



Nisqually Land Trust

Winter 2022 - 2023
Newsletter

LAND TRUST SECURES BAIRD COVE

Important juvenile salmon habitat
conserved with recent project.

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The Nisqually Land Trust protects and stewards lands to permanently benefit the water, fish, wildlife, and people of the Nisqually River Watershed.

OFFICE

Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge, Old Education Center
100 Brown Farm Road NE
Olympia, WA 98516

MAILING ADDRESS

1420 Marvin Road NE
Suite C PMB 243
Lacey, WA 98516-3878

Telephone: 360.489.3400
staff@nisquallylandtrust.org
Website: nisquallylandtrust.org

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Joe Kane
Eric Erler



Nisqually Community Forest, 2022



LETTER FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT

On any given morning these last few years, you'd likely have found Polly Zehm out bird watching at the Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge. If not there, she might be tending to the unique and beautiful assortment of plants in a hillside garden at her home overlooking the Nisqually Valley.

Polly died quietly at home on July 1, 2022 of pancreatic cancer. In the year after her diagnosis, she faced life with her trademark wry humor, with gratitude for family, friends, the earth, and planning the details of treatment and end of life decisions.

As part of her estate plan, Polly made a bequest to the Nisqually Land Trust—the single largest ever given—\$440,000. It is an unparalleled gift that reflects faith in the Land Trust's effort to restore balance in the natural world. It reflects Polly's vision of a sustainable future for this watershed, and the ongoing recovery and protection of the life it supports.

My hope is that Polly's gift will allow the Land Trust to begin to build a needed foundation for the perpetual stewardship of the lands we have so successfully acquired these last decades. And in the short term, we have been able to temporarily use a small portion of the bequest to finalize a key acquisition.

Polly's bequest puts the question to all of us conservation-minded folks—Do we want to leave a legacy gift(s) that will protect the places that have sustained us during our lives? In full respect of the personal and sensitive nature of such decisions, let's all ask ourselves whether we want to give back, with a gift in our Will or Estate Plan that will protect our wild places, now and forever.

And let's all give a collective thank you to Polly, leading the way.

With Gratitude,

Kathleen D. Mix



Lackamas Flats Protected Area

Evergreen GIS professor Mike Ruth, and long -time NLT supporter, recently helped NLT document with drone photography the migrating river channel on the Lackamas Flats Protected Area.

GEOLOGIC DISCOVERY ON THE NISQUALLY

This summer, a Washington Geologic Survey geologist discovered new evidence of a massive historic mudflow from Mount Rainier in a cut bank on one of our Nisqually River properties. Michael Polenz, a senior geologist in the Washington Department of Natural Resources’ Geologic Mapping Division, was kayaking the river to collect information to update the state’s geologic hazards map when he made the discovery.

The Land Trust’s Lackamas Flats Protected Area has seen significant erosion on the south riverbank over the last several years. The shoreline retreated over 60 feet during the flooding in February 2020 alone. This erosion has provided excellent housing opportunities for a thriving population of bank swallows. It has also revealed fresh faces in the cut bank, exposing geologic history.

In his survey, Polenz observed three feet down from the top of the cut bank a dark grey section of soil with beige inclusions mixed throughout the layer. A dark brown, clayey layer was lower down, just above the waterline. The dark brown layer contained charcoal and other woody debris mixed in with the sediment.

Polenz determined that the grey horizon was a lahar deposit from Mount Rainier and the beige bits were pumice (a light porous volcanic rock), likely from Mount St. Helens. Lahars are massive mud and debris flows that move quickly down the slope of a volcano and can travel over 50 miles or more.

Over the coming winter Polenz is using radiocarbon dating to estimate the age of the wood samples collected from the outcrop. He plans to use the results to determine when the sediment was deposited. Then, using the age of the wood as a maximum upper limit, Polenz hopes to identify not only when the lahar happened but also when the eruption from St. Helens happened.

These findings are unique enough to generate interest from other agencies, including the Cascade Volcano Observatory at US Geologic Survey and retired professor Pat Pringle from Centralia College, a prominent Washington geologist. Until the lab results are in, all findings and theories are preliminary.



Geologists and NLT staff examine the exposed volcanic mudflow deposit in the Nisqually riverbank.



A piece of pumice, possibly from Mt. St. Helens, found in the mudflow deposit.



POLLY ZEHM - A STAUNCH ADVOCATE FOR CONSERVATION

When Polly Zehm made an extraordinary bequest to the Nisqually Land Trust in her will, we were overwhelmed by the magnitude of it – \$440,000 – the biggest bequest in Land Trust history. But her friends, including those on the Board, were not surprised that she gave to the land trust community as part of her estate plans.

Polly led a life devoted to environmental protection, always understanding that care of our natural world is a long game requiring patience and vision. Her deep appreciation of the landscapes where she lived and worked, and her desire to protect and preserve wild places was part and parcel of who she was. The bequest was a message from Polly to continue our efforts.

Polly's connection to the land began early. She was born and raised on a farm near Spangle, Washington and she never lost her love of the open, color-changing hills of the Palouse.

After graduation from Central Washington University with a BS in Biology, Polly became the first woman to work at Ellensburg's Wastewater Treatment Plant, paving the way for other women. Later she moved to Olympia to work for the LOTT Wastewater Treatment Plant, helping protect the waters of Budd Inlet and South Puget Sound. Polly's love for Eastern Washington drew her back to the Yakima Valley to work for the Washington State Department of Ecology where she served in several leadership roles including the Regional Director for six years. During those years, she came to love the unique shrub-steppe habitat of the Cowiche area of the Yakima Valley. Polly has also made a bequest to the Cowiche Canyon Conservancy to further their conservation, education, and recreation mission.

Polly's career brought her back to Olympia, where she served as Ecology's Deputy Director from 2003 until her retirement in 2020. She and her husband and partner of 27 years, Phil Crane,

bought a house on a steep hillside overlooking the Nisqually Valley. She loved walking and birdwatching at the nearby Nisqually Wildlife Refuge. It was a source of solace and joy to her until the last of her days.

Telling you where Polly worked is insufficient to describe the person she was. Colleagues and friends would say: Leader, mentor, smart, listener, respectful, funny, humble, thoughtful, practical to the core, and honest as the day is long. She always kept the perspective of small town and rural Washington in decision making and never forgot under represented groups. The four Directors of the State Department of Ecology during the years of Polly's tenure would likely tell you they couldn't have run the agency without her. She was uniformly and hugely respected by staff, agency partners, and colleagues.

Polly would help her friends identify plants, birds, critters. She'd love a hike through the woods or up the Mountain. She'd bring presents, help you solve a problem, share her lunch when you left yours in the car, and always, always, make you laugh with her delightful and unexpected humor.

The Land Trust has begun discussion as to how best use Polly's bequest in a manner that honors the woman whose life was devoted to appreciation and protection of our natural world. It allows us to seize current opportunities, as well as to think big and long-term about how to best use such unexpected gifts.

Those of us here at the Land Trust who were friends with Polly know all too well that she would hate the attention we are giving her with this article, these photos. But we want to honor her remarkable life, and her extraordinary bequest. We want her to inspire others who also want to protect our wild places forever.



Land Trust Secures Baird Cove
Important Juvenile Salmon Habitat Conserved

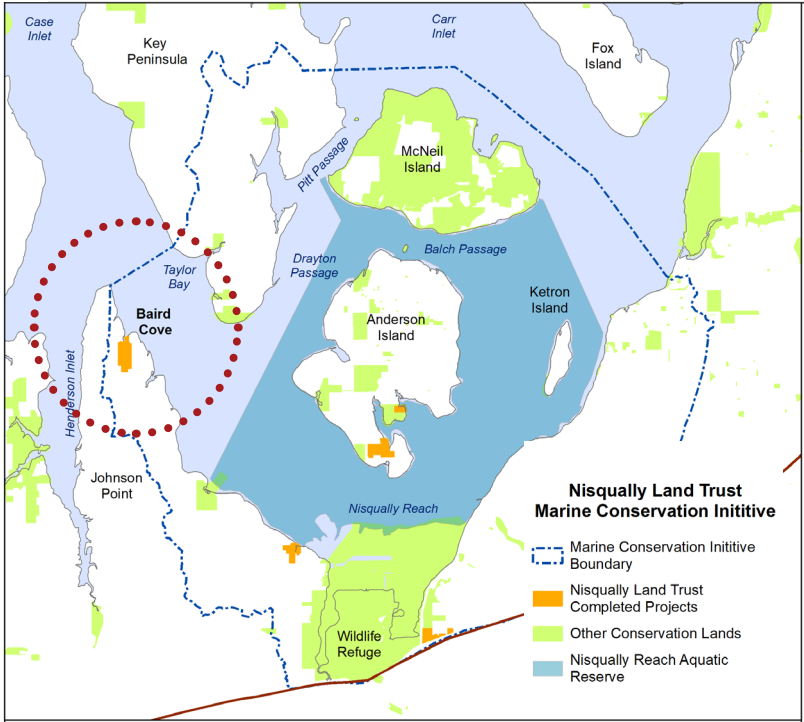
The Land Trust recently closed on an acquisition protecting Baird Cove, an 87-acre forested pocket estuary on Johnson Point in South Puget Sound. The property which is just south of Zittel’s Marina includes 4,200 feet of marine shoreline, 2 miles of forested stream shoreline, and 50 acres of coastal wetland habitat.

Pocket estuaries are important rearing habitats for outmigrating juvenile salmon and have been identified as a high priority for protection in Puget Sound salmon recovery plans.

“There are not many opportunities left in the Nisqually Reach to protect intact forested pocket estuaries such as this one,” said Nisqually Land Trust Executive Director Jeanette Dorner. “We are grateful to our funders and partners for all their assistance in helping us ensure this habitat is protected for future generations.”

Eric Erler, special projects consultant for the Nisqually Land Trust’s Marine Conservation Initiative and lead project manager for this project, said he appreciated working with the landowners who sold the property to the Land Trust.

“These projects can only be successful if we have willing landowners. We appreciate the Manke family for selling the property for permanent protection.”



Rare Estuary Protected
87 Acres of Marine
Shoreline, Wetlands,
and Forests

“Investments like this are essential for the long-term survival and recovery of salmon and our Southern Resident orcas.”

The acquisition was completed with federal funding provided by the National Wetland Coastal Conservation Grant through the US Fish and Wildlife Service agency and the Washington State Department of Ecology, Thurston Conservation Futures funding from Thurston County, and additional funding from the Nisqually Indian Tribe.

“Baird Cove is critical to fish habitat, wildlife, and bird populations, including many state and federal listed species,” said Thurston County Commission Vice Chair Tye Menser. “This project invests in mitigating our environmental impact and balancing development with the preservation of our rural character. I am happy it received support.”

“This is a great opportunity in the South Sound to safeguard critical habitat,” said Department of Ecology Director Laura Watson. “Investments like this are essential for the long-term survival and recovery of salmon and our Southern Resident orcas.”

“Protecting important salmon habitat by acquiring it has been a significant tool for Nisqually and our partners,” said Willie Frank III, Chairman of the Nisqually Indian Tribe. “We are thankful to land owners willing to help us do this work, especially with the understanding that making the choice to benefit the environment is not always the most popular or lucrative path.”



Aerial view of Baird Cove marine shoreline and forest habitat now permanently saved for future generations, courtesy of Mike Ruth.

Taking Care of the Nisqually Nearly 4,000 New Native Plants Installed

This winter, the Land Trust is planting 3,900 native trees, shrubs, and perennial wildflowers along the Nisqually River on our Lackamas Flats properties. Over 500 students, from third-graders to college students, and our regular community volunteers are helping us restore shoreline forests and their biodiversity. Plantings kicked off in November and will continue through February.

An essential partner in these plantings continues to be the Nisqually River Foundation’s Nisqually River Education Project, which coordinates student participation. After many years of working with former NREP coordinator Sheila Wilson, the program has a new coordinator, Davy Clark. Wilson handed off the program to Clark after accepting a position as the new Outdoor Education Program Manager for Washington state. Clark previously oversaw educational outreach at the Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually Wildlife Refuge and is no stranger to the Nisqually partnership.

An experiment to increase planting success is a new element to this year’s planting. Many floodplain restoration sites have well-drained sandy soils that are often too dry for young trees. NREP students are adding amendments to some planting holes to help the trees retain more water and nutrients over the growing season. The two test amendments are mycorrhizae and compost. Mycorrhizae are fibrous vegetative threads that connect plants and fungus in the soil in a beneficial symbiotic relationship that helps tree growth and health.

Students will return later in the growing season to collect data to evaluate overall growth and survival. The Land Trust hopes to use the results to guide future planting plans.



Thank you to our 2022 Volunteers

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Kelly Smith
Norm Smith
Robin Smith
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Mark Spee
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Ed Steinweg
Lasha Steinweg
Diana Stokes
Mark Teply
Haley Thompson
Sunny Thompson
Sally Toteff
Ngan Tran
Gail Trotter
Raymond Tsumpti
Tatum Tsumpti
Dan Tufford
Lara Tukarski
Rowan Utzinger
Cristina Valdes
Torren Valdez
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Eugene Villacian
Sophia Vallacian
Austin Walker
Aaron Walter
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Bob Walter
George Walter
Charlie Ware
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Elizabeth Weiser
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Morgan Wendell
Sara Wendell
Tanner Wendell
Mary White
Sophia Whitney
Katie Wilcox
Diana Willie
Mason Worst
Nicholas Worst
Shoko Yoshikawa
Nicole Zock

WELCOME NEW STAFF



Ellie Stroemer
Stewardship Technician



Emily Simroth, AmeriCorps
Habitat Stewardship



Domenic Feola, AmeriCorps
Community Engagement



Heather Paladini
Office & Development
Assistant

Ellie joined us in August, 2022. Born and raised in Washington, they graduated from Western Washington University with a degree in Environmental Science and a minor in GIS. Since graduating, they have worked all over, serving two AmeriCorps terms and working many seasonal jobs. They are excited to be back home in WA and out in the field working on a watershed.

Emily joined the stewardship team this fall to pursue her passion for environmental restoration. Prior to joining the land trust, Emily worked on habitat restoration, trail maintenance, and fuels reduction projects with the California Bureau of Land Management as an AmeriCorps NCCC member. She grew up in New Jersey and graduated from the University of Michigan with a B.A. in Environmental Studies.

Dom comes to the Land Trust after spending summers on a trail crew in the forests of Oregon and as a Wilderness Ranger in the mountains of Colorado. He graduated from Penn State with a degree in Advertising & Public Relations, and looks forward to combining his experiences in the outdoors with his education in communications to help make the outdoors accessible to all. He’s excited to work with staff to bring his wilderness experience to communities who may not have had the same opportunities to benefit from the outdoors.

Heather is thrilled to join NLT as the new Office & Development Assistant. A longtime outdoor adventurer, naturalist and environmentalist, she is passionate about protecting, restoring, and conserving critical habitats. She has studied geology and environmental sciences in college and has volunteered in many different capacities with environmental organizations since moving to Olympia, where she now lives with her three children.



Left/Above, We would not be successful planting trees and keeping invasive plants back without the help of our regular Wednesday work party volunteers.

Left, Two Cougar Mountain Middle School students, part of the over 500 students helping the Land Trust restore shoreline forests this winter.

Nisqually Land Trust Board Transitions



Brad Jones



Roger Andrascik



Suzanne Nelson



Craig Davison



Jake Pool



Sally Toteff



John Rosenberg

This year the Land Trust saw many board transitions. A number of long-serving board members completed their time on the board, and we welcomed four new members, bringing the total board membership to its largest ever at 16 members.

Roger Andrascik left the board in May this year after completing over six years with the Land Trust. Roger had joined the board soon after retiring from Mount Rainier National Park. He provided leadership on the board first as Secretary and then as Vice President. Roger dedicated his time and knowledge in many ways, including monitoring Land Trust properties, planting trees, and gathering restoration data. Thanks for your guidance over the years, Roger!

In July, **Suzanne Nelson**, who joined the board in 2017, stepped away from her position to focus on her work at the US Fish and Wildlife Service where she had recently taken on a new and significant role. In her time on the board, she stepped up to provide leadership as the Treasurer and helped focus our finances. Thanks, Suzanne for sharing your passion in service of the Land Trust!

After serving for nine years on the Land Trust Board, **Brad Jones** completed his last term on the board in September. During his time with the Land Trust Brad co-chaired our Development Committee and helped advance our events and organization with his expertise, vision, and endless generosity. Brad likes to champion the collaborative conservation partnership in the Nisqually watershed. We are delighted that he will continue to serve on the Development Committee. Thanks, Brad!

Jake Pool was the first of the new board members to join the Land Trust board earlier this summer. Jake's roots run deep in the Nisqually River Watershed. He comes from a family who settled along South Muck Creek in South Pierce County in the 1930's. He and his wife and their two kids love the outdoors and are avid hikers, snowshoers, and explorers. Jake is passionate about conservation, volunteering, and community engagement. He works for Tacoma Metro Parks' Northwest Trek Wildlife Park as the Horticulturist/Arborist Leader and is also their representative on Pierce County's Conservation Futures technical advisory committee.

John Rosenberg joined the board in October. He is a native of Wisconsin who has lived and worked in the Pacific Northwest since falling in love with the region on a road trip in 1973. He has served as a pastor, program director, and college instructor. John is also an avid fly fisherman and advocate for wild salmon and healthy watersheds. He formerly served for a number of years on one of the Land Trust's partner organizations: the South Puget Sound Salmon Enhancement Group. John and his wife Nancy have two adult daughters and live in Tumwater, WA.

Our last two new board members joined the board in November. **Craig Davison** is a Tacoma resident and currently works as the Executive Director of Marketing Communications with MultiCare Foundations. Craig has called the Pacific Northwest home since he was stationed at Fort Lewis back in 1991 and he took his first swim in the Nisqually river. He is a passionate conservationist and advocate for the Land Trust's mission. In his off time,

Craig loves to explore, hike, and nerd out on our region's geological and indigenous history.

Another November addition to our board, **Sally Toteff** grew up along the lower Columbia River as part of a commercial salmon fishing family. Her early experiences on the river inspired a 30-year career supporting natural resources, working for local and state government. She recently retired as the Regional Director of the Department of Ecology. She and her husband John feel most at home in forest or mountain meadows, along river or marine shorelines, paddling their kayaks in the Salish Sea, or spending time in their garden.



Above, Spotted Owl near our Mount Rainier Gateway Protected Area.

Below Nisqually River Shoreline view from our Lackamas Flats Protected Area.





**NISQUALLY COMMUNITY FOREST TOUR
LED BY THE NORTHWEST NATURAL
RESOURCES GROUP**

MANAGING A FOREST FOR THE FISH

Snowpack, Forest Gaps, and Streamflow

Chinook salmon returning to the Mashel River encountered streamflows this fall of only one to two cubic feet per second. A flow at that level is not enough water for salmon to travel upstream and spawn. The Mashel river is one of the key salmon streams in the Nisqually watershed.

At the headwaters of the Mashel River, in the Nisqually Community Forest (NCF), the Northwest Natural Resources Group (NNRG) is testing different forest management strategies to retain more snowpack and moisture to help improve future streamflows for fish downstream.

The Nisqually Community Forest, a subsidiary organization by the Land Trust, was an initiative to transform management of Nisqually headwater forestlands. The intent is to keep these forestlands as working forests while managing them for ecosystem values instead of maximizing investment returns.

A lot of the acquired Nisqually Community Forest lands have dense plantation stands of one or two tree species. Very little light or moisture can reach the forest floor with little space between the trees. Sustainable thinning opens up the forest to create room for the remaining trees to grow healthier, establish an understory of native shrubs, and allow for winter snow to reach the ground.

In early November, NNRG led a tour for community partners and the NCF Board to show how they are testing different forest management strategies. They want to learn which methods allow the forest to hold onto the most moisture. NNRG staff led the tour group through sites where they thinned the forest and sites where they created small forest gaps that ranged from a half-acre to one acre in size.

NNRG completed the first season of snow accumulation measurements during the '21-'22 winter season. The Land Trust stewardship team was able to help them collect some of this data, snowshoeing in with NNRG staff to measure snow depth.



Above, one of the experimental forest gaps where snow accumulation was measured.

Below, the Nisqually Community Forest is in the foothills of Mount Rainier.

Results showed the thinning and creation of gaps resulted in more snowpack that stayed on the ground much longer into the spring. Snow accumulated the most in the gaps and the least in the unthinned control forest.

NNRG plans to repeat their measurements this winter to have a second season of data to help inform future forest management plans. The goal is to use this information to choose forest management strategies that help retain moisture longer through the seasons and boost downstream streamflow for salmon.

NNRG is also testing whether planting some seedlings sourced from more southern locations or lower elevations will be more successful getting established as the climate warms. The Land Trust helped NNRG keep the tree seedlings in our nursery over the summer so they would be available for planting this fall.

To see some of the treated areas and learn more about these innovative forestry strategies, check out a short video that NNRG posted on their YouTube channel, "How to Grow a Forest for the Future."



Nisqually Land Trust

1420 Marvin RD NE

Suite C PMB 243

Lacey, WA 98516-3878

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2022

**Conservation
Campaign**

CONSERVATION CAMPAIGN

Give for Nature and help us protect
the wild places of the Nisqually!

Conserve the Nisqually for future generations.

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360.489.3400 for more information. Thanks!

Lackamas Flats Protected Area, aerial photo by Mike Ruth