

San Juan Land Bank Acquires Judd Cove property

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After spending the better part of a year in a holding pattern waiting for financing to come through, the San Juan County Council voted unanimously Tuesday to accept the deed to Judd Cove property on Orcas Island.

The acceptance of the 3.69 acre parcel near Eastsound will increase public access to Orcas Island's shoreline, said Land Bank Director Lincoln Bormann. Total cost to the Land Bank is \$500,000 for property valued at \$1.15 million.

The Judd Cove property adjacent to the Land Bank's holdings will allow for beach access. "Acquisition of this parcel completes this preserve," Bormann said. "We had acquired the rest of it hoping to gain beach access, but it's really too steep to get down to the water's edge. It compliments our existing preserve that doesn't allow public access because the bank is too steep," Bormann said.

In September or October, Bormann said, Department of Natural Resources will remove leftover creosote from the pilings on the parcel, which was in the Fowler family for many years and used as a log dump.

The property is a documented herring spawning site – something rare in state waters, Bormann said.

The Land Bank plans on removing an existing dock structure and building a rudimentary parking lot to facilitate public access, Bormann said. "I would guess that we'll probably open it in the spring, officially."

The property was acquired by Mike and Julie Carlson in 2005. According to Carlson, the Judd Cove property was the last remaining log dump in the county. "It's the end of an era," Carlson said. "It's something important to the county's history."

Carlson is pleased that the parcel is now in the hands of the public and thinks the Land Bank is the right place for it. "I'm complementary of how the Land Bank has handled this," Carlson said. "I'm in disagreement that they're going to take the dock out, though. It's been there for 75 years. There's a historic value there that's being overlooked, and I'd sure like to find a way to preserve that."

Currently, there are six sites comprising one mile of public waterfront access on Orcas Island's 77-miles of waterfront. The acquisition of the Judd Cove property will add an additional public

access point, and make it easier to move from Eastsound, through the Judd Cove property to the Turtleback property acquired by the Land Bank in 2007.

The transaction was held up for a year as the county applied for grants and negotiated with two outside agencies, the Trust for Public Lands (TPL) and the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program.

Bormann singled out the Carlson family who owned the property and patiently waited for the pieces to fall into place to put it into public hands, and TPL's role as being especially important in making the deal go through.

"In this case, Trust for Public Land's role was pretty crucial in that they secured an option and were willing to step in and hold the property without charging any interest," Bormann said. Bormann said that the grants have not been finalized, but the Land Bank sits near the top of the list and Bormann feels the Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account grant will come through with little problem.

"We've been told we're number five on that list, so it looks like we're pretty much guaranteed funding for that \$650,000 portion of the price."

"TPL finally came though on a shoreline gig. That's been what, a three-, four-year push?" asked councilman Kevin Ranker.

"Yeah," replied Bormann.