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Our environment: We have a job we dare not fail

By Lincoln Bormann

It snowed April 19 on Lopez Island. That may have been appropriate for the day of the San Juan Islands **Conservation Summit**, which brought together at least a dozen local environmental groups and about 85 interested citizens.

The environment and its supporters have been on-the-run in the San Juans lately, ironic in a political climate where supporters of environmental protection will likely make substantial political gains at the state and national level in the fall.

However, as the day progressed and we heard about state efforts to address the degradation of Puget Sound and the loss of farmland, as citizen stewards received their awards for playing their role in making the islands a better place, and as we all talked with each other about issues and events, the chill began slowly to recede.

In the afternoon, as people went off to spectacular places like Iceberg Point and Watmough Bay and others scoured Lopez Village and Weeks wetland for trash, a new feeling started to emerge. It has been unfamiliar of late. It is hope.

Coming out of events this winter and spring where people have shouted or accused or intimidated to deliver their messages, where a desire for conquest and altercation have reigned in the public arena, where tremendous economic and political uncertainty has dominated our thoughts, hope is a starkly contrasting thing.

It is a feeling that somehow we can come to grips with the challenges facing us whether they are professional or personal, spiritual or medical, economic or environmental. Islanders are resourceful people. Those of us who have come here have acquired that skill or left. Despite our innate tendency to argue with each other and complain, we can find common ground and thrive.

Ecologically, we all want to live in a beautiful place defined by our forests and seas. We want to dig clams and fish for abundant salmon and halibut. To make full use of our limited good soils to grow food sustainably, to see our wildlife flourish once again, to have places to sit quietly on a sunny spring day with our families.

I have feared this winter that this vision was lost. That we have broken down into warring tribes and surely the island community was coming apart. I have had my personal crises, thinking about moving away to someplace warm where people greet you with a smile. I have let dreams of other places consume my consciousness.

But I have elected to stay. Two more lucrative job offers and a desire for new beginnings have given way to the realization that in some way I belong here. Where it snows in April and a public meeting can reveal the terrible inclinations of our neighbors. I have decided to stay because I know we can overcome these things. That in time and place we can fuse a new way of being and interacting and direct our better instincts into positive action.

It will not be easy. We will all slide back into self-interest and anger and fear on occasion. It is

our job as islanders to help each other get beyond those times, to stay focused on a better way.

It is truly up to us alone. The rest of the world is consumed with its problems. Our place is here. Our job is here. And we dare not fail.

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