WHIDBEY CAMANO
— Land Trust —

WINTER 2025

LIVING IN HARMONY

Helping Beavers and Salmon Thrive Together in Kristoferson Creek

Salmon making their way upstream toward their native spawning grounds is a magical sight. It's a glimpse into a remarkable life cycle, the completion of their ancient journey to give life to the next generation. Salmon provide countless benefits to coastal habitats, river systems, humans and wildlife across the Pacific Northwest.

Perhaps equally awe-inspiring are the lives of the North American beaver, as they employ their natural engineering skills to build massive structures and redirect waterways, one stick at a time. Beavers alter their environment at a scale well beyond their modest proportions. For millennia these two keystone species have thrived together. Now, both have found a place at the Land Trust's Kristoferson Creek Preserve on Camano Island.

Kristoferson Creek is the most productive salmon bearing creek on Camano Island, and over the years strategic and focused efforts have improved salmon habitat across this system. Several stream restoration plantings have increased plant biodiversity while buffering and shading the stream, creating optimal habitat for fish and numerous other species. Meanwhile, multiple culvert improvement projects have removed fish blockages and created an open pathway for salmon to enter the creek from Triangle Cove and allow their passage upstream, all the way to Kristoferson Lake.

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Protecting the Islands' Treasured Lands and Waters

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Beaver dam constructed in Kristoferson Creek.

Managing Beaver Dams

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In recent years, beavers have taken advantage of those same riparian plantings to help construct several dams, creating ponded habitat and wetlands along the creek. This further increases biodiversity and improves water quality and aquifer recharge in the area. The beavers on the Kristoferson Creek Preserve have been exceptionally active, building two large dams along the stretch of the creek in the Preserve. Unfortunately, these larger dams have presented an impasse for chum salmon returning to the creek. Jumping with all their might, the salmon remain stuck at the bottom of the dam, unable to reach their desired spawning grounds. So much for all our hard work!

Now we face a conundrum. We love the salmon and we love the beavers. So what can we do to ensure both can exist in this special place? Working with the community, experts from the Tulalip Tribes and a local non-profit, Beavers Northwest, we began exploring options on how to assist the salmon without evicting the beavers. Spoiler alert, it's not easy!

Phase one of the project involves a labor-intensive technique known as beaver dam notching, to create openings that allow the temporary passage of salmon… At least until the beavers catch on. With permits in hand, notching of the beaver dams began on the Preserve in November, and will continue for the duration of the main chum salmon run through late-December. It's all manual labor—a cold, wet and muddy job using basic hand tools! Kudos to our dedicated staff and volunteers who have taken on the hard work of notching.

Now fast forward, and emerging for their evening routine to find notches in their dams, those beavers are not happy. Who can blame them? Their dam is broken and pond levels are dropping. And so the industrious beavers set to work, and the back-and-forth of notching, repairing, and re-notching ensues. All this work to ensure enough salmon can successfully make their way upstream this season.

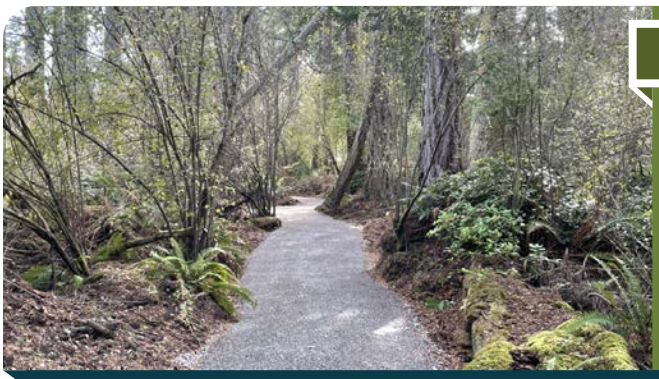
Such an effort would be unsustainable every year, at least for us humans. So the Land Trust is currently working on phase two of the plan—the placement of more permanent fish passage structures into the dams to allow annual salmon passage. These pipe and box devices will create year-round fish passage through the dams whenever there is flow in the creek. Engineering designs, permits and grant applications are currently in progress, with the goal of installing these structures next summer, in time for the next salmon run. It will be exciting to see how this next chapter in the saga unfolds.

We are incredibly thankful to the Camano Island community and our passionate volunteers for encouraging and assisting with this work. And to both of these charismatic creatures for their persistence, and this opportunity to assist them in thriving, side-by-side, in a healthy and productive Kristoferson Creek!

Salmon in Kristoferson Creek.

KEYSTONE CORNER

Exciting updates at Keystone Farm and Forest Preserve as we continue restoration work, trail building and gear up for public access. Read more for recent highlights, and visit our Keystone Preserve webpage to learn more about the property: ***www.wclt.org/projects/keystone-farm-and-forest-preserve.***



TRAILS

The ADA trail construction is complete! The thoughtfully designed trail winds through the forest and offers two different routes to explore: a 0.25-mile loop and a 0.7-mile out-and-back route, both built to provide opportunities for everyone to experience the landscape. This winter, the trail will settle and compact, ensuring it's in great shape to welcome visitors next year.

RESTORATION PLANTING

The young plants flourished through the summer thanks to the hard work of our stewardship team and dedicated volunteers. Recent restoration monitoring showed an impressive first-year survival rate of nearly 90%! This is an amazing success and a true reflection of the team's hard work.

HISTORIC BARN

The beautiful, historic barn on this property is standing strong and has officially been added to the Washington Heritage Barn Register — a meaningful way to celebrate and honor the site's history. This recognition also creates new opportunities for funding to support the barn's ongoing care and maintenance.

FOREST HEALTH

Forest health is vital to Keystone Preserve. That's why the Land Trust is taking action to revitalize the forest. A three-acre section of the forest was overstocked with Douglas-fir, leaving no understory vegetation due to the dense tree crowding. Thanks to the Washington Conservation Corps, this stand of trees was thinned out, bringing light and life back to the forest floor!

This winter, final preparations will begin for the preserve's public access in the fall of 2026. Finishing touches include sign installation on the trails and kiosk construction. Excitement is kicking in as the grand opening nears!

The Taste of Place

By Jess Dowdell
Author & chef

Recently, I had the chance to visit home — the kind of home that lives in your bones long after you've left. Whidbey Island has always been that place for me. And on this trip, my sister, who works for the Whidbey Camano Land Trust, took me on a quiet tour of a current project. We walked the freshly turned earth along the edge of the Salish Sea, the afternoon sun catching on the windmill blades while lighting up the distant Olympic mountain peaks beyond the water. We shared a pear from a forgotten orchard and remembered our childhood.

She spoke about what it means to preserve not just land, but legacy — to save something that belongs to everyone and no one all at once.

As I stood in that field, I felt the deepest kind of remembering — of why this land matters, of how it shaped me, and why I've spent a lifetime trying to feed people not just food, but connection. The work the Land Trust is doing isn't just conservation. It's love in action. It's a promise that this soil, these views, this taste of place — will still be here for someone else to discover. And in that moment, I knew I wanted to write something that honored that work, and the way it has shaped not only my story, but the table I now invite others to.

Where Farmland Meets the Salish Sea

There's a stretch of earth on Whidbey Island where rows of freshly turned soil slope gently toward the sea. Where the scent of salt and soil meet in the breeze. Where seagulls circle overhead and the tractor hums like an old hymn. This is the meeting place of two ancient givers — land and water — and in their embrace, a deeper story takes root.

It's here, on this island, that I first learned to listen — not just to birdsong or tide, but to the quiet teachings of place. I discovered that soil holds more than seeds. It holds memory. And the shoreline doesn't mark an edge — it opens a doorway.

The Whidbey Camano Land Trust understands this sacred connection. Their work doesn't just preserve acreage — it preserves belonging. They protect farmland and wild shoreline and ancient forests, not simply for the sake of open space, but so we can continue to live in relationship with this place. So we can continue to grow food, gather in community, sit in quiet reflection, and remember who we are.

Because this land is more than beautiful. It's bountiful. It feeds our bodies and our spirits. It's where summer

corn tastes like sunlight, and oysters carry the brine of the bay. It's tomatoes that taste like childhood, pie that tastes like tradition, and the quiet truth that we are nourished not only by what we eat — but by where it comes from.

When we save the land, we save the stories and create new ones. We save room for future hands to pull carrots from warm soil. For children to chase butterflies through clover and eat blackberries until their mouths turn purple. We make space for memory - and for meaning.

As a chef and a writer, I carry this with me in every dish, every sentence. The ingredients I choose are landscapes. The recipes I share are invitations — back to the table, back to community, back to ourselves.

So this is my offering of thanks to the Land Trust. For keeping the windmill turning. For letting the fields stretch wide toward the Salish Sea. For making sure this place — this flavor — remains on the map for generations to come.

And to a sisterly bond as rooted and steady as the rows that feed us - thank you for walking beside me, for sharing your passion, and for the reminder that some roots grow deeper when shared.

Because when we protect the taste of place,

we guard more than land — we guard belonging.

We keep the memory warm.

We keep the table set.

We keep the story alive in every bite.

And that...

is worth saving.

That...

is worth savoring.

Check out Jess Dowdell's website to follow along for more inspiring stories. *tasteofplace.co*

NOW'S THE TIME: Double Your Impact!

$105,000 MATCH CHALLENGE

There's an unmatched charm about this special corner of the world. Something in that magical combination of lush green forest, fertile farmland and wild Puget Sound shoreline. Your support helps protect that charm — ensuring these islands remain healthy, vibrant and full of life!

Exciting news — the year-end match challenge has increased! A group of incredibly generous Whidbey and Camano Island donors has pledged **$105,000** for our match challenge. This means, right now if you make a gift beyond your annual donation, **the impact of your extra gift will be DOUBLED** to protect and care for these special islands.

Give before December 31 to have your gift go twice as far. **Scan the QR code or visit our website**, ***www.wclt.org***, to donate, or mail a check to **765 Wonn Rd C-201, Greenbank, WA 98253.**

SCAN HERE TO GIVE TODAY!

Field Notes

Outtakes from the Land Trust

Big Win for Outdoor Education

The Land Trust is thrilled to announce that it has been awarded a Community Health Grant from the Whidbey Community Foundation (WCF) in support of our *Connecting Kids to Conservation* program, which brings students outdoors to learn, explore and grow through hands-on environmental education.

Support from this grant will help fund transportation for local schools seeking outdoor learning opportunities, reducing barriers and making nature-based education more accessible to all students.

WCF's Community Health Grant Program is "dedicated to improving the well-being of Whidbey Island residents by addressing the key factors that create a thriving, healthy community" — including access to nature, education and opportunities for connection.

Together, the Whidbey Camano Land Trust and Whidbey Community Foundation are helping ensure that every child has the chance to learn, grow and thrive — outside.

Students observe the outdoor world on a recent field trip.

A Record Year for Volunteer Groups

This year, 14 outstanding clubs and local organizations volunteered with the Land Trust. That's triple the amount from last year! **Meaning triple the positive impact on the land.**

One such group is the Leo Club, Coupeville High School's community service club, who volunteered for their third consecutive year. They helped build and maintain trails at different preserves and trail systems, and joined our recent Orca Recovery Day to help with a beach cleanup. "It was fun working with them and actively being part of the community," said Wyatt Sylvester, a Leo Club member. "It's satisfying to know that the work we did will be around for many years in the future."

Megan Austin, leader of the Leo Club, added, "By volunteering with the Land Trust, our students have learned how trails are built, how to manage invasive species, and how Keystone Preserve helps protect the food supply for Southern Resident killer whales. We're excited to keep volunteering with the Land Trust in the future!"

A Boost for Prairie Restoration

The Land Trust received $5,000 from the Whidbey Island Garden Tour to support prairie restoration work at Keystone Preserve! For nearly 30 years, the Whidbey Island Garden Tour's local grant program has helped beautify and restore public spaces across Whidbey Island. We're honored to be among this year's recipients. These funds will provide vital native plants for ongoing prairie work. Thank you to Whidbey Island Garden Tour and to everyone who participated in their annual Garden Tour event to help ensure natural spaces thrive!

The Perfect Gifts!

Give the gift of cozy Land Trust apparel in fresh colors and styles, perfect for the trails. And enjoy our 2026 Wall Calendar, filled with stunning images, thanks to the talented photographers who entered this year's photo contest. Shop apparel here: ***www.wclt.org/land-trust-store*** and find local stores carrying our calendars here: ***www.wclt.org/2026-calendars.***

SAVE THE DATE: NEW YEAR'S DAY WALK

Thursday, January 1 at Keystone Preserve

There's no better way to kick off the year than by connecting with nature! Ring in 2026 with the Land Trust and enjoy a serene and scenic backdrop for a New Year's Day adventure! **More details to come. *www.wclt.org/events***



Partnerships That Made 2025 Shine!

Huge thank you to our generous sponsors for supporting so many meaningful events this year! From community gatherings, Walk & Talks, and special guided tours to our open house, appreciation celebrations, the Legacy Hoedown, and the final Sea, Trees & Pie Bike Ride, these dedicated community partners made it all possible. Thank you!

If your business is interested in sponsoring the Land Trust's events please contact Neena at **neena@wclt.org** or call **360.222.3310.**

THANKS TO OUR SPONSORS

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Calypso Restoration

Business sponsors support us in many ways, through both financial contributions and generous in-kind donations of goods and services. Both help offset event and activity costs, allowing us to better connect with Land Trust members and the broader community. A huge thank you to our in-kind sponsors below!

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HUMMINGBIRD	PICK UP LITTER	FALLEN DOUGLAS FIR CONE	FLOCK OF CANADA GEESE IN THE SKY	TAG THE LAND TRUST IN A SOCIAL MEDIA POST
TREE SNAG	DOUGLAS SQUIRREL	**FREE SPACE**	DECIDUOUS TREE WITHOUT LEAVES	SWORD FERN
NORTHERN HARRIER	SIGNS OF A WOODPECKER	TAKE A PICTURE OF SOMETHING IN NATURE	ANIMAL TRACKS IN THE SNOW	BE STILL IN NATURE FOR TWO FULL MINUTES
RAIN DROPS ON A LEAF	VISIT A LAND TRUST PRESERVE	FUNGI	WEAR A BEANIE OUTSIDE	INVITE A FRIEND ON A WALK

GOT BINGO? Enter our raffle for a chance to win a Land Trust insulated mug to keep your drinks hot on those cold winter days! **Email Ashley at ashley@wclt.org by March 1 to be entered in the raffle.**