

2024/2025  
WHATCOM LAND TRUST  
**IMPACT REPORT**



**WHATCOM**  
LAND TRUST  
EST. 1984



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Special thanks to former executive director Rich Bowers for the cover photo "Maple Creek Reach Morning".

## STAFF

ALEX DALUISO	Development Specialist
ALEX JEFFERS	Conservation Director
ALEXIS BURTON	Office Manager
BRYCE AUBURN	Stewardship Assistant
CLAIRE JOHNSTON	Communications Director
EMILY SEGURA MAZE	Communications Manager
HAILEY CLARK	Conservation Transaction Specialist
HUNTER CALLUNA	Stewardship Assistant
JENN MACKEY	Stewardship Director
JODI BROUGHTON	Development Director
KENDRA SCHMIEDESKAMP	Outreach & Events Coordinator
LAUREN RALBOVSKY	Volunteer Coordinator
RACHEL VASAK	Executive Director
TYLER YUNG	Conservation Easement Coordinator

## BOARD

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# NOW IS THE TIME FOR LOCAL CONSERVATION



## A NOTE FROM WHATCOM LAND TRUST'S NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RACHEL VASAK

I joined this amazing group of staff and board members in January, and am so grateful for the chance to do such important work. As a mom and a community member that loves being outside in nature, I have treasured memories of my son's first 'hike' on the Point Whitehorn trail, of visiting the beaches at Lily Point, and of finding profound awe when I am standing among the huge trees along the Nooksack River at Wildcat Reach, Stimpson Family Nature Reserve or Canyon Lake Forest.

My first year at the Land Trust has coincided with a tumultuous and challenging period for this country. Learning and doing this work has been a powerful reminder that we can find hope, learning, and joy in local community action.

**To me, and to Whatcom Land Trust, resilience is about our capacity to adapt and thrive in the face of challenge and change.** It's about the deep, interconnected web of life here in Whatcom County, and the strength that comes from that diversity. We believe that through our collective efforts, we can build a truly resilient Whatcom County where nature and people thrive together.

Resilience is also perseverance, and for 40 years the Land Trust community has supported this mission with determination, refusing to give up when the challenges are big, the future is uncertain, and the work is tough. Now, more than ever, resilience means continuing to live our mission together.

This year, we are working on updating our strategic plan to help the Land Trust adapt and guide our efforts to be as effective as possible—so we can continue to protect the places that not only offer habitat for wildlife, but also provide clean water, healthy soils, and access to nature for our communities. In the face of national uncertainty, development pressures, and a changing climate, now is the time to build resilience and find hope in our Whatcom County community.

I find hope when I walk the trails at Governors Point, knowing that this treasured space will be conserved for future generations to explore and appreciate. I love the habitat protected by conservation easements like Agate Pond. I value the lands that have supported salmon recovery projects. And, as the daughter of hard-working farmers who taught me the importance of raising food, I value every acre of farmland we can help protect to produce food to feed future generations.

Your support is crucial in making that vision a reality. Thank you for your care, your commitment to this mission, and your hope. I look forward to seeing you out on the land we all love.

## 2025 STAFF AT POINT WHITEHORN RESERVE





# PATRICIA'S DREAM OF WILD LAND

## AGATE POND PRESERVE CONSERVED FOREVER

On a surprisingly bright March morning, Patricia Otto sat on her front porch, laced up her boots, and adjusted her bright red Washington Forest Stewardship baseball hat. Before her lay acres of restored wetlands, meadows, and forests that make up Agate Pond Preserve, her home for the last 40 years, newly **protected with a conservation easement held by Whatcom Land Trust.**

In 1988, Patricia and her then-husband David Wisner, began purchasing land in the Lake Whatcom watershed to create Agate Pond Preserve. "It had been my dream to have wild land to enjoy and to steward. Eventually, I ended up with 100 acres of this gorgeous forest and wetlands, and it's been a joy and delight all these years to take care of and to be part of," said Patricia.

What began as an overcrowded forest combined with a few acres of pasture and irrigation ponds (all overrun by invasive species) has been transformed over the past 40 years of remarkable stewardship into healthy forestland and wetlands. Patricia has undertaken massive restoration efforts, including a

culvert removal, ongoing battles with invasive species like reed canary grass, bird habitat improvements, and so much more. This March, Patricia gained a new partner in conserving Agate Pond when she signed a conservation easement with Whatcom Land Trust, ensuring that the land she loves so deeply will be legally protected from development forever. "I'd profusely like to thank the Land Trust for holding this easement for me for the indefinite future, and for helping me get it all done. Now I have this wonderful feeling that my forest is protected forever," said Patricia.

"We are so honored by Patricia's decision to trust this organization with protecting Agate Pond Preserve," said Whatcom Land Trust Executive Director Rachel Vasak. "Patricia's lifetime of commitment and care has deeply impacted Whatcom County, including the innumerable trees, birds, and other species she has created this habitat for," added Rachel.

The wetlands not only provide habitat for hundreds of species, but also clean and filter the water in Agate Creek before heading into Lake Whatcom. Patricia's work has both created vital habitat and supported clean drinking water for over one hundred thousand people in Whatcom County.

"It's very hard to think about the future, because the world is now changing so rapidly," said Patricia. "I wanted to keep Agate Pond Preserve free of other human disturbance for the future, and I so appreciate that the Land Trust can do this for me."







BEFORE



AFTER

# CLEAN UP AND STEWARD

ALONG THE SOUTH FORK NOOKSACK

The Saxon Riparian Corridor connects wildlife habitat and riparian areas along the South Fork Nooksack River. Riparian habitats border rivers, lakes, and streams, and are typically covered in native trees and shrubs. These zones help keep the river cold, clean, and clear—conditions that are essential for supporting all five species of Pacific salmon that call the Nooksack River home.

The Land Trust protects healthy, functioning landscapes and our stewardship team maintains these important habitats. Sometimes protected lands like the 2022 Saxon Riparian Addition need more immediate clean up and care to become flourishing ecosystems supporting clean water and healthy wildlife.

This winter, to begin critical restoration work along the South Fork Nooksack River, the stewardship team contracted Highline Construction to demolish a building that was no longer structurally sound. “It’s important to remove any infrastructure that may have failed and emptied right into the Nooksack River system,” said Stewardship Director Jenn Mackey. “Then, we can replant native trees and shrubs. Once these root systems stabilize the soil again, they will then help filter out pollutants and provide nutrients into the river system.”

After the structure was torn down and cleaned up, the stewardship team laid straw over the demolition site to reduce erosion (see the picture to the left). Over the next year, the team will work with volunteers and community partners to continue planting over 1,000 native plants across the site. “All of us at the Land Trust and our neighbors along the Saxon Riparian Corridor are really excited to take this next step toward the long term restoration vision here. This work helps build functional, healthy habitat to support salmon and all the other wildlife that utilize this entire corridor,” said Jenn.



# BUILDING A RESILIENT FUTURE TOGETHER

Today, our community is facing the impacts of climate change, threats to forest health and salmon populations, reductions in wildlife habitat, and much more. Resilience is our community's ability to bounce back from these challenges together, to be able to recover, learn, and grow from our collective experiences.

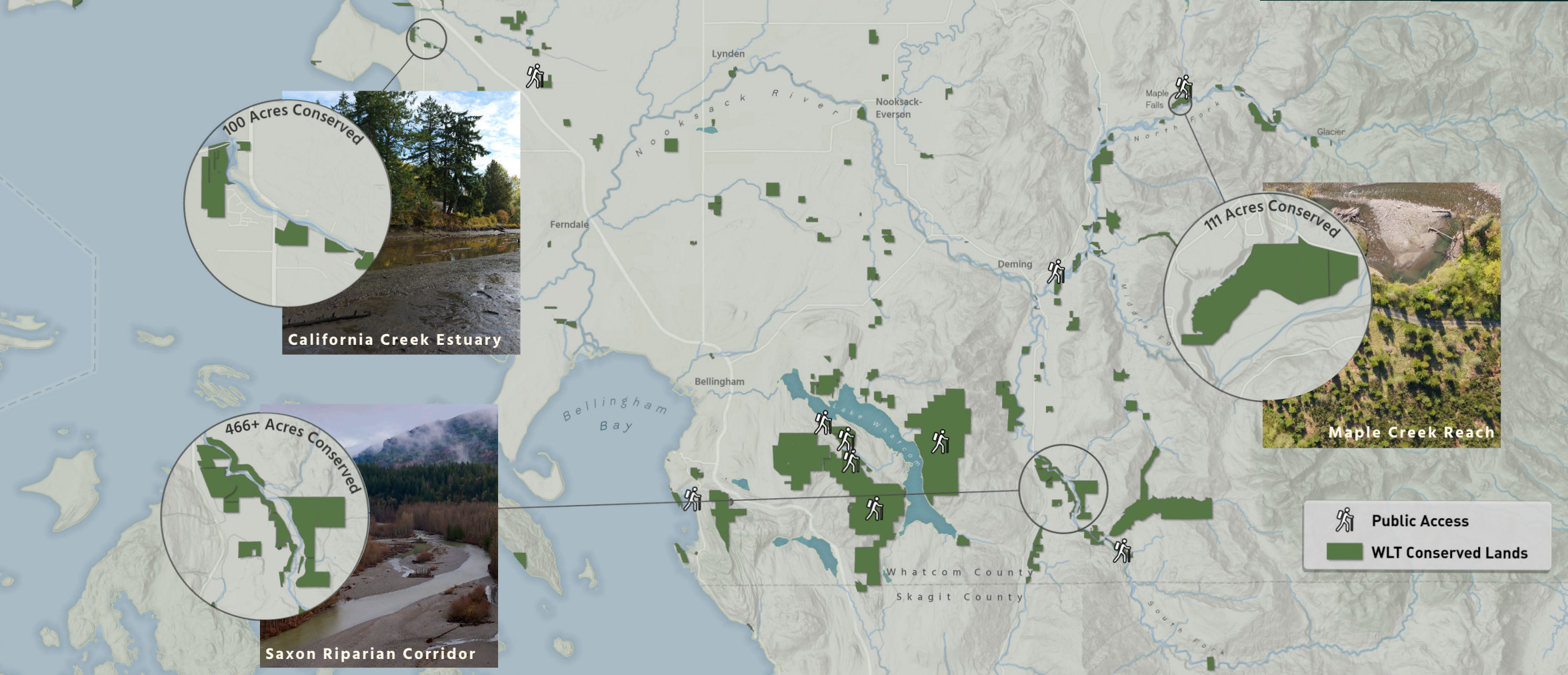
Every acre the Land Trust protects is a commitment to stewarding that land forever—to support a resilient ecosystem for future generations of all species. “After 40 years of successful land protection, we need to be able to take care of these places. We need support from everyone to help make this vision we have a reality,” said Stewardship Director Jenn Mackey.



Caring for the land we conserve is an important responsibility. This year alone, stewardship staff monitored, managed, and restored 6,693 acres of Trust owned lands. Additionally, volunteers contributed 7,652 hours to remove thousands of square feet of invasive species and plant almost 2,000 native plants.

“Every time the Trust conserves a new property, we build a stewardship plan that reflects its unique ecological needs. Often that includes strategies for consistent invasive removal and native plantings that support key habitat restoration. Resilience is our ability to do this work together, whether that’s showing up to a work party or making a donation to support stewardship. This collective work towards a resilient future gives me inspiration and hope for the hurdles that come,” said Jenn.





# RESTORING HABITAT CORRIDORS

## CALIFORNIA CREEK ESTUARY

Draining into Drayton Harbor, the wetlands, estuary, and coastal forests of California Creek provide critical habitat for native marine and freshwater species, and shorebirds. To build climate resilience and provide a buffer from the impacts of sea level rise, the Trust has hosted dozens of public work parties to remove invasive species and plant trees. In October, more than 60 volunteers braved a rain storm to celebrate “Orca Recovery Day” by restoring the riparian areas that support salmon populations, sustaining local orca pods.

## MAPLE CREEK REACH

This large-scale 100-acre restoration project converted manmade ditches along the North Fork Nooksack River into salmon and wildlife habitat. Additionally, Nooksack Indian Tribe has installed engineered log jams in the river, creating deep, cold habitat pools for all five Pacific salmon species that spawn here. For the last 20 years the Trust has hosted annual community work parties to plant trees and remove invasive species—look for an upcoming one!

## SAXON RIPARIAN CORRIDOR

The Lummi Nation and Nooksack Indian Tribe have already built engineered log jams in this stretch of the South Fork Nooksack River. The Land Trust has worked with multiple businesses through the Conservation Alliance, including SuperFeet, to plant trees on conserved lands bordering the river. With continued stewardship, those trees will grow to shade the river and create additional salmon habitat, supporting long-term resilience in the South Fork.



# CONSERVATION & CARBON AT KELSEY

## A PARTNERSHIP TO PROTECT 51 ACRES FOREVER

This past October, Whatcom Land Trust partnered with Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA) and Whatcom Million Trees Project to protect 51 additional acres at Kelsey Nature Reserve along Lake Terrell. These forested and open wetlands, that include a section of salmon-bearing Butler Creek, provide habitat for a variety of wildlife. The new addition connects Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's Lake Terrell Wildlife Management area with an existing Trust property, the Ruth Kelsey Nature Reserve (Kelsey), creating a 1,200 acre wildlife corridor.

The newly protected forested wetlands surround a section of Butler Creek known to be used as spawning grounds by the federally threatened coho salmon. "Now all this habitat is officially connected as one big, contiguous wildlife corridor," explains Trust Conservation Director Alex Jeffers.

Together, this partnership results in more environmental benefit for the

community than either organization could have achieved individually—including offsetting some of WTA's bus transit carbon emissions.

"WTA was looking for conservation projects they could invest in locally, rather than just sort of paying money into a carbon credit program where the money goes somewhere and then you never see it again," remembers Jeffers. "They wanted to have those benefits stay as local as possible, so they provided \$150,000 of funding towards the \$600,000 purchase price."

This purchase was just one small part of WTA's long-term decarbonization strategy. "A major task is transitioning the bus fleet to all zero-emission technology, like electricity or hydrogen, by 2040," explains WTA's General Manager Les Reardanz. "That transition will take a while and a lot is still left to be determined."

A Carbon Sequestration Report (August 21, 2024) prepared by Whatcom Million Trees Project



estimates that this collaborative conservation work will sequester and offset the annual emissions of 2.5 diesel buses or 4.5 hybrid buses. Planting 1,000 new conifers at either property would sequester 50-80 additional tons of carbon per year, on average, over 50 years.

Janet Murray, one of more than 120 volunteer land stewards that assist the Trust in monitoring and caring for conserved lands, has stewarded the original Kelsey protected landscape over the past 12 years. "The most exciting part of this whole thing for me is that now we have a good chunk of Butler Creek, the part of the creek where there might be

spawning happening," said Murray.

Murray has already observed a salmon redd—a nest dug by female salmon in the streambed to incubate their eggs—on the new acreage. "I know for a fact there's baby fish in there, so there's somebody spawning."

"By partnering on this project, a first of its kind for WTA, we are leveraging each other's strengths to help the environment across the board, while preserving these values into the future together," said Reardanz. "This project gave us the opportunity to invest in local partnerships, benefiting the local environment, right here in Whatcom County."



# CONTRIBUTE TO A RESILIENT FUTURE

## MEET DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR JODI BROUGHTON

I moved to Bellingham in 1994 to finish my college degree and I'm still here 30 years later because Whatcom County's natural wonders have won my heart. I know that many of the places I cherish would not still be here without the hard work of many people and organizations like Whatcom Land Trust advocating for their protection. Ninety thousand more people live here since 1994 and the pressures on farms, wetlands, estuaries, forests, rivers—many of the places that make our region so unique—are growing by the day. After working in conservation advocacy and then environmental education for the last two decades, I'm excited to be here for the next decade to focus on local land conservation and stewardship. I believe Whatcom Land Trust can help ensure a conservation legacy into the future and you are each essential to making that happen.

**Want to make a gift or get to know each other? Email [jodi.b@whatcom-landtrust.org](mailto:jodi.b@whatcom-landtrust.org), or call (360) 650-9470. I look forward to partnering with you!**



JODI, JENN & RACHEL VISITING  
HARRISON NATURE RESERVE

**Building a Resilient Future for Whatcom County begins with a courageous commitment from donors like you. Your support is critical to helping the Trust continue to protect lands and to steward them forever.**

## BECOME A MONTHLY GIVING G.O.A.T.

Givers for Our Abundant Tomorrow (G.O.A.T.) provide consistent, reliable monthly donations so we can plan for future stewardship and respond to urgent conservation needs. Join the monthly giving herd!

## LEADERSHIP CIRCLE

Join our Leadership Circle by donating \$1,500 or more so you can join VIP hikes and property tours, receive exclusive Land Trust updates and be invited to other special events.

## GIFTS OF SECURITIES

Did you know that gifts of stocks, appreciated securities or mutual funds may allow you to augment your giving AND help you save on taxes? You or your broker can contact our financial advisor, who will discuss your assets and determine the best option.

## REQUIRED MINIMUM DISTRIBUTIONS

If you are 73 years old, you are subject to required minimum distribution (RMD) rules for your IRA. Gifting some or all of your RMD income (a qualified charitable distribution) may be a great way to benefit the Trust and reduce your taxes.

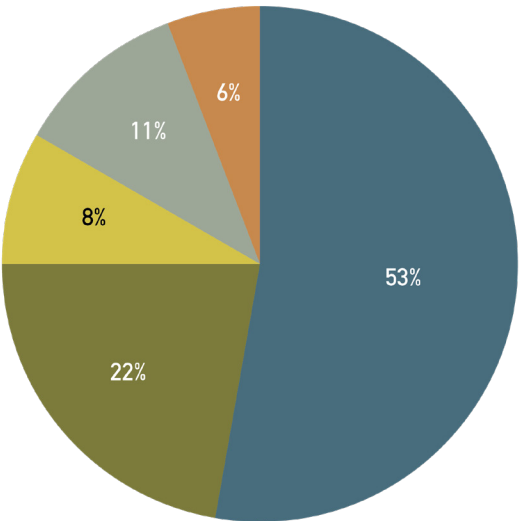
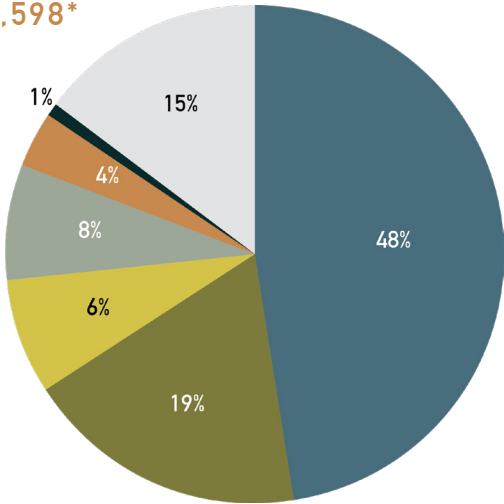


# FINANCIAL INFORMATION

FINANCIAL FIGURES REFLECT 7/1/23 - 6/30/24

## SOURCE OF FUNDS - \$2,735,598\*

- Contributions
- Grants
- Fundraising Events
- Program Income
- Investment Income
- Bridge Loans
- Other



## USE OF FUNDS - \$2,913,440

- Land Conservation
- Land Stewardship
- Community Engagement
- Administration & Operations
- Fundraising

Sources of funds and uses of funds represent fiscal years from July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024. The financial information is excerpted from Whatcom Land Trust's audited financial statements. To obtain a copy of the complete audit by Bellingham public accounting firm Larson Gross PLLC, please visit [whatcomlandtrust.org/contribute/990s/](https://whatcomlandtrust.org/contribute/990s/). \*This number does not reflect the impact of fluctuations in market performance on the investment portfolio.

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"I love recreating in nature because I involve myself with this beautiful place, I clear my head, I exercise, and I keep my body feeling good. If nature is giving me all of this, I should give back to it... it just makes sense. Recreational users that come into the forest and leave their footprints have a responsibility to steward the land."

**CALEB BARVILLE**



"We've raised our kids, in these places, on trails, and out here on the coastline. It has created a special bond amongst the four of us. Anyone considering the Land Trust and whether or not to throw your support behind it, it is a worthy cause to give your time, talent, and treasure to."

**THE CONNER FAMILY**



"I love the land because it's beautiful and breathtaking and part of us. The land is what supports the ecosystem and us. Think about what your children will have. I would love future generations to have the access to nature that I have seen. I want my children, and their children, to have access to the mountains, the environment, and the pure joy of being in nature."

**BRYAN HENNESSY**





♥ **this land**



Visit [whatcomlandtrust.org](https://whatcomlandtrust.org) to learn about upcoming events and volunteer opportunities, and give a gift.

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Mailing Address: P.O. Box 6131, Bellingham, WA 98227

Whatcom Land Trust is a tax exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Tax ID# 91-1246994.