

FALL 2025 ZINE

THE STEWARD

NEW LOOK, SAME IMPACT!



WHATCOM
LAND TRUST
EST. 1984



Winding through 98 acres of beautiful coastal forest, the new Governors Point trail will explore conserved land along the Chuckanut shoreline. Legendary trailbuilder Russ Pfeiffer-Hoyt, whose handiwork can be admired at Stimpson Family Nature Reserve, is crafting the trail.

Whatcom Land Trust's long-time partnership with Whatcom County Parks ensures that popular Land Trust protected reserves—like Governors Point—are managed by the County to provide public amenities like bathrooms and parking lots. While Russ and the Land Trust team finish building the trail, Whatcom County is evaluating proposals to build a parking lot at Governors Point. Once the parking lot is complete, we will be able to open the trail to the public.

Governors Point is not open to the public yet, but keep an eye out for tours!

GOVERNORS POINT

STEENSMAS CREAMERY

Have you ever tasted Whatcom County's famous Steensma skyr yogurt? For four generations, the Steensma family has run a local dairy farm in Lynden near Bertrand Creek. Whatcom Land Trust is working with the County's Conservation Easement Program (CEP) and the Steensma Family to protect 88 acres of farmland through a conservation easement. The easement creates an affordable opportunity to expand the Steensma family farm, and will legally protect the land for farming forever. The easement will also protect mature riparian habitat along salmon-bearing Bertrand Creek, helping keep salmon and other wildlife in the Nooksack River system healthy.



Kate Steensma
Fourth Gen Farmer



"Partnerships like this are a win-win for sustainable local food systems and stream health. The Steensma conservation easement will support a fourth generation of local farmers and protect habitat along Bertrand Creek forever, supporting salmon recovery efforts in the Nooksack basin."

-Conservation Director Alex Jeffers





HEALTHY FORESTS

First comes forest protection, then comes building healthy forests. This summer, Whatcom Land Trust worked with Northwest Natural Resource Group (NNRG) to complete a long-term forest management plan for the 2,200 acre Skookum Creek Wildlife Corridor. The plan will guide restoration efforts in the forest above and around Skookum Creek to improve forest health and enhance water quality.

For decades, Skookum Creek corridor was managed with the sole purpose of timber production—meaning young, crowded forests with limited species diversity. Moving forward, the Trust will manage Skookum Creek for more diverse, mature forests that will store more carbon, provide richer wildlife habitat, and help keep streams cool and clear.

The plan builds on these benefits through ecological forest management—an approach that mimics natural processes to create a more climate resilient and diverse forest at a faster rate. Strategies include thinning, letting trees grow longer before harvest, and streamside restoration to build a healthier watershed.

“Instead of clear-cutting and replanting, we’re moving toward selective thinning—cutting only certain trees to give others more space and light. That sunlight will reach the forest floor, encouraging native plant growth that supports deer, elk, pollinators, and birds,” said Stewardship Director Jenn Mackey. “This helps the forest grow into a more mature, diverse ecosystem over time.”

Clear-cutting has also historically impacted water quality in Skookum Creek by increasing erosion, which can create unhealthy conditions for salmon. To reduce erosion and protect fish habitat, the Land Trust will retire old logging roads, plant native trees and shrubs to improve slope stability, and increase large woody debris in the creek.

“What happens up here affects everything below,” Mackey said. “Managing the upper forest carefully keeps water cleaner and cooler for salmon and communities downstream.”

The new forest management practices at Skookum Creek will have long-term benefits on available water for the South Fork Nooksack river. Research led by the Lummi Nation and Nooksack Indian Tribe shows mature trees release water more evenly throughout the year, improving late-summer streamflows—critical for endangered salmon.

“We’re thinking in decades, not years,” Mackey added. “This isn’t about one harvest cycle—it’s about managing a living forest that keeps giving back for generations.”





FOR SALMON AND STUDENTS

In 2017, local science educator Michael Jay put an idea on paper: “What if my family’s land along Kinney Creek could become an environmental education site?” Eight years later, thanks to a partnership between the Jay family, Whatcom Land Trust, Explorations Academy, Whatcom Transportation Authority, and Whatcom Million Trees, that vision has become a reality. Kinney Creek’s 13 acres of wetlands, forests, and salmon habitat are now protected forever as the Explorations Academy Conservation Easement.

Michael Jay’s parents, Susan and Burton Jay, purchased the land along Kinney Creek—a tributary to the Sumas River that supports coho and steelhead salmon—in 2003 with the sole purpose of habitat restoration. “My dad loved planting trees. Throughout their lives, they had a chance to see those young trees grow up and change the landscape,” said Michael. The Jay family worked with Whatcom Conservation District to plant more than 5,500 trees, and with Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association to restore in-stream salmon habitat. By the time Susan and Burton passed, they had transformed their 13 acres from a cleared field to a thriving ecosystem for salmon and other wildlife.

In 2024, Michael connected with Whatcom Land Trust to explore conservation options for his parents’ land that would honor their legacy of stewardship. Serendipitously, a local non-profit experiential learning school called Explorations Academy was searching for land to create an outdoor classroom and living laboratory. With a generous contribution from Whatcom Transportation Authority,

Whatcom Land Trust helped Explorations Academy purchase the land and place a conservation easement on the 13 acres.

The conservation easement held by the Land Trust legally ensures that the habitat will remain protected forever. “So not only is the property going to be able to live on through the learning that the kids at Explorations Academy will experience there,” said Alex Jeffers, Whatcom Land Trust’s Conservation Director, “but the conservation values will be protected forever through the conservation easement.”

For Explorations Academy, the new living classroom will directly connect K-12 students with local wildlife through stewardship. “This field campus is going to allow students to learn with nature and from nature through observation, research, restoration, and hands-on projects across every discipline,” explained Explorations Academy Head of School Jennifer Dowd.

The students wholeheartedly agree. When they visited their new outdoor classroom for the first day of school this year, one student reflected, “I’ve somewhat connected to nature in the past, although I’ve never had the time to enjoy it. I like the field campus because I can have peace, and I can face my fears more and more of bugs.”

Explorations Academy will maintain young tree plantings, create small trails, and add educational resources like a covered outdoor learning space and a small farm. The Land Trust will provide ongoing monitoring and support.



Watch students enjoy their first day at the outdoor campus!





The print version of the Steward is back in a compact & fun format, called a "zine" short for magazine.

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WAYS TO GIVE



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