

**Notes of the 2009 Annual Retreat
San Juan County Land Bank
November 13, 2009
2970 Port Stanley Rd, Lopez Island
Port Stanley Schoolhouse**

The Land Bank Commission and staff hold an annual retreat to allow in depth exploration of issues and challenges facing the organization. These topics often arise during the regular monthly meetings of the Commission, but there is usually no time for a broader exchange of ideas. The retreat is not intended as a decision-making forum.

Commission Members Present: Amanda Azous, Tom Cowan, Nancy Greene, Nancy Jones, Lisa Wolford and Jim Skoog. **Members Absent:** Mary Blackstone

Staff Present: Lincoln Bormann, Judy Cumming, Doug McCutchen, Ruthie Dougherty, Tim Clark, Diane Kinnaman, Ted Emery (Intern), and Karen Vedder (Legal counsel).

Public Present: Debby Clausen and Marilyn O'Connor (both arrived at 10:10 a.m.)

Facilitator: John Howell

Recorder: Diane Kinnaman

9:15 a.m. Convene Meeting

Introductions.

Tom Cowan shared the rich history of the Port Stanley Schoolhouse and explained how the schoolhouse was dilapidated until about six years ago. Restoration was achieved in 2003 through in-kind contributions, grants, volunteers, and the Lopez Island Historical Society.

Nancy Greene explained how the Land Bank has been approached over time about conserving the lands surrounding the schoolhouse. Chris and Helena Jones donated the schoolhouse to the Lopez Island Historical Society and additionally donated the adjacent 17-acre forested property to the SJPT in 1996, completely surrounding the schoolhouse with protected land.

Surrounding properties are part of an ongoing conservation area effort, building on original efforts by Fred and Marilyn Ellis in 1985. The Ellis' placed a conservation easement (CE) through the San Juan Preservation Trust (SJPT) on the 313-acre working ranch to protect its wetlands and to ensure its open fields remain available for agricultural purposes in perpetuity. Currently three produce farmers and a beef farm located across the road from the Port Stanley Schoolhouse on Baker View Road are some of the most active agricultural producers on Lopez Island.

Agenda Review

John Howell gave an overview of the agenda:

1. Review 2008-2009 Accomplishments
2. Review of the Land Bank going into its 20th Anniversary year (2010)
3. Near Term Goals
4. Defining the Land Bank for the Future
5. Reauthorization Climate / Steps / Timing

1. Review 2008-2009 Accomplishments

Lincoln Bormann noted the summary provided ahead of the meeting outlining the status of action items identified at the annual retreat in October 2008:

Stewardship Role and Priorities

Create a 2009 work plan for stewardship with a proposed budget by the end of the year. Production of the draft 2010 work plan with corresponding budget began after the October 30, 2009 stewardship retreat.

Lincoln acknowledged Judy Cumming and Karen Vedder's outstanding efforts on expediting contract processing, facilitating preserve openings at an unprecedented pace.

Lincoln gave an overview of the Trust for Public Land, Land Bank and Public Works community open houses which took place on four islands (San Juan, Orcas, Lopez, and Shaw) November 5, 6, 7, and 10th, 2009. Lincoln gave an overview of the meetings describing them as well attended with over 200 participants.

Citizens commented on wetlands, park structure, preserves, public works – describing what it is that the public wants. Trails were a main theme in each of the meetings. At the Lopez meeting a trails committee was formed, at the Orcas meeting Orcas Pathways reported they are ready to step up activities, as the San Juan Island Trails Committee continues to successfully lead many projects. Lincoln explained that the Land Bank's acceptance of trails easements will be a key component of these efforts. There was discussion.

Stewardship Project Progress Report

San Juan

Beaverton Valley Marsh restoration – Funding secured from federal North American Wetlands Conservation Act program via Ducks Unlimited. Restoration planning/implementation is currently underway on the Taylor property and Beaverton Valley Marsh Preserve (this is a partial restoration plan based on the inability to secure easements from other property owners to manipulate water levels).

Deadman Bay – Re-routing of beach access currently in assessment and planning stage.

Frazer Homestead -- Management plan complete. Trail and fence work complete (funded by NPS grant). Set to open in spring, 2010. Work started on creating an agricultural lease for the property. Pond improvements underway to provide water for agricultural operations.

King Sisters – Agricultural lease complete together with all infrastructure projects on the property. Trail largely complete and set to open in spring, 2010.

West Side – Pull out improvement projects still under discussion with public works.

Lopez

Lopez Hill lease – Accepted management obligations for the property. Staff working with Friends of Lopez Hill and hunting groups to maintain the property and complete the transition to Land Bank management.

Fisherman Bay Spit dock permitting – In process.

Upright Head – Signage and entry to be completed by the end of 2009. Negotiations over transfer of the water system underway.

Orcas

Judd Cove – Management plan complete. Site enhancements largely in place, including removal of log dump structures and restoration of the historic lime kiln. The Preserve officially opened November 10.

Turtleback Mountain – Garry Oak enhancement project complete. (currently in the first phase of a multi-year restoration effort, with 75 young oaks cages, unit one conifer removal finished, and first blackberry removal practice complete.) Multi-use trail on the north side of Turtleback is roughed in and opening is expected in spring of 2010. Public access improvements currently in the process of being designed and installed. Forest Stewardship Council certification application largely complete (the Preserve will be inventoried over the winter to create firm management objectives and potentially establish eligibility for carbon credit programs).

Crescent Beach – Trailhead parking areas and signage completed.

Terrill Beach/Stonebridge – Signs have been installed since July.

Another priority is to review and revise the policy manual as a process document to make decisions about allowable land uses. It has to be useable, respectful of public interest and flexible to manage properties on a case-by-case basis – project to be picked up again when Eliza Habegger returns to work next March.

Volunteer Activities

- Work Parties - a large number of work parties have been held throughout the year, especially with fence and trail building on the Frazer Homestead Preserve.
- Blog/Communication Tool - no action has been taken on this.
- Volunteer recognition – Nancy Jones is working on a public letter thanking our volunteers. To date, volunteers have put in over 1,800 hours of work. This comes out to nearly a year's worth of time for one full time employee. There was discussion on different ways to acknowledge volunteers.

Acquisition Priorities

San Juan

- Erickson historic preservation and conservation easement. Purchase and sale agreement signed. Easement drafting underway. Town of Friday Harbor and the SJ Agricultural Guild need to work through details of property ownership/management.
- Heritage Farm conservation easement addition. Completed.
- Howard conservation easement. Completed.
- L. Guard. Offer and counter offer made. Awaiting response from seller.
- Mar Vista. Offer rejected.
- Mitchell Hill. Appraisal completed. Federal funding approved. Will work with Conservation Fund and National Park Service to complete the transaction January/February 2010.
- San Juan Historical Society historic preservation and conservation easement. Final easement completed. Hoping to close by January 1.
- San Juan Island trail easements. Hurd and Nishitani easements completed. Smith/Weil underway.
- Taylor conservation easement. Survey and appraisal underway.
- W. Sundstrom property conveyance. Waiting on San Juan Preservation Trust.

Lopez

- Lopez Hill lease – Negotiations completed. Lease executed.
- Strachan conservation easement donation. Underway. Closing expected by the end of 2009.
- Jones conservation easement. Negotiations halted.

Orcas

- Tompkins trail easement. Initial discussions completed. Trail easement area to be defined and easement drafted.

Additional comments on accomplishments or otherwise that had not been noted or discussed on the year just completed:

Nancy Jones acknowledged Lincoln's leadership with Land Bank staff's fiscal responsibility through this economically challenged time, holding the line on expenses. Also noteworthy is the decision on the part of the commission to set aside money for bonding so that the Land Bank is not scrambling to make these payments. The commission has held the line on setting funds aside for this, readjusting the budget to reflect the new revenue stream. All should be commended.

Lincoln commented how using local contractors on stewardship projects has been very beneficial to the Land Bank, getting more work done and at the same time supporting locals during these economically challenged times. Doug McCutchen further explained that stewards on each of the islands effectively spread the work around to different

contractors, increasing the benefits. Nancy Greene suggested an article be written sharing these facts with the public.

Public Outreach

Op Ed Pieces: Lincoln published an opinion piece on the status of Lopez and Mitchell Hill (May). Mary Blackstone did one on the Judd Cove management plan (September). Amanda Azous and Lincoln co-authored an opinion piece on the Erickson Historic Preservation and Conservation Easement project in Friday Harbor (November).

Community Presentations, Displays, and Outreach: A number of presentations/workshops were done by staff, including a trail-building workshop. Staffed displays were presented at the Orcas Library Fair and County Fair as well as the Lopez farmer's market. Photography exhibits were displayed at a number of venues on Orcas, San Juan and Lopez and the photography contest entries continue to be displayed as a slide show on the Land Bank website. Boyd Pratt also gave a lecture on lime kilns on Orcas in October, 2009. Two community presentations were done by commissioners over 2009 and staff and commissioners led numerous hikes and outings for the public and groups from school classes to senior citizens.

Increasing Commission Meeting Public Attendance: Monthly Land Bank Commission meetings have had sporadic public attendance. There was discussion on how to increase participation.

Ten minute break.

2. Review of the Land Bank going into its 20th Anniversary year (2010)

Introductions of public (just arrived) Marilyn O'Conner of the Port of Friday Harbor and Debra Clausen of the San Juan Preservation Trust.

Successes

Consensus: The Land Bank's role in the community is much more defined. The clear and positive identity the Land Bank currently enjoys is the result of staff and commissioners' professional, honorable and respectful relationships with the citizens of San Juan County.

Of particular importance in creating a positive image for the Land Bank have been:

- Efforts to leverage resources and use funds efficiently;
- Creation of opportunities for the public to participate and provide feedback on Land Bank activities;
- Development of new opportunities for public access via preserve openings and consideration of multiple uses for properties;
- On-going efforts to communicate with the public through the media (press releases, opinion articles), presentations and personal interactions;

- A substantial increase in the use of volunteers for various projects.

The Land Bank has protected a significant amount of land, particularly agricultural farmland and has had a successful year developing public trails, opening preserves, and taking care of business. Having a designated steward on each island has also been very beneficial. The Land Bank has been very adaptive, staying relevant and is working with many public agencies. Meetings have been more open, welcoming public process, and ultimately creating a stronger public entity. Feedback from citizens is gratefully received and the Land Bank will continue to craft its program around community input within its legislated mandate.

3. Near Term Goals

Importance was relayed on the following community interests:

- Continue efforts toward supporting agricultural farmland
- Respond to the community needs and interests as they are identified – give citizens a forum to be heard
- Preserve more shoreline and small islands
- Resolve public access issues with neighbors
- Facilitate transparency of Land Bank activities for easy citizen access

Additionally, commissioners and staff identified other strong areas of focus for the upcoming year:

- Effective, responsible stewardship of the land including increasing the health of preserve's sensitive areas through more science and restoration i.e. oak restoration work.
- Draft strong conservation easements (CE); update current CE boilerplate agreement
- Ensure the availability of funds to continue stewardship of Preserves in perpetuity
- Craft criteria identifying points for commission to identify when to move away from a project
- Map and identify properties with high conservation values to facilitate expedient responses

- Review and resolve any differences between the mandate and the policy manual

12:15 – 12:55 p.m. Lunch Break

4. Defining the Land Bank for the Future

September 5, 1990, Ordinance No. 142-1990 was passed “establishing a citizens conservation Land Bank and methods for acquiring and managing open space and conservation areas in San Juan County”. In 1991 the Land Bank began.

The Land Bank has continually modified itself to serve the environment and the community with changing needs. To that end, the consensus is that the organization is a proven success and a positive example of government working.

Throughout changes in San Juan County communities, the Land Bank has maintained the vision of representing citizens in an honorable, ethical, transparent way. Its mission: to continue to do so, keeping its doors open to the community in an effort to grow and be stronger.

Potential Acquisition Priorities:

- General: trail easements
- Lopez: Central Valley Ag Easements, Village open space
- San Juan: Beaverton Marsh properties, Cattle Point Road trail easements
- Henry: Southwestern portion of the island near Kellett Bluff
- Orcas: contiguous forest lands, shoreline access

Additional Priorities:

- Open more preserves, increase public access opportunities
- Protect potable water, native species, forest health, carbon credits
- Preserve character of place visually
- Increase stewardship capacity via volunteers and seasonal positions
- Continue to partner with a variety of organizations (federal and state government agencies/programs, private non-profits)
- Position the Land Bank to participate in the emerging carbon credit market

5. Reauthorization Climate / Steps / Timing

Karen Vedder, legal counsel, advised what the Commission can legally discuss regarding reauthorization.

Commission contemplated the appropriate timing for a referendum, probably no later than 2012.

Lincoln reported that the survey results from the Trust for Public Land would be available in early January. The survey was sent to 3,000 residents randomly selected in an effort to gather ideas and priorities for the county's parks, trails, and natural areas. Included in the survey was a question about whether individuals would support a Land Bank renewal. There was discussion.

Next Steps & Timing

- Create new group including commissioners, county council members and citizens to create a reauthorization strategy
- 2010 - Meet with realtors and other groups
- Increase outreach, i.e., op eds, presentations, especially by Commissioners/volunteers

Meeting was closed at 3:15 p.m.