

IMPACT REPORT
2025

RESILIENT WHATCOM COUNTY



WHATCOM
LAND TRUST
EST. 1984

CONNECTION

A NOTE FROM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RACHEL VASAK

A year into this role, I find myself reflecting with deep gratitude for the places, the people, and the shared purpose that make Whatcom Land Trust what it is today. Over the past twelve months, I've had the privilege of spending time out on the land, visiting more than 100 of the special places you have helped protect. I've been struck by the beauty and biodiversity of Whatcom Land Trust's protected lands, and by the immense care behind restoration and stewardship efforts.

So much of Whatcom Land Trust's work is centered on restoration—returning natural systems to a healthy state after decades of degradation. Across Whatcom County, we are working to heal forests, reconnect rivers to floodplains, replace invasive species with native plants, and rebuild habitat that salmon, birds, amphibians, and communities depend on. We believe these places can be restored and reconnected to the beautiful landscapes that matter so deeply to the future of this county. As you read through this report, you will find stories of exactly that kind of land stewardship, each project a testament to what becomes possible when we commit to caring for the land forever.

This year, I've also connected with the people who make our conservation and stewardship work possible. From incredible partners and generous donors to talented staff and board members to committed conservation easement landowners to

volunteers who show up with energy and care—this community is extraordinary. Each conversation and shared experience has deepened my understanding of what it means to be part of this work. And together, we've been looking ahead.

Our board and staff have been developing a new strategic plan, thoughtfully considering how we adapt and grow in the face of change. I have confidence in our ambitious conservation, stewardship, and organizational capacity goals for the next year, and in the strength and momentum of the amazing team supporting Whatcom Land Trust today. I am deeply grateful to the generations of people who have brought the Land Trust to this moment, and to those who continue to carry our mission forward today. It's an honor to be part of this community as we continue to build a resilient future for Whatcom County together.



THANK YOU FOR LOVING THIS LAND.



Rachel Vasak



218

LANDS CARED FOR THIS YEAR

1,753

ACRES PROTECTED THIS YEAR

28,779

ACRES OF LAND PROTECTED SINCE 1984

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Cover Photo: A young steward hugs the old growth trees at Canyon Lake Forest.



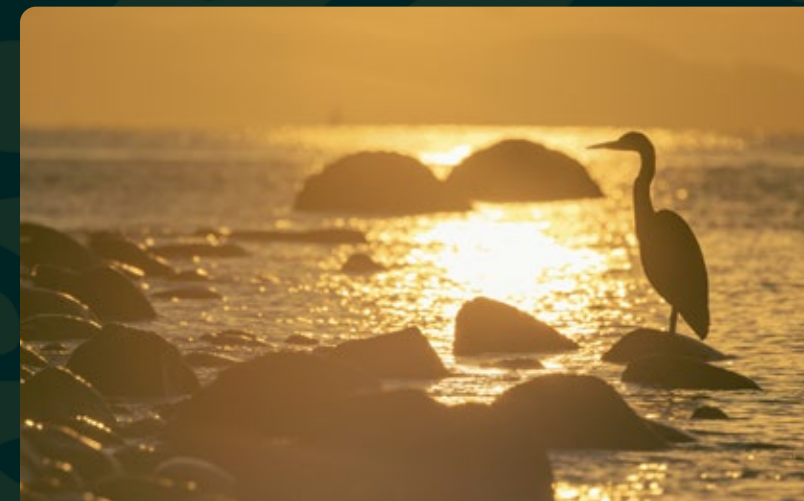
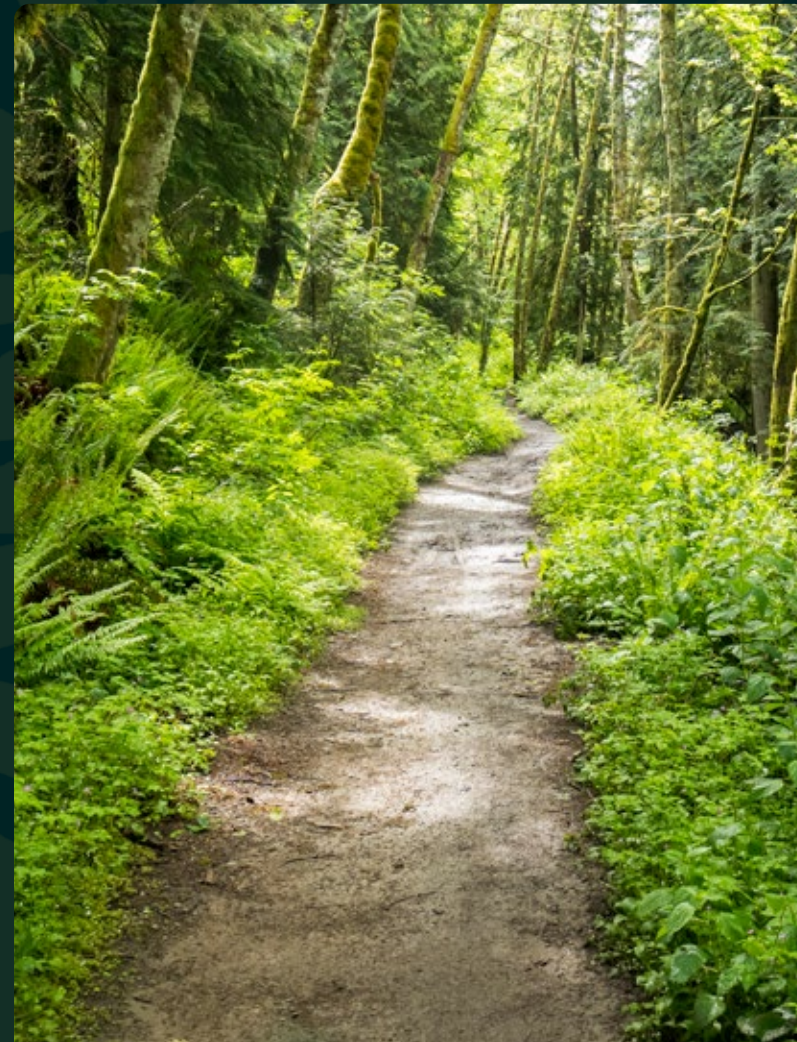
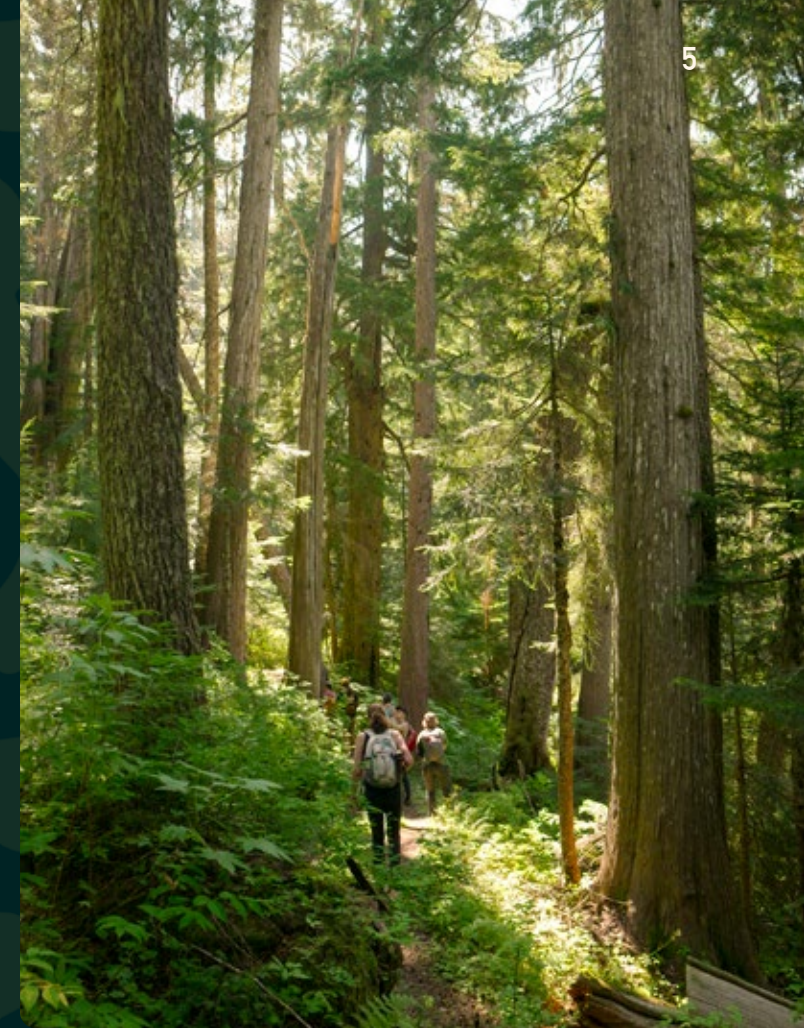
- Sound Finances
- Ethical Conduct
- Responsible Governance
- Lasting Stewardship

FEATURES

CONSERVED LANDS	P. 6
FORESTS FOR ALL	P. 8
FLOOD RESILIENCE	P. 10
VOLUNTEER HIGHLIGHTS	P. 12
KENNEY CREEK RESTORATION	P. 16
FINANCIAL REPORT	P. 18

**WHATCOM LAND TRUST CONSERVES,
RESTORES, AND CARES FOR WILDLIFE
HABITAT, WATERS, FARMLANDS AND
FORESTS IN WHATCOM COUNTY FOREVER**

♥ **this land**



2025 CONSERVED LANDS

EXPLORATIONS ACADEMY CONSERVATION EASEMENT

As part of helping Explorations Academy purchase the land, Whatcom Land Trust accepted a donated conservation easement on 13.67 acres along Kinney Creek in Everson, protecting salmon habitat, restoring a regenerating forest, and setting aside the land as an outdoor classroom where students will carry out long-term habitat restoration and education.

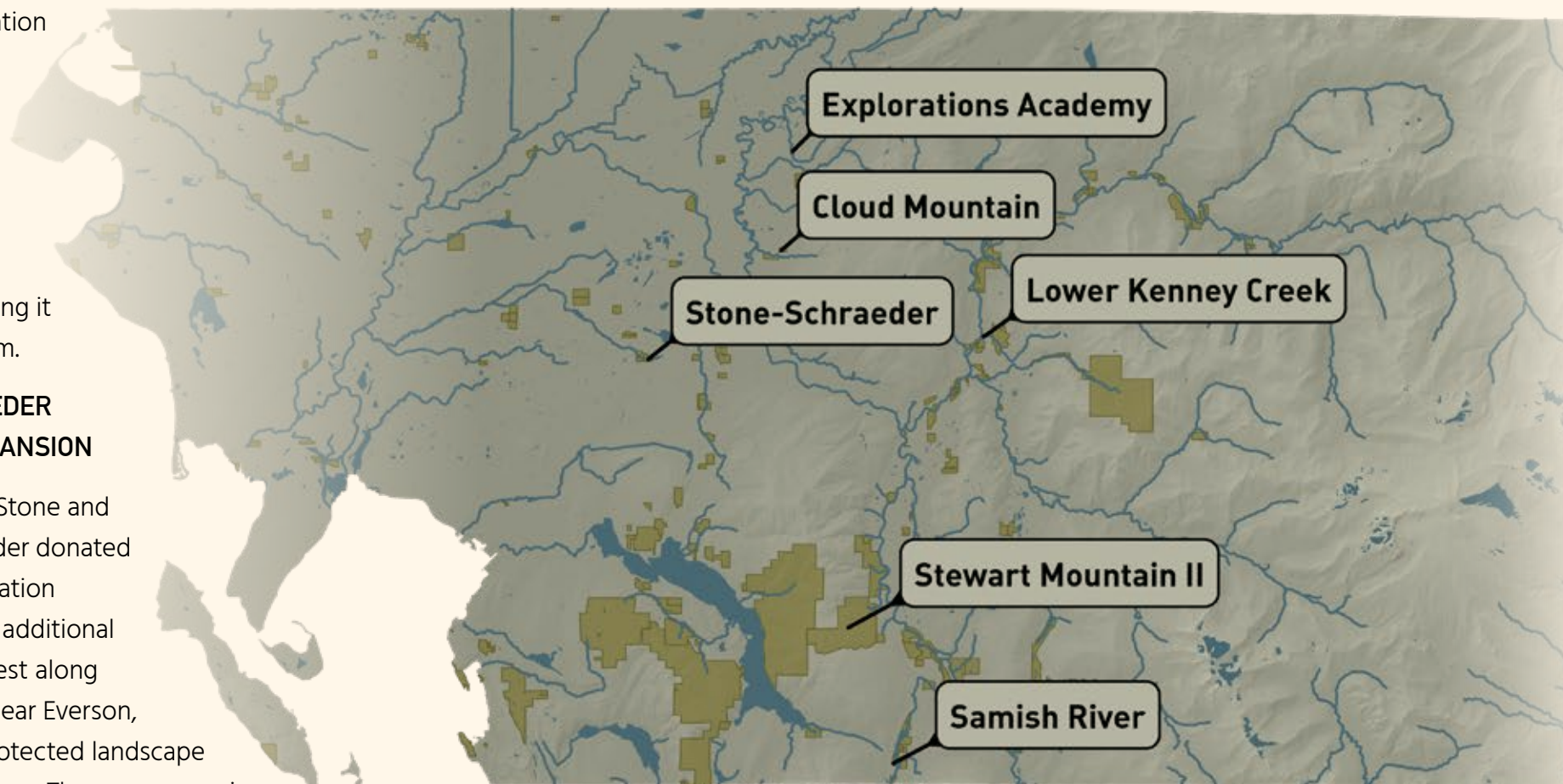


CLOUD MOUNTAIN FARM CENTER

Whatcom Land Trust took interim ownership of the 20-acre Cloud Mountain Farm Center in Everson to protect its prime farmland soils. This year, we will place a conservation easement while facilitating a long-term transfer to an owner well-positioned to continue operating it as a working farm.

STONE-SCHRAEDER EASEMENT EXPANSION

Landowners Ed Stone and Michelle Schraeder donated another conservation easement on an additional 6.83 acres of forest along Ten Mile Creek near Everson, bringing their protected landscape to just over 71 acres. The new expansion removed the opportunity for four additional residential developments along wetland habitat.



LOWER KENNEY CREEK II

This 2.7-acre acquisition adds 215 feet of salmon-bearing shoreline to the nearly 200-acre Lower Kenney Creek conservation corridor. We will remove existing structures within 100 feet of the creek and replant riparian habitat to support threatened Spring Chinook, winter steelhead, coho, chum, and pink salmon.

STEWART MOUNTAIN COMMUNITY FOREST II

Whatcom Land Trust acquired 1,616 acres of forestland above Acme on the north side of Jones Creek, expanding the Stewart Mountain Community Forest to 2,100 acres. We are working with our partners (Whatcom County, Nooksack Indian Tribe, and the Evergreen Land Trust Association) to support sustainable local forestry jobs, ensure tribal cultural access, enhance watershed health along the South Fork Nooksack River, build healthy wildlife habitat, and create opportunities for public access.

SAMISH RIVER RESERVE VIII

We added a small wetland parcel to our existing 242-acre Samish River Reserve, expanding the protected corridor along Samish River and one of its tributaries, Innis Creek, and adding a permanent buffer against development in this sensitive habitat.

FORESTS FOR ALL

STEWART MOUNTAIN COMMUNITY FOREST GROWS

This January, thanks to years of community effort and a long-term partnership between Whatcom Land Trust, Nooksack Indian Tribe, Whatcom County, and the Evergreen Land Trust Association, the Stewart Mountain Community Forest grew by 1,616 acres. Combined with the initial 550-acre purchase in 2022, the forest now protects 2,166 acres of forestland above the South Fork Nooksack River near Acme to be managed for watershed health, wildlife habitat, sustainable timber jobs, tribal cultural access, and public recreation for generations to come.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF FOREST MANAGEMENT

Over the past 30 years, Stewart Mountain has been owned and logged by six different companies, each with little incentive to manage for long-term forest health. Intensive industrial logging left large sections of clearcuts behind, which were later replaced by densely planted young trees that were harvested again within a few decades. The young, dense forests impacted the amount and quality of water draining into the South Fork Nooksack River below. In September 2021, an estimated 2,500 Chinook salmon died before reaching their spawning grounds on the South Fork, killed by the combination of low flows and high stream temperatures that allowed harmful bacteria to thrive. Two months later, an atmospheric river brought historic flooding to the valley. These weren't isolated events—they were warning signs pointing to the same conclusion: the forest above the valley needed to return to community hands.

Research shows that changing the management of upland forests can measurably reverse the damage left by decades of intensive logging. The community forest will implement ecological forest management, a science-based approach that extends harvest rotations and practices selective thinning to build climate resilience and improve watershed health, while producing high-quality timber that supports local living-wage jobs.

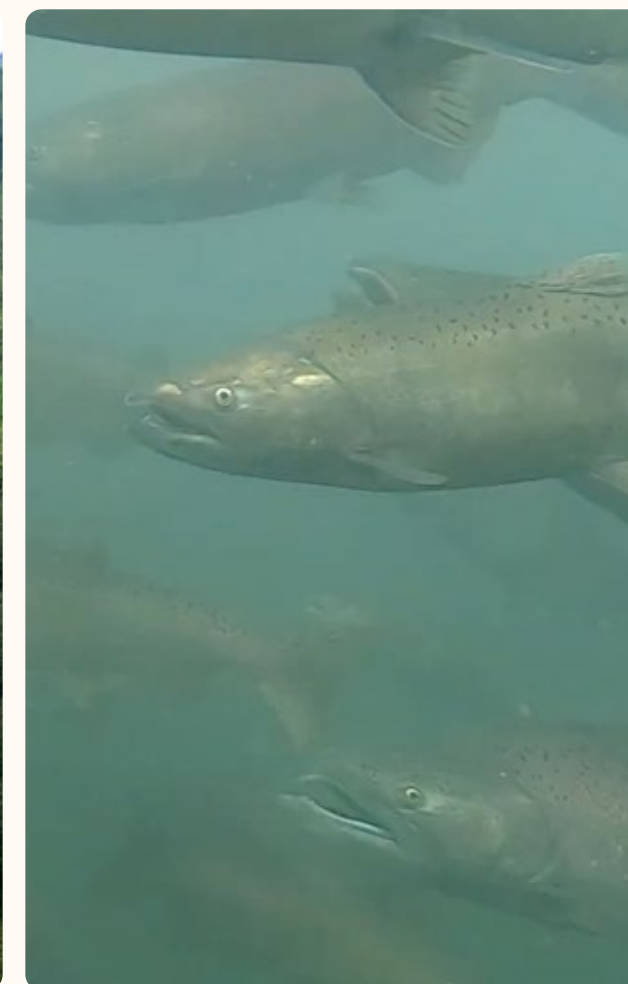
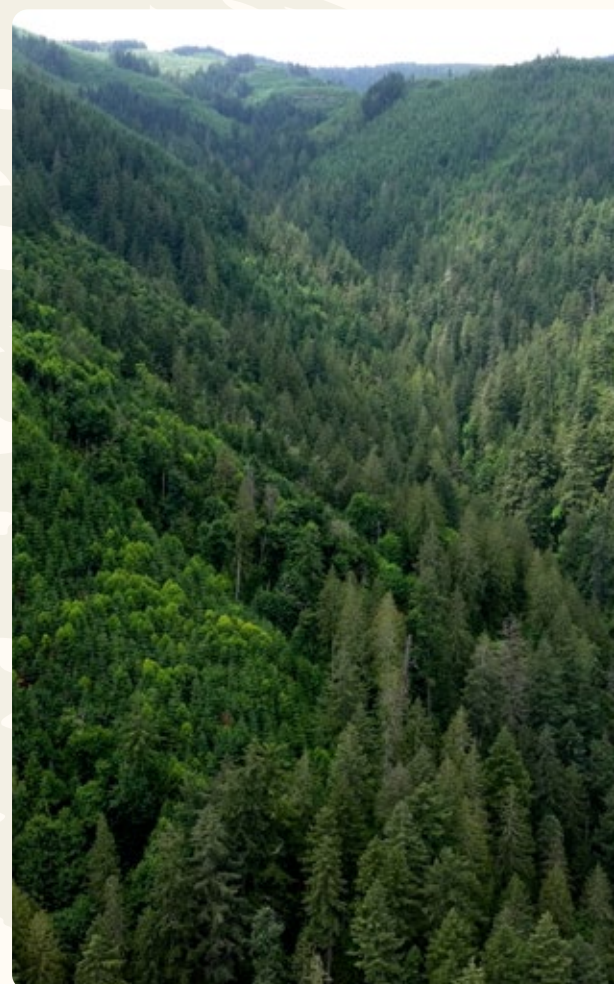
BY THE COMMUNITY, FOR THE COMMUNITY

The vision for the Community Forest began during conversations with South Fork Valley residents, Nooksack tribal members, and local advocates who had spent years calling for change. "Summer on the South Fork, a story passed down from our ancestors, reflects our values as the first stewards of this Valley," said Trevor Delgado, Nooksack Indian Tribe Historic Preservation Officer. "Establishing the Stewart Mountain Community Forest partnership revitalizes tribal

stewardship on this land, along with restoration of the many needed habitats."

The community forest model has grown significantly across the Pacific Northwest, supported by the Northwest Community Forest Coalition and expanded state and federal funding opportunities. In 2026, Whatcom Land Trust will establish a new subsidiary nonprofit to own and govern the forest, keeping decision-making local and accountable to the South Fork Valley community. "Stewart Mountain Community Forest will be owned and managed by representatives from our community, for our community," said Rachel Vasak, Whatcom Land Trust Executive Director. "Together, we can rebuild a healthy, functional timber forest that supports salmon recovery and restores critical wildlife habitat."

The \$9 million Phase II acquisition was made possible by a \$5.5 million grant from the Washington State Department of Ecology's Streamflow Restoration Program, \$3 million from the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office Community Forest Program, and additional public funds and generous support from Whatcom Land Trust donors.



FLOOD RESILIENCE

CONSERVATION WORK SUPPORTS NATURAL RIVER SYSTEMS

Last fall, severe flooding forced evacuations, displaced families, damaged property, and cut off travel across Whatcom County. As we watched the floods impact neighbors and friends, our hearts went out to our community. As climate change makes these events more frequent, we're working together to reduce short-term impacts and build long-term flood resilience. Whatcom Land Trust's conserved and carefully stewarded lands play an important role in that effort.

Conserved lands along rivers and streams give water somewhere to go. When a river swells and spreads across an intact floodplain, it slows, loses energy, and releases gradually rather than pushing downstream in a surge that overwhelms levees and floods neighborhoods.

Restoring degraded floodplains and wetlands helps return land to its natural role as a flood buffer. Maple Creek Reach along the North Fork Nooksack River was once leveled and drained farmland, and later a private residence. After years of restoration work alongside partners, the landscape is once again a functioning network of wetlands and riparian forest. Today, when

the river rises, that land absorbs and spreads floodwater across the landscape rather than sending it downstream in a concentrated surge.

"Making a living farming for the past thirty years has involved all manner of weather related challenges. Our farm lies along the South Fork of the Nooksack River, and we are thankful every winter for the protection our land is provided with by the riparian area owned by Whatcom Land Trust. Having that dedicated land for the river to expand and absorb makes a world of difference compared to the parts of the river that have been cut off from the historic

landscape of back channels and forest. It has kept our operation safe from floods year after year," said Nick Guilford, owner of Sunseed Farm in Acme.

Additionally, everything that happens upstream impacts the rivers below. The Skookum Creek Conservation Corridor, 2,400 acres along the South Fork Nooksack River's largest cold-water tributary, is managed to grow older, more diverse trees that hold water in their root systems and reduce runoff from the forest floor. During large rainfall events, these forests intercept water and slowly filter it through the soil, releasing it gradually into the river rather than contributing to rapid rises that put downstream communities at risk.

We've also been working with our partners to remove invasive plants and replace them with deep-rooted native species. These plants strengthen streambanks, helping absorb and slow water over time. At California Creek Estuary near Blaine, restoration crews have replaced degraded vegetation with native plantings that stabilize the shoreline and buffer the surrounding community from tidal and storm surge at the point where California Creek meets Drayton Harbor.

Together, these strategies help build a network of natural systems that work alongside the levees, roads, and emergency infrastructure communities depend on. They reduce flood peaks, stabilize banks, and store water that would otherwise move fast and destructively, supporting a flood-resilient future for Whatcom County.



Volunteer Land Steward Monique recently spotted the remains of a roof in the Nooksack River. The house was washed away during fall 2025 floods.



Maple Creek Reach Restoration Area

VOLUNTEERS

BUILDING RESILIENCE FOR THE LAND AND EACH OTHER

In 2025, **over 400** Whatcom Land Trust volunteers dedicated more than 6,700 hours to conservation and stewardship. Those span public work parties, long-term site monitoring, community outreach, board and committee service, and other behind-the-scenes tasks that keep our organization running.

WORK PARTIES + FIELD FRIDAYS

Public Work Parties and Field Fridays are where many volunteers first get their hands dirty — and get hooked on stewardship work. Last year, **29 stewardship events** drew volunteers from across Whatcom County, totaling **2,581 hours** of on-the-ground work. Volunteers planted native trees and shrubs, removed invasive plant species, and helped staff with more complex management tasks. They installed a gate at Black Slough to prevent the wetlands from becoming a free dumpsite. They constructed a footbridge along the Stimpson Family Nature

Reserve trail to improve recreational access while protecting wetland habitat. At California Creek Estuary, volunteers replanted a coastal shoreline ecosystem that crumbling structures had once occupied, improving critical habitat for birds, salmon, and more.

Volunteer Heather found her way to the Land Trust through one of these events, hauling Scotch broom at Maple Creek Reach. She's been showing up ever since: at riverside plantings, invasive blackberry removals, and even in the office, carefully reviewing protected lands to help build out the Land Trust's new land management database.

"I like volunteering with the Land Trust because it feels like such a tangible way to make a difference," Heather said. **"You get to get your hands in the dirt, and at the end of the day, you can see the change the group has made to support a healthier local ecosystem."**

LAND STEWARDS

This past year, Volunteer Land Stewards cared for **31 different protected lands**, contributing **1,933 hours** of monitoring, restoration, and general land management. During regular seasonal visits, Land Stewards improve trails, mark boundaries, remove invasive plant species, clean up litter, and surface problems early so staff can respond quickly. Their steady presence enables the



"IT'S INSPIRING TO ENCOUNTER FOLKS FROM SO MANY DIFFERENT WALKS OF LIFE WHO ALL CARE ABOUT LAND STEWARDSHIP. VOLUNTEERING HAS, WITHOUT A DOUBT, INCREASED MY SENSE OF CONNECTION TO THE LAND HERE, BUT ALSO TO THE COMMUNITY." - KATIE



Land Trust to proactively care for more than 8,000 acres of conserved land, which would not be possible without their support.

Volunteer Carol has been doing this work for a decade, participating in more than 27 work parties and tending everything from the office garden to remote forested properties.

“Soon after moving to the area 10 years ago, I was happy to sign on as a Volunteer Land Steward with the Land Trust,” she said. “I have been glad to see how much progress has been made at conserving the wonderful environment here in just that amount of time.”

Volunteer Alex has brought that same depth to Christie Creek, creating and maintaining a three-mile path for ease of management access, leading Native Plant Society tours, clearing invasive laurel, and enlisting community members to help care for a place he knows intimately.

“Christie Creek is my church, my playground, and my school,” he said. “I feel compelled to do what I can to help heal the Earth.”

Reading Alex’s quarterly stewardship reports, staff says, is like reading prose—the kind that makes you want to go outside and thank the day for being there.

Volunteer Hank logged more than 1,500 hours this year alone—the most of any volunteer! In his time in the field, he expanded a trail network across 70 acres at the Fenton Reserve to eradicate the invasive



English holly, roped in a retired restoration expert to help measure trees and make habitat improvements, helped haul a culvert out of the woods for a partner organization to use on their own project, and more.

AMBASSADORS

While stewardship volunteers work on the land, the Land Trust’s **33 Ambassadors** share our mission and vision at farmers’ markets, festivals, university events, and community gatherings across the whole County. In 2025, Ambassadors tabled at **more than 30 events**, from Bellingham to Lynden, connecting new people to our work and inviting them to get involved.

For Volunteer Nick, the Ambassador role has been about belonging as much as conservation.

“I love to be around people who are actively engaged in being the solution and not

just talking about it! The most precious thing you may give an organization is your time. I cherish building community relations by being actively engaged through volunteering.”

Katie Fialko moved from out of state, became an Ambassador, and then joined the Land Trust staff as a Stewardship Coordinator.

“I have talked with and learned something from heaps of interesting people at Land Trust events,” she said. “It’s inspiring to encounter folks from so many different walks of life who all care about land stewardship. Volunteering has, without a doubt, increased my sense of connection to the land here, but also to the community.”

GROWTH MEANS NEW TECHNOLOGY

As more lands are conserved (and more amazing volunteers join the organization to support our work), we need new

systems to manage and care for protected lands. Recently, we began transitioning to *Landscape*, a new stewardship data platform that will improve how we track and manage stewardship activities, store and access monitoring data, and coordinate across Land Trust programs.

Volunteers like Heather have spent hours in the office carefully reviewing each protected land to enter records, maps, and documents into the new system. *Landscape* will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of monitoring, help staff prioritize the various management needs and accomplishments across 8,000 acres, track changes on an additional 10,000 acres of Conservation Easement lands, and position the Land Trust to meet the increasing demands of stewardship as our protected lands—and the community that cares for them—continue to grow.



"FOR THE FIRST TIME IN OVER 50 YEARS, SPRING CHINOOK CAN MAKE THEIR WAY UP TO THE KENNEY CREEK SYSTEM TO SPAWN, REAR, AND HAVE THE NEXT GENERATION OF SALMON." - JAMES

KENNEY CREEK

COLLABORATIVELY RESTORING SALMON HABITAT

On a fall morning along North Fork Road, nearly 100 volunteers gathered at the recently protected Lower Kenney Creek Reserve to plant native trees and shrubs along the creek just before it flows into the North Fork Nooksack River. They worked their way across a field of open grass, planting Western red cedars and Pacific ninebark shrubs provided by Whatcom Conservation District. The plantings will grow into a riparian buffer, stabilizing Kenney Creek's slopes to prevent erosion and creating shade to keep the waters cool for salmon. Along the road, a newly constructed 115-foot bridge built by Whatcom County replaced a five-foot culvert that blocked salmon from returning up the creek. In the water below, the Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association (NSEA) had placed large woody debris to slow water flow and create habitat pools for salmon spawning.

This work party showcased years of coordinated work between Whatcom County's conservation partners, each playing a critical and unique role to restore and reconnect Kenney Creek to the North Fork Nooksack River. After more than 50 years, Spring Chinook, a federally listed endangered species, will be able to return and spawn in Kenney Creek.

THE MISSING 15 ACRES

More than 20 years ago, Whatcom Land Trust protected a significant stretch of the upper Kenney Creek watershed, preserving bald eagle habitat and the forested headwaters that keep the stream cold and clean. But the connection between that protected land and the North Fork Nooksack remained broken. The missing piece was a 15-acre stretch of the lower creek corridor. When Whatcom Land Trust purchased that critical connection, it helped unlock the community collaboration that followed.

Whatcom County replaced the culvert with a 115-foot bridge, restoring the natural channel width and allowing the free movement of water, sediment, and wood.

"It restores the natural sized channel," said John Thompson, Whatcom County Senior Salmon Recovery Planner. "It allows for the free passage of water, sediment, and wood — all those things that come together to create good fish habitat."

At the same time, NSEA worked in the streambed, placing large woody debris throughout the creek channel. Large wood creates pools, slows current, and provides cover for juvenile fish—processes that had been absent from Lower Kenney Creek for decades. Whatcom Conservation District funded NSEA's upstream restoration work through the Salmon Recovery Funding Board and Washington's Climate Commitment Act.

PLANTING FOR THE FUTURE

Fish passage alone doesn't make a functioning salmon stream. Much of Lower Kenney Creek's banks had been stripped of the native trees and shrubs that shade the water and stabilize stream banks over time.

Volunteers from NSEA and Whatcom Land Trust's stewardship programs planted approximately 700 native trees and shrubs along the creek corridor, converting open grassland into the beginning of a riparian buffer. Those plantings will shade the creek, reduce water temperatures, and eventually contribute woody debris to the stream, building the habitat complexity that Spring Chinook need across their entire life cycle.

"For the first time in over 50 years, Spring Chinook can make their way up to the Kenney Creek system to spawn, rear, and have the next generation of salmon that can continue on," said NSEA Riparian Project Manager James van der Voort.

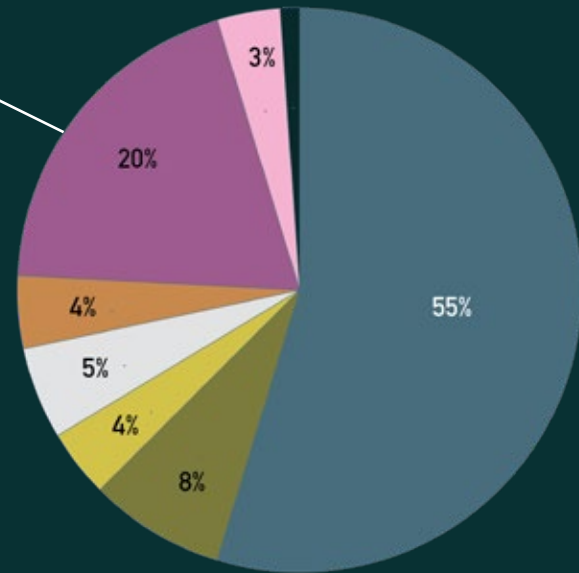
WATCH INTERVIEWS WITH PARTNERS AND LEARN MORE: whatcomlandtrust.org/kenney-creek

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

FINANCIAL FIGURES REFLECT 7/1/24 - 6/30/25

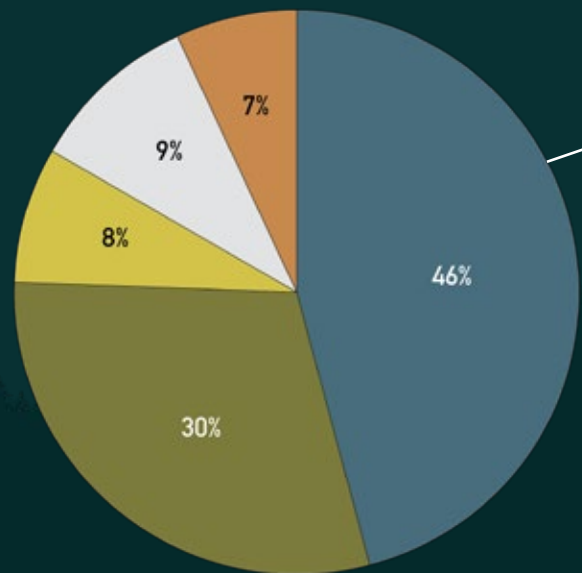
SOURCE OF FUNDS - \$2,902,026*

- Donations - 55%
- Government Grants - 8%
- Fundraising Events - 4%
- Program Income - 5%
- Investment Income - 4%
- Facilitation - 20%
- Bridge Loans - 3%
- Other - 1%



USE OF FUNDS - \$2,709,448

- Land Conservation - 46%
- Land Stewardship - 30%
- Administration & Operations - 9%
- Outreach and Education - 8%
- Fundraising - 7%



Sources of funds and uses of funds represent fiscal years from July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025. The financial information is excerpted from Whatcom Land Trust's audited financial statements. To obtain a copy of the complete audit please visit whatcomlandtrust.org/contribute/990s or call 360.650.9470. *This number does not reflect the impact of fluctuations in market performance on the investment portfolio.

DONOR PROFILES

WAYS TO GIVE A GIFT

HUNDREDS OF GENEROUS FRIENDS, NEIGHBORS, FOUNDATIONS, AND BUSINESSES MAKE OUR WORK POSSIBLE. THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT. VISIT WHATCOMLANDTRUST.ORG/CONTRIBUTE TO LEARN MORE AND MAKE A GIFT TODAY.



"My late husband Bob Keller and I have been giving to Whatcom Land Trust since 1990 and are so pleased to see this vital work continue. Making a gift from my IRA helps me save on taxes while protecting the places I love most."

- PAT KARLBERG



"Giving a donation of appreciated stock is the perfect way of fulfilling my charitable goals while preserving cash and avoiding embedded capital gains. I love that Whatcom Land Trust's work is both tangible and permanent."

- ANDY WICKSTRAND



"I love the woods and get sad when ivy takes over the trees and the holly and blackberries spread. Joining others at Land Trust work parties to remove these invasive plants made me so happy. Now, I give a donation so this vital work can continue. Giving monthly as a G.O.A.T. helps me still make a big impact but spread my gift out across the year."

- MARY RAWLINS



IN THE FOREST

A "LETTER TO THE LAND" BY LOIS HOLUB

O Standing People giving life to four-leggeds and winged ones,
to stones and waters still or trickling,
I love you.

I fill my eyes with your colors.
I want my vision to overflow with your beauty.

I fill my ears with the songs of wren and sparrow, the
calls of robin, and raven, and owl.
I fill my lungs, my bloodstream, my heart and brain with
the pure rich oxygen you offer to all beings.

I put my hands on you.
I press my heart against you, you cedar, you fir, you
ancient ones.

Then I feel your deep, slow pulse rising from the earth
into air, echoing down to the roots, passing through my
palms, my ribcage.

My own heartbeat responds, chanting "Thank-you. Thank-
you. Thank-you."



To learn more about how you can support conservation and
stewardship work in Whatcom County,

Scan or visit: whatcomlandtrust.org/impactreport26

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