

## Minutes of the 2007 Annual Retreat

### Executive Summary

San Juan County Land Bank

October 22, 2007

Camp Orkila

Orcas Island, WA.

Members Present: Amanda Azous, Mary Blackstone, Tom Cowan, Nancy Greene, Nancy Jones, and Lisa Lawrence.

Members Absent: Thom Pence

Staff Present: Lincoln Bormann, Judy Cumming, Eliza Habegger, Doug McCutchen, Ruthie Dougherty, Brian Windrope (consultant), and Karen Vedder (legal council).

Staff Absent: Diane Kinnaman

Facilitator: John Howell

Recorder: Julia Turney

8:09 a.m. Convene Meeting

Introductions of attendees and overview of the agenda:

- 1) Accomplishments and reactions to the years activities
- 2) What the Land Bank is doing to meet goals, balancing science and monitoring, managing staffing changes, where to increase funding
- 3) Identify, discuss and strategize possible future acquisitions
- 4) Discuss grant funding
- 5) Sustainable leases
- 6) What steps to take toward reauthorization
- 7) Have John bring Cascade Conservancy organization experience to the discussion
- 8) How to incorporate affordable housing into Land Bank mission

#### **Review 2006 - 2007 accomplishments (PowerPoint presentation)**

Lincoln and Doug narrated a pictorial overview of projects in the field.

#### General Discussion and Reaction:

Lisa: Stewardship is becoming a larger part of the Land Bank's day-to-day activities.

Amanda: "A" grade for the work that was done.

Nancy G.: Turtleback and Watmough Bay Preserve were big purchases since last retreat and were somewhat stressful.

Nancy J.: Commended staff for meeting challenge and increased staff communication with Commission.

Tom: The Commission has made more decisions on stewardship over the past couple of years. Now staff is addressing these.

Mary: Providing initial access to Turtleback and making the community feel that it is open to them has been very successful, even though it preceded the final management plan.

John asked if there were any concerns:

Tom: How to get everything done and how to make things happen given budget and staff time.

Karen: There has been an effort to make it appear that the Land Bank and affordable housing interests are competing for public funds and how to educate the public to show that this is not the case?

John: The Cascade Conservancy sees public perception that conservation competes with other land interests.

Nancy G: The Land Bank may be seen as an organization to solve monetary woes if it can be reorganized in some way. There is a need to clarify who the Land Bank is and what we've done. The Land Bank has been in the center of the affordable housing discussion without participating in the discussion.

Lisa: The money sitting in various funds may look like it is a large amount and there may be pressure to use the funds on other county missions.

Nancy J: The stewardship fund might be perceived as a large amount of money just sitting there to future public officers.

Karen: There has been a trend toward private groups writing ordinances without public input or review by trained staff and this could be a source of interest in Land Bank funds.

Lisa: The work plan by staff was very helpful.

Lincoln: The work plan was a change in approach and the retreat helped guide the plan.

Tom: Would like each staff to develop a statement of job duties.

Eliza: Additional staff really helped and while it was still busy it made tasks seem achievable.

Lincoln: It is important to focus on issues where we can have a positive impact.

Affordable housing keeps coming back up as an issue because it is a difficult issue.

Perceptions of the Land Bank seem to vary by Island.

Lincoln: Everyone did an incredible job this year.

9:22 Break

9:36 Reconvene

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## **Stewardship Capacity**

Lincoln gave an overview of the issue to provide context:

The Land Bank is a dynamic entity and it evolves over time. Eliza would like to reduce her work hours and this provides an opportunity to think about how to structure our stewardship efforts. She has been doing science assessments, monitoring conservation easements, writing preserve management plans, and serving as liaison to the agricultural resource committee, among other duties. How to accomplish the work with staff availability, do we keep current focus or change, should we be shifting resources.

Eliza described scientific assessment:

Science allows understanding of the properties provides a snapshot of the ecology, identifies what is important, and what is happening. Investigations happen at different levels of detail to address active ecological management or restoration. Ecological monitoring is limited on Land Bank preserves; most monitoring is of the property use and status for conservation easements.

### Summary of Discussion

Need scientific knowledge on staff.

Increasing preserve staff on Lopez makes sense.

Two areas where expenditures might be reduced are: limiting the extent of new public access, and in finding additional funding for other kinds of projects, such as restoration.

### Summary

Commissioners feel volunteers important and program should be expanded. Staff plans on addressing the volunteer program in coming months and will present a volunteer plan for the Commission.

## **Building the Stewardship Fund**

Background: There is a need to keep building the Stewardship fund and a need to determine how much to have in the fund by 2014 when the REET could sunset. Also, there needs to be a plan on how to spend the money in the fund. Current plan has not put sufficient funds into the fund. One option is to place a lump sum in the fund. Nancy provided an example that at the current rate of spending with a return rate of 5 % the fund would have to be approximately \$9 million.

### Summary

Need a plan, goals and find a way to add more money to the Stewardship fund. Also provide political protection for money.

Lincoln and Judy will perform an analysis of spending trajectory. The Commission has an existing subcommittee to work on this issue.

Karen: The fund is protected by statute. However, should there be more of a political fallout if someone redirects the money elsewhere.

Eliza: What will the Land Bank look like when the REET sunsets? Will there still be a need for a commission? What will be the Directors role? What are the challenges?

Karen: Conservation easements may be the greatest challenge to manage. The Commission may have to defend easements from private parties who want to change land use.

Tom: If the Land Bank and REET is not reauthorized, the County Council could choose to fund a position in the parks department and make another manager the stewardship director.

Third Party partnerships could help protect land.

11:40am Adjournment for lunch

12:36pm Reconvene

### **Land Conservation**

Lincoln handed out a draft list of pending and proposed acquisitions showing estimated REET income and expenditures for 2008. Of special note was the decline in REET funds following decreases in revenue since 2005. Lisa noted this is due to a slow down in real estate sales and some reduction in sales prices. Two large property sales provided for a significant percentage of the 2007 income. It also seems prudent to plan for real estate sales not recovering very quickly over the next several years. The acquisition list noted that the trend in income is dropping. Projected net income for 2008 totaled about \$2.75 million.

Lincoln noted that on this projection there will be \$1.25 million on hand, 2009 will net approx. \$1 million REET, perhaps \$1-2 Million in grant funding and there will be \$2.1 million in debit service. The picture could be similar through 2014. This may mean reduced funding for projects and money going into stewardship fund.

Grant funds will likely be state funds from Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program and these funds can be used for acquisition or a variety of projects.

Nancy J: Need \$2.5 million to make 2007 expenses. This may cause her to rethink some purchases.

Lisa: There could be \$1.75 Million from the Argyle Lots and two other resale properties.

Nancy G to Tom: This could have implications for the Lopez Village property and expectations on Lopez about what comes next for the Land Bank.

Other properties mentioned: Mar Vista on San Juan Island  
San Juan Island Historic Museum  
Cascade Creek in Olga  
Ferguson Historic Preservation Easement  
Odlin South

### Summary

Lincoln says that this is the direction purchases will take unless the Commission has concerns. Plan does not include discussion of lump sum contribution to the Stewardship fund. Lincoln noted that this is a working document and developed for comment and planning purposes.

### **Grant Options**

Brian: Reviewing State of Washington grant opportunities for Land Bank. He sees reasons for cautious optimism for getting grants. The Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program awarded over \$100 million in grants in the last biennium. There are four or five different categories of programs to which the State grants. San Juan County received no funds during last round although there were 24 overall applications and 22 grants awarded (with only one application from San Juan County). The next grant cycle starts in April 2008 for funding in 2009.

Lincoln: Several properties are eligible for grants:  
Turtleback for Recreation and Riparian Habitat (Retroactive) and Trails  
Taylor for Riparian Protection  
Saunders for Local Parks  
At least one or two Lopez properties for Agricultural Preservation  
Crescent Beach Trail for trail development  
Judd Cove for water access  
Fisherman Bay Spit for the dock

Tom: Is the focus on WWRP Grants?

Lincoln: This seems the best fit. It seems reasonable to hope for \$1 to 2 Million. Project funding is awarded based on merit, not on how much the applicant has in resources.

John: Is there a mechanism to establish what projects are applied for?

Ruthie: Will there be one application overall or one application per project?

Brian: Probably individual applications.

Brian: Strategy is to attend next rule making hearing for RCO to understand the process and tone of meeting and understand what isn't stated explicitly in the applications rules.

Lincoln: Keep grant process in mind and it will be revisited early in the year after the stewardship subcommittee meeting.

### **Sustainable Agriculture**

Agenda item to discuss if there should be infrastructure added to Land Bank lands to support lessee.

Lincoln: Agriculture advocates say that for anyone to make a go of farming they need infrastructure in place like wells and fencing. If they have to add these items up front it may be impossible to make money.

One question is, can the Land Bank do this as part of the statute? And what is public perception of this kind of support?

Lincoln visited with Boulder County Open Space Program and related their approach. Boulder County invests in infrastructure up front so it is clear who owns it; there is a higher lease rate for improved property over unimproved property; they keep leases short (3 years) so that if a lessee is not managing the property properly they choose to not renew the lease; and they set up a business model for the lease process.

### Summary

Basic infrastructure seems to be a common thread and this seems to mean water, electricity, access, fencing of some sort.

Lincoln: We will move forward and develop a plan to bring to the Commission. There is an existing Agriculture subcommittee to address plan.

Afternoon Break-- Reconvene at 2:30pm

### **Affordable Housing**

#### Summary

Partnering with AH is possible only if it fits in with the mission. Low-key outreach with AH group with conversation focused on benefits of Land Bank to public.

### **Building Momentum**

Has there been progress and is this the kind of progress that we want?

#### Summary

Make presentations to service groups

Op-ed pieces

Lead or participate in hikes

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Inter island ferry tour of conservation lands  
Brochures for real estate offices  
Display at the Lopez & Orcas Community Theaters  
Different sized displays for different venues  
Partner with other groups like Audubon Society  
Sponsor activities like apple tree pruning at Fisherman Bay Spit

John: What support do the Commissioners need?

Amanda: Eliza should run through the talk to prepare commissioners

John: How to deal with the myths?

Lincoln: Adding a tag line to op-ed pieces like: 70% of Land Bank properties are open to the public.

Develop a fact sheet that addresses the tax, mission and access issues for staff and commissioners to carry.

### **Action Items**

1. Reconfigure how money is put in stewardship fund. Lincoln and Judy will perform an analysis of spending trajectory for subcommittee analysis.
2. Add grant funding to funding sources and develop prioritized list for grant funding.
3. Staff will develop a plan for volunteer participation.
4. Judy will improve and update the volunteer database.
5. Commission will review land conservation list.
6. Research and design agricultural leases.
7. Lincoln will start low key outreach to AH group(s).
8. Community outreach by staff and commissioners based on brainstorm list.
9. Karen will look into legal aspects of Land Bank owning a building and using land as investment for future funding to increase return on equity.
10. Develop fact sheet on Land Bank tax and public access.

11. Staff will evaluate mix of part time staff and geographic distribution for best function.

Last Question

Tom: What is appropriate and legal role for Land Bank commissioners for reauthorization in 2014?

Nancy J and G: Last time the Commissioners did not participate but focused on business. Do not have to wait until 2014 to approach reauthorization if it seems appropriate earlier.

Lincoln and Karen: Any County agency can commission a poll or study of affects but can't advocate political maneuvers.