

**Notes of the 2008 Annual Retreat
San Juan County Land Bank
October 24, 2008
609 Smugglers Cove Road
San Juan Island, WA.**

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.

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, Tim Clark, Diane Kinnaman, and Karen Vedder (legal counsel).

Public: Jim Higgins

Facilitator: John Howell

Recorder: Julia Turney

8:50 Convene Meeting

Introductions of attendees and John gave an overview of the agenda:

- 1) Accomplishments and reactions to the years activities
 - a. Acceptable?
 - b. Unacceptable?
 - c. Where would the Land Bank draw the line on intensity of use in properties?
- 2) Comments on Volunteer Plan
- 3) Review District Analysis
- 4) What will be the acquisition priorities for each District?
- 5) Reauthorization timing and climate timing
- 6) What steps to take toward reauthorization
- 7) Public outreach and Commission role
- 8) Commission/Staff/ Land owner Communication

Review 2007-2008 accomplishments

Lincoln noted the list that was provided ahead of the meeting and a couple of additional accomplishments:

1. Progress on the goal of promoting sustainable agriculture. The lease for the King Sisters property has been advertised. Up to 10 parties have expressed interest in the lease before advertising and by the February meeting there should be a decision.

2. The Volunteer database has been improved and now has 275 individual contacts. Doug noted that the number of volunteers is up four times from previous years and that Diane's involvement as volunteer coordinator has made a big difference. Lincoln said that during his talks to groups he always mentions how volunteers leverage the work that the Land Bank does in the community.

General Discussion and Reaction:

The addition of volunteers and greater participation was good. The addition of Brian to help with grant writing was productive. The amount of work the stewards have accomplished at Judd Cove, (site clean-up), Deer Harbor (swimming pool removal), trail work (Crescent Beach, Westside Preserve, Turtleback) is impressive. The list of accomplishments doesn't capture the challenges of getting the work done. The Turtleback Management Plan process and public interaction was handled well and staff and Land Bank Commission dealt with the questions. With REET income down there has been a new focus on stewardship, which has required more staff, and more workspace. The follow-up on the 2007 retreat has been good. How will the Land Bank clarify its mission and communicate it to the public?

Land Bank Stewardship Role

Lincoln provided an overview of County budget issues and potential implications for the Land Bank: A potential issue is the Council transferring Parks Department obligations to the Land Bank to deal with revenue shortfalls. A second issue is the increasing demand for more recreational use of Land Bank properties, including higher intensity use.

Where will the Land Bank draw the line on land uses on properties?

General Discussion:

The Land Bank mandate is driven by the word "acquisition" and as stewardship needs increase over time there is a need to balance this with stewardship. More uses mean more stewardship needs and more funding going toward stewardship. The Land Bank's primary mission is protection of ecological resources. Public use can damage ecological resources. How does the Land Bank balance use against preservation?

Each property is unique and should be managed differently based on its characteristics. The multiple uses on Turtleback should not set a precedent for how all properties are managed. Turtleback is divided into use areas: no access, pedestrian access and multiple use access. The availability of Land Bank funds and staff capacity may also govern site uses. Public may not understand that funds in Land Bank accounts are reserved for acquisitions and aren't available for general maintenance and upkeep. There is a trend to manage for public access and more resources and time are going into managing for public access.

Need a framework for decisions on the intensity of use for each preserve. There will be pressure for equal use for other aspects of recreation. The management plan generates recommendations for uses. Co-ownership also has implications for who defines the uses. Management strategies need short, medium and long-term goals. The stewardship fund needs ground rules for long-term preservation.

Example of low/high impact use is San Juan Frisbee Golf. This sounds like low intensity use but the under story plants are being trampled by people searching for Frisbees off the open grass area. The use ends up being high intensity.

Consider conservation easements more often. The first solution seems to be to purchase and “save” the property. Need to cultivate relationships and promote conservation easements to make money go further. However, while conservation easements can hold large blocks of property and lower the density of development, enforcing the provisions of the easements can be difficult. Second and third owners may not like the easement constraints and are willing to use the court system to try and change the conditions. The legal fees to defend the easements can be very high, although the courts have supported the easements.

Address public education about preservation vs. recreation in Land Bank displays. Show pictures of people using properties in line with land management goals.

Discussion Summary

- More community interest increases use expectations
- The focus needs to be resource protection
- There should be flexibility based on individual properties
- There needs to be stewardship of resources
- There needs to be a balance between stewardship and acquisition
- The context of the property in the landscape, uses, and neighbors
- 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.

Possible general rules for Land Bank property use:

A single user group’s activities should be funded by the group

Reasonable use

Resources of the organization are not well spent to fund single uses

No overnight camping, no firearms, no off-road vehicle use

Volunteer Activities

Lincoln gave a brief overview of the draft Volunteer Plan handout. Volunteer efforts have been much more organized since Diane assumed the position of volunteer coordinator. Doug has also ramped up efforts for volunteers with weekly work parties. This structure has made events more dependable and created a group culture around the activity. If someone couldn’t come one time they knew it would be happening again. The goal is to

make the schedule regular, for example the “second Saturday of every month”. There are 270 people in the database but some only participate once a year. The need to reinforce the existing connections is important and then build and recruit more people.

The idea of a Blog was suggested based on the local Orca network where blogs are the main communication tool. This would be a way to keep volunteers informed, summarize the activities, and display photos with a few lines of description about a volunteer activity. Perhaps the stewardship reports could be more formal and short. The blog would be kept up daily or weekly. It would be used to get event/activity information out to volunteers and the community quickly. It would also be a way to keep the positive energy from volunteers going and build on positive input. It needs to be updated regularly to keep it from becoming stale.

Volunteer recognition with hats, pins, t-shirts and recognition gatherings also seems valuable. The materials show the person is associated with the Land Bank and gives a visible presence to people on the properties.

Short Break and Resume at 11:00am

District Analysis and Project Priorities

Lincoln: Summary of handouts in preparation for the discussion on prioritizing purchases. Handouts represent District Analysis, Total Real Estate Sales, percentage of sales by District, Orcas is catching up in sale percentage and surpassing San Juan Island.

Revenue Analysis

- 1) Historic Balance remaining indicates what is on hand
- 2) Committed acquisition amounts are those voted on by the Land Bank Commission and County Council, but not purchased
- 3) \$1.6 million would be available for new acquisition if all currently approved projects were completed. However, the prices for some approved projects may not be up to date.
- 4) Projections of REET funds are for three scenarios
 - a. 3 year trailing scenario
 - b. 6.46 % increase (modified average with outliers removed)
 - c. 7.95 % averaged over every year

Projections suggest that with \$500k going to administration and \$2.1 Million in debt service very limited funds will be available for new acquisitions. The budget projections start with REET funding of \$2 million for 2009. REET has been volatile and could go up but this estimate is conservative. No grant money is included in the projection. Budget shows that if all voted projects go ahead, the Land Bank could be very low in cash in 2009.

Priorities are money in the bank to cover bond costs and protect county bond rating. Funds must be available to support long-term stewardship. Land Bank is confident in the available funding to make payments.

Table represents a basis for project prioritization discussion. Table carries out funding to 2014 and is reduced by the payment to the stewardship fund. The analysis shows \$4.6 million in reserves solely for acquisition; all other expenses are accounted for. The estimate does not include the conservation buyers program or grant money or income from selling properties.

General discussion of funding and budget.

The Land Bank was created to acquire property, first and foremost. Should there be a discussion of cutting back on stewardship? There should be continued regular review of the fund and spending. The quarterly finance report will be important.

Short term expenses for site enhancements are significant including: Turtleback Trail Plan and new trails, fencing for the King Sisters and Saunders Agricultural lease properties, and Fisherman Bay Spit dock, to name a few.

It's disruptive to change what is being worked on. Need to be aware of spending but don't want to stop committed projects. The Commission may need to look at stewardship but not yet. Prudence needed for spending but fulfill commitments and possibly cutting back on non-pressing issues.

Action Items:

- Create a 2009 work plan for stewardship with a proposed budget by the end of the year.
- Work on the backlog of Stewardship projects right now. Projects that have been on the to-do list will be discussed at the next staff meeting.

Working lunch 11:50am to 12:35pm

Acquisition Priorities Discussion.

Lincoln: The bottom table on the prioritization discussion listed projects that have been discussed but never approved or brought before the commission.

- Mar Vista: There is \$1.7 million in federal funding available for preservation of Golden Paintbrush. There is an possibly an additional \$1 million from the San Juan Preservation Trust. There may be additional funding through the Salmon Recovery Funding Board for purchase.
- Lopez Island Farmland, Buffum: may have \$300,000 in Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program funding
- Beaverton Marsh, Taylor property: Ducks Unlimited might be a partner.
- Wade Sundstrom: Goals of acquiring a conservation easement to reduce density on one of the 40 acres tracts still owned by the family. Not urgent.

- Turtleneck: Saddle located between Turtleback and head. \$1.2 million may be a high end estimate, as with all properties. SJPT will probably shoulder the bulk of the acquisition cost for this project.
- Henry Island, Hart: 80 acres. Western portion stunning, owner interested in preservation. Not connected to developed properties.
- San Juan Valley, Hudson property: Now has a court appointed trustee. Will sell most of the property. Land Bank is primarily interested in the northern 80 acres.

Total projected Land Bank contribution for these projects is \$4.25 Million. Given the fact that funds will be limited, it makes sense to outline potential priorities for protection.

District 1 Acquisition Priorities

Howard, adjacent to Heritage Farm, conservation easement
 Heritage Farm conservation easement amendment
 Wade Sundstrom conservation easement
 Mar Vista
 Erickson, Friday Harbor, Not happening at this point, but it could come back. Also a possibility of changing this to generic project to facilitate farmer's market facilities in town. Reserve funds or add a placeholder for this type of project.
 Mount Ben next to existing preserve.
 Hauschka- two properties 1) Cady Mtn. directly linked to Reserve would help access and 2) Beaverton Valley Road should be on list to be discussed.
 Mills Property, 40 acres on Stuart Island
 Hart on Henry Island
 Reiss Property, associated with Mt. Ben. Opposite side on the west. 60 acres going up the hill;
 Friday Harbor watershed protection project
 Roche Harbor Forestland watershed
 Beaverton Marsh conservation easement (entrance to Friday Harbor)
 Public access to Cady Mtn.
 Hudson, San Juan Valley

Important Projects

Mar Vista
 Beaverton Marsh
 Ag Guild project
 Cady Mt. Access
 Hart on Henry Island

District 2 Acquisition Priorities

General discussion of ability/willingness to purchase property in District 2 given the existing debt from the Turtleback Mt. project.

Turtleneck- SJ Preservation Trust is in negotiations with owners. It may be possible to structure a purchase by staging it over time or other creative option. It is not necessary to

decide now. Would be open to purchase if Land Bank funding was leveraged 3:1 or if it is possible to structure a real estate sale where money for Orcas comes later. Prioritizing purchases in other Districts was part of the Turtleback purchase discussion.

Other possible purchases:

Diamond Hill- Killibrew Lake Connection

Pt. Lawrence- Albert Johansen did not want to sell

Cascade Creek to Buck Bay- Salmon Creek Preservation McDowell-Dickinson Property

Mt. Constitution to Sound Trail- Eagle Lake easement connection

Waldron 40 acre parcel-Nature Conservancy, Preservation Trust Connection

Shaw Island shoreline protection and easements along Blind Bay

Note: a number of these properties may come up in the future

District 3 Acquisition Priority

More farmland in conservation protection

Kjargaard-Buffer Easement

Richey Family Farm

Other Center Valley Farmland

Village Property Open space with view across Fisherman Bay and wetlands. Part developed. Property owner not interested.

Robinson (earlier removed from list)

Meng conservation easement

Conservation easement on Sperry Peninsula, Lees property.

Long Island and Davis Point, Stein, both areas have only one owner and Golden Paintbrush and butterfly habitat.

Smith property, Eastside of Lopez Hill, 60-80 acres now owned by a nephew

If not available, reach out to other parties; his priority is to preserve agricultural land in the central valley.

C. Jones/Strachan conservation easement (Lopez)

General discussion on the best way to approach the agricultural property owners on Lopez. Using the Preservation Trust to make the first approach may be helpful because of their NGO status. The assessor is also currently auditing agricultural properties for compliance with tax requirements. It appears that there may be many properties in non-compliance. As a result, owners may be more interested in selling.

Reauthorization

General discussion of what the Commission can legally discuss regarding reauthorization. Government can educate about issues and the discussion of long range planning is appropriate; need, timing, public education in order to make an informed vote. It is also possible to spend money on polling. Commission can build the case that this is what we do, this is what has been done, and this is what needs to be done. The Commission can go to the County Council and recommend when to reauthorize.

Timing:

Lincoln noted that originally 2010 seemed like the best time for reauthorizing the REET fund. Now with the economic climate looking very difficult, wanted a discussion of issues and options.

2012 is the next presidential election, which brings out more voters- this could be an advantage. Conversely, there may also be an advantage for a light voter turnout- the Land Bank supporters would come out and have more impact to the vote. Change on the county council may also bring other perspective. A new council might change the ordinance; possibly dividing the percent of funds and dividing funding between conservation priorities. Not much about the existing funding can be changed. The Conservation Futures Tax is a 30-year tax that expires in 2046. The REET stops in 2014. The original ordinance was crafted by the commissioners, voted by the council and put on the ballot. It was adopted verbatim.

The real nuts and bolts of the campaign should start 5 – 6 months before the election. The last time the committee kept plans quiet until then to limit opportunities for the opposition. It is not too early to start a “Friends of the Land Bank” committee. There should be a coalition of business, realtors, farmers, trail advocates. Need a diverse committee to lead the campaign but a smaller focus group for planning.

Action Items and Steps:

- Need to determine mechanism to get on the ballot for reauthorization. Karen will research steps.
- Determine if the ordinance be changed by the council (Karen)
- Judy will find planning information on voting year
- A key core strategy group will be formed, and a campaign group will be started- some internal to Land Bank and some external.

Public Outreach

Commission Task- Discuss the purpose for outreach and the goals they want to achieve

Lincoln: The Land Bank has different constituencies

- 1) Core: Need to maintain this group
- 2) Others, how to reach them.

General Discussion:

Volunteers for the Land Bank as an outreach effort. Need to educate the public on Land Bank constraints and limitations on what can be done. It is important to keep up a steady drumbeat of what the accomplishments have been. It means a lot when the Land Bank message comes from a volunteer and not paid staff.

Outreach Ideas:

Need to find out what groups don't think there have been accomplishments by the Land Bank and change that message. Narrow in on education.

Develop an ad campaign as an education and information tool. Maybe a monthly ad that says: Did you know the Land Bank did this _____? Or a "numbers" format similar to Time magazine. Target the farmers markets for local advertising.

Include a message panel with the photo panel displays to inform and correct misconceptions.

During the last campaign there were 20% who will never support the REET and 40% who certainly will. The campaign needs to target the 40% who are in the middle.

New homebuyers pay the REET and should know that there are tangible benefits of where the money goes. A brochure to hand out would be helpful. Lincoln noted he has a draft brochure for homeowners and it will be forwarded to Commissioners. A color brochure that can be emailed to realtors would give them something to give to buyers and would not have to be printed by Land Bank.

Volunteers have asked for commission meetings to be held in the evening so that people who are working can attend.

Have District workshops or think tanks and invite specific people to attend.

Have lunch with key people to keep the flow of information going.

A weekly newspaper column could talk about impacts to properties and the Land Bank.

Action item: Staff will follow up with each commissioner to work on:

- 1) Op Ed pieces,
- 2) Community presentations, and
- 3) Inviting new people to attend the monthly meetings.

Meeting was closed at 3:40pm.