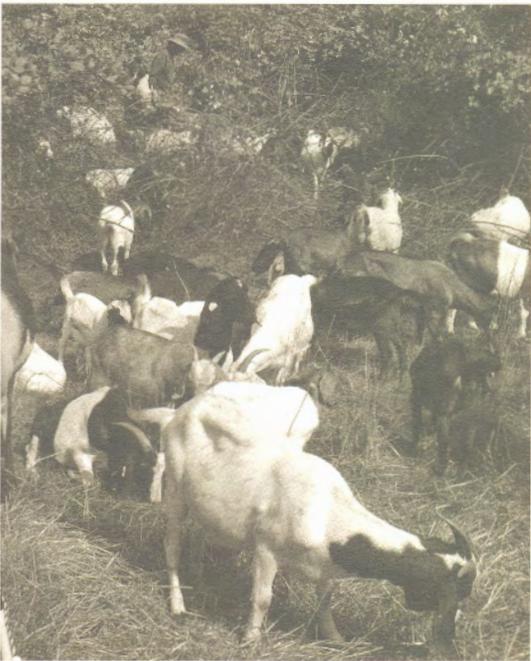
Whatcom Land Trust continues to work throughout Whatcom County to protect special wildlife habitat and working landscapes. We are excited to be working with additional private landowners to grow this preserve and other preserves in the coming year.

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Ladies of the Lake Preserve

This summer the Whatcom Land Trust assumed management responsibility for the 101 acre Ladies of the Lake Preserve at the south end of Lake Whatcom. The property includes the lower quarter of Fir Creek, which sees a spectacular autumn run of spawning Kokanee salmon. The Preserve, which was purchased in 2005, is subject to the terms of a life estate and is not open to the public. The majority of the property is forested, however, 20 acres served as pasture for beef cattle when the Preserve previously was a farm. If no steps are taken, the fields, like most open spaces in Whatcom County, would soon fill with invasive weeds. So the Trust has leased the field for hay production. This arrangement keeps the land in its historic agricultural use, maintains the open vista, provides modest income for the Trust to monitor the lease, and prevents invasive species from becoming the dominant vegetation.



Ruth Kelsey Nature Sanctuary

WLT recently "hired" 240 goats to mow through 3 acres of invasive Himalayan blackberries at the Ruth Kelsey Nature Sanctuary northwest of Ferndale. The goats belong to Craig Madsen, owner of a vegetation management company called Healing Hooves. The goats are voracious eaters. When contained with temporary electrical fencing, they can target specific weed infestations.

Now that the blackberries have been defoliated and reduced to a few woody canes, volunteer work parties will be dispatched this fall to uproot the invaders. Special thanks to Steve Irving, volunteer land monitor for the Kelsey property, for his many days of clearing the entry trail, hauling water, and assisting Craig with herd management.

Ruth Kelsey Nature Sanctuary is located west of North Star Road between Thornton Road and Aldergrove Road. A small plaque marks the trailhead where visitors can begin a short hike into the 20-acre parcel Ms. Kelsey donated to Whatcom Land Trust in 1992. The property is managed for habitat protection under a joint agreement with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. *photos: Steve Walker*

Please join us on October 22 for an unusual work party.

We'll be sharpening our tools—getting prepared for *Make A Difference Day* on

October 24. The work party will be at the WLT office from 7:00 – 9:00.

For more information, please contact Laura at 650-9470.

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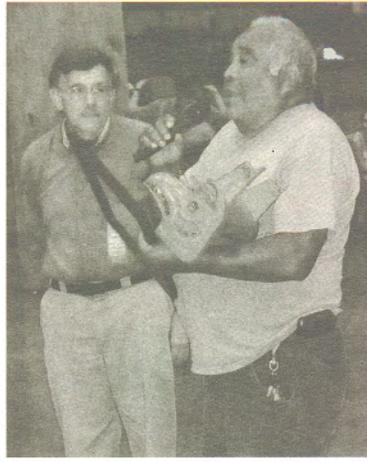
Julie Carpenter, A.B.R., G.R.I.

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Gift to Lummi Nation



On behalf of Whatcom Land Trust, Rand Jack presents a gift of a carving he made to James Hillaire and the Lummi people to commemorate the permanent protection of Lily Point at Point Roberts. Representatives of the Lummi Nation presented Whatcom Land Trust with a ceremonial blanket at the Park's opening.

photo: Dana Jack

Edfro Creek Preserve

At the end of the Saxon Road lies the 130-acre Edfro Creek Preserve. This magnificent property, purchased by the Trust in 2003 to provide protection for salmon, elk and eagles, has a long tradition of recreational use. Most visitors utilize the aptly-named Thousand Puddles trail. Horse riders, hikers, mountain bikers, swimmers, and gold panners are historic users from the days when the property was owned by timber interests. The Trust has installed a trailhead sign asking visitors to limit their stay and avoid activities that degrade the habitat the Preserve was established to protect.

2009 Tours

Call 650-9470 for registration or more information.

Tours are free to WLT supporters. You can become a supporting household for as little as \$35.

\$5 to \$10 donation requested from the public.

South County Bicycle Tour

September 26 • 10:00 a.m.

Join members of Whatcom Land Trust's staff as we bicycle our way through conservation properties at the South end of Lake Whatcom and along the South Fork/Saxon area. This loop is approximately 20 miles long and the pace is slow to moderate. Bring your lunch money as we plan to stop at the Blue Mountain Grill for lunch and a beer toward the end of the ride!

Canyon Creek Restoration Tour

October 24 • 10:00 a.m.

In 2006-07, Whatcom Land Trust and Whatcom County purchased several lots at Glacier Springs along Canyon Creek. The creek provides critical habitat for native spring Chinook, but a levee built to protect the properties also created a barrier to salmon moving upstream to spawn. WLT partnered with Whatcom County to remove a portion of the levee to address the barrier. Come and see the result of this special restoration story with the project manager John Thompson.

Lichen Tour at Squires Lake

November 7 • 10:00 a.m.

Lichens are interesting examples of mutualistic associations of fungi and algae. They abound in the Pacific Northwest and play subtle but important roles in the ecology of our woodlands and mountain sides. Come learn about these amazing organisms with Dr. Fred Rhoades, retired WWU instructor and research associate. You'll increase your lichen knowledge while exploring the beautiful Squires Lake Park on the border of Whatcom and Skagit County.

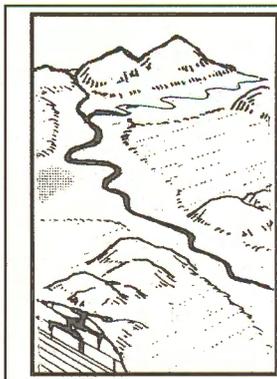
Fall Nooksack Salmon Tour

November 28 • 10:00 a.m.

Discover winter Chum & Coho on this trip along some of WLT's Nooksack River properties with fish surveyor and wildlife writer, Doug Huddle. See the salmon as they make their spawning trip up the river and learn about their tendencies and challenges from this experienced outdoorsman.

Visit the Pumpkin Patch!

Steve George has offered to sell his pumpkins by donation to benefit Whatcom Land Trust or the Nature Conservancy! Visit Steve at 3771 Gilmore Rd. in Everson (just North of Cloud Mtn. Farm) from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. the first four Saturdays and Sundays in October. Celebrate Autumn and help protect our special places at the same time!



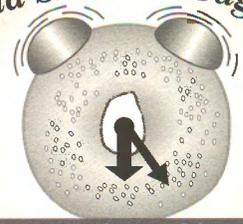
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110 Central Ave.

Bellingham, WA 98225

Phone: **360-650-9470**

Fax: **360-650-0495**

E-mail:

info@whatcomlandtrust.org

website:

www.whatcomlandtrust.org



Cascade Joinery Donates Jensen Family Forest Park Table



Whatcom Land Trust Business Partner Cascade Joinery recently installed a craftsman-style picnic table at the Jensen Family Forest Park. Pictured L-R: Jeff Arvin, Phil Kneisley, John Miller.

For information about how your business can become a partner with Whatcom Land Trust, please contact the office at 650-9470 or jerry@whatcomlandtrust.org.

Photo: Jerry DeBacker

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