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Islanders celebrate the Earth, and hear warnings

By Claudia Bradley
The Islands' Sounder

Fifteen local **conservation** organizations came together in a **summit** Saturday to celebrate Earth Day and honor its local stewards.

"There is a high **conservation** ethic in the county," said Tim Seifert, executive director of the San Juan Preservation Trust.

"It's like a contact sport in the San Juans. Ordinarily, we work in silence. This is our opportunity to work together."

The San Juan Islands **Conservation Summit** & Stewardship Awards were Saturday, 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., at Lopez Center.

Keynote speaker Tom Cowan, regional liaison to the Puget Sound Partnership, recounted his memories as a child on Lopez, when residents could buy salmon right off the boat at Mackaye Harbor or pick up a crab from a bucket on the dock and pay by the honor system.

"In the last 50 years, society has done more damage to the Sound than in the previous 50,000 years," Cowan said. "The sunsets in the San Juan Islands are still as beautiful as ever. But, underwater, things are not so pleasant.

"Derelict marine gear clogs the waters, shellfish beds and swimming beaches have closed and orcas are eating poisoned fish. We need to focus on controlling and treating stormwater to save Puget Sound.

"The stars are aligned to make improvements. The political will is there. Gov. Gregoire initiated the Puget Sound Partnership and our state representatives and senators are on board.

"This is our best chance to save Puget Sound. We now have the money, the brains and the environmental work ethic to get it done.

"As Washingtonians, we joined together to save the Olympic Rain Forest, Mount Rainier, the North Cascades. (We) cleaned up Lake Washington and prevented Jet Skis in San Juan County. Your involvement is critical in this issue."



Sounder photo / Claudia Bradley

Fred Ellis Sr. received an award Saturday for his commitment to save the fauna and flora of the islands since 1937.

San Juan Stewardship awards

Six awards were given to San Juan County residents, businesses and organizations that have shown outstanding stewardship of the environment.

The awards recognize those who are not **conservation** professionals but who have shown a long-term commitment in their daily lives to preserving the environment.

n Blossom Organic Gro-cery was recognized for making efforts to stock island-grown products and for buying green power only from OPALCO.

n Island Paper and Supply received an award for its sustainability management practices, which include selling post-consumer waste products and non-toxic cleaning products.

Island Paper and Supply is also responsible for converting many local restaurants to biodegradable packaging in place of Styrofoam.

n Fred Ellis Sr. of Shaw Island received an individual award for his commitment — since 1937 — to protecting the fauna and flora of the San Juan Islands.

Ellis and his wife, Marilyn, purchased and donated more than 1,000 acres of land and waterfront to **conservation** uses over the last 60 years.

"It is very comforting to know it will go on in perpetuity," Ellis said. Quoting noted Harvard biologist E.O. Wilson, Ellis said, "Man is defined not by what he creates, but by what he chooses not to destroy."

n Ona Blue and Neil Hanson were recognized for their 16 years of commitment to the free "Take it, or Leave it" facility at the Lopez Transfer Station. Because of their voluntary efforts, tons of appliances, clothing, electronics, furniture and tools have been diverted from the landfills, saving county residents the cost of off-island disposal.

n Bill and Barbara Humes, farmers and ranchers of Warm Valley Farm on Orcas Island, received the Farmland Stewardship Award for their 45 years of protecting land through **conservation** trusts, mentoring farmers and taking exceptional care of their island neighbors.

n The Port of Friday Harbor received the Shoreline Stewardship Award. It was one of the first ports in the state to meet shoreline stewardship criteria. It also uses electric vehicles for port business.

The port collects oil, batteries and trash for recycling, and has a shelter for items that can be repaired and reused.

A 400-gallon marine aquarium at the port district's Spring Street Landing fosters appreciation and knowledge of local marine life.

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