

Salish Current

Independent, fact-based news for Whatcom, San Juan and Skagit counties

Dear Readers: — It's been an incredibly wonderful week of sunshine and hopeful vaccination news that will take us into a Spring of longer afternoon light, thanks to the convention of Daylight Savings Time. We will continue to keep you informed and engaged in the news of our three-county readership area and hope you will help us by encouraging others to read [Salish Current](#). Please share this newsletter and ask others to subscribe. And, should you see fit, please [donate](#) to support our freelance reporters who bring the news to you. — Thank you. Amy Nelson, Publisher, and Mike Sato, Managing Editor.

News from the *Salish Current* for the week ending March 12, 2021:

[Rescue tug stationed in islands is best bet to avoid oil spills in San Juan – Gulf waters, study says](#)



A cargo ship — one of several thousand transiting local waters each year — shares a narrow Salish Sea passage with a pod of orcas. (Monika Wieland Shields photo © 2020)

By *Kimberly Cauvel* — With increased vessel traffic around the San Juan Islands, some worry that the risk of oil spills may be rising as well. A new study makes the case that an emergency response tug stationed in the islands would be money well-spent. ([Read more](#))

[Removal of birdseed feeders advised to stem rising salmonellosis deaths](#)



A pine siskin eats at an alder tree; the birds have been hit hard this winter by deaths due to salmonellosis spread at birdseed feeders, and wildlife officials are recommending those feeders be taken down for the time being. (Alan Fritzberg photo © 2021)

By *Ella Banken* — Recently, wild birds have been dying at a higher rate, and birdseed feeders are being blamed. A state advisory asks people to take down birdseed feeders until April 1 to protect pine siskins and other birds. ([Read](#)

[more.](#))

From the Editor's Desk / [Young adults weigh risks in choosing to mask, distance in COVID-19 fight](#)

Is your mask and distancing behavior different with friends or family than when in public? If there is a difference, why? When we asked those questions, young adults reported making choices that range from the hard decision to curtail visits home to see family, to feeling safely unmasked with family or select friends. Here's a look at what they're thinking: [\(Read more.\)](#)

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Salish Current *affirms its commitment to work for truth, justice, equality and healing for all people.*
#SayTheirNames #BlackLivesMatter #NoJusticeNoPeace

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News from around the region:

Health and Safety

- [3/12/21] Whatcom County is at very high risk. Take strong precautions to avoid exposure, including official recommended actions. [\(Covid ActNow\)](#)
- [3/12/21] San Juan County is at low risk. [\(Covid ActNow\)](#)
- [3/12/21] Skagit County is at high risk. Take precautions to avoid exposure, including official recommended actions. [\(Covid ActNow\)](#)

Education

- At Cascades Job Corps Center in Sedro-Woolley, which was revamped in 2017 to focus on information technology and health care, the pandemic has created an increased interest in the IT program, especially those who may not have otherwise thought much about it before. [\(Skagit Valley Herald/paywall\)](#)

Government

San Juan County

- The San Juan County Council continued its [public hearing on March 9](#) regarding a moratorium and [fact finding](#) on county vacation rentals. The council voted 2-1 (Wolf opposed) to limit the moratorium to six months and to apply it to dwellings in Urban Growth Areas, hamlets and activity centers. [\(Orcasonian\)](#)

City of Bellingham

- The Bellingham City Council met on March 8. [Agenda items included:](#)
- [22929] The council voted 7-0 to form a Bellingham/Whatcom County tourism promotion area.

- [22599] The council voted 7-0 to renew and extend an emergency ordinance imposing a moratorium on the processing of applications for detached single-family development in multi-family zones.
- The council approved 5-2 [Vargas, Knutson opposed] to review a draft ordinance that establishes labor standards requirements for additional compensation for grocery workers in Bellingham.
- The council will hold a special meeting on March 15 at 2 p.m. to consider an ordinance imposing an additional sales and use tax of .1% for affordable housing and related services as authorized in RCW 82.14.530

Whatcom County

- The Whatcom County Council met on March 9. [Agenda items included:](#)
- [AB2021-136] The council approved 5-1 [Elenbaas opposed, Byrd excused] a resolution supporting the formation of a Tourism Promotion Area by agreement between Whatcom County and the City of Bellingham. [AB2021-137] The council approved 5-1 [Elenbaas opposed, Byrd excused] authorization for the County Executive to enter into an interlocal agreement between Whatcom County and the City of Bellingham for the joint establishment of a Tourism Promotion Area.
- [AB2021-164] The council voted 4-1-1 [Elenbaas opposed, Byrd excused, Kershner abstain] to hold a public hearing on an [ordinance](#) imposing an additional sales and use tax of .1% for housing and related services as authorized by RCW 82.14.530 and adding a new chapter 3.47 to the Whatcom County Code.
- [AB2021-134] The council voted 5-1 [Elenbaas opposed, Byrd excused] to hold a public hearing on an [ordinance](#) amending Whatcom County Code Section 1.14, Electoral Precincts, for changes in certain voting precinct boundaries in Whatcom County Elections.

Port of Bellingham

- The Port of Bellingham Commission will meet on March 16. [Agenda items include:](#)
- The commission will authorize by [consent agenda](#) the port to sell vessels seized for nonpayment of port charges.
- The commission will approve an increase in 2021 [recreational moorage rates](#) for Squalicum Harbor.
- The commission will approve a new [commercial lease](#) between the Port of Bellingham and Pacific Cruises Northwest, Inc., dba Port Fairhaven to operate a fish and chips restaurant in the Bellingham Cruise Terminal.

State Legislature

- HB 1326 — [Concerning coroners and medical examiners](#) Introduced by Rep. Debra Lekanoff (Whatcom County). Passed 98 to 0 in the House and moved to the Senate.
- HB 1372 — [Replacing the Marcus Whitman statue in the national statutory hall collection with a statue of Billy Frank Jr](#) Introduced by Rep. Debra Lekanoff (Whatcom County). Passed 92 to 5 in the House and moved to the Senate.
- HB 1280 — [Concerning greenhouse gas emissions reductions in the design of public facilities](#) Introduced by Rep. Alex Ramel (Bellingham). Passed 57 to 39 in the House and moved to the Senate.
- HB 1330 — [Providing a retail sales and use tax exemption for the purchase of electric bicycles and related cycling equipment](#) Introduced by Rep. Sharon Shewmake (Whatcom County). Passed 57 to 39 in the House and moved to the Senate.

Nature

- The return of spring Chinook in the Nooksack River is forecasted to double this year over last year's return. ([Bellingham Herald/paywall](#))
- The Whidbey Environmental Action Committee sued the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission this week over allowing the U.S. Navy's to use Washington's state parks for training exercises. ([Tacoma News Tribune/paywall](#))
- The 19th annual Wings Over Water NW Birding Festival begins March 19 in a [virtual format](#) celebrating migratory birds that pass through the Blaine area on the Pacific Flyway from Alaska to Patagonia. ([Northern Light](#))

Business

- The nationally acclaimed Willows Inn restaurant on Lummi Island that had previously been accused of underpaying its employees has agreed to pay \$600,000 to settle a class-action lawsuit over accusations of wage theft. ([Seattle Times](#))
- Southwest Airlines announced it will add Bellingham to its service this year. ([USA Today](#))
- The fierce debate over cross-border pipelines is putting more Canadian oil and gas on trains destined for the United States — a country experts fear is ill-equipped for the potential consequences. ([Coast Reporter](#))
- The U.S. International Trade Commission has ruled that foreign blueberry imports are not causing serious injury to domestic blueberry producers. Washington state is one of the top producing blueberry states in the country, and Whatcom County is the top blueberry producing county in the state. ([Lynda Tribune/paywall](#))

- MJB Properties has applied for a clearing and grading permit to start building roads and utilities on its 28-acre property on Fidalgo Bay, one of the largest stretches of private, undeveloped waterfront land in Anacortes. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology's living wage calculator finds the hourly rate an individual working full time needs to earn to support themselves and their family. It takes annual salary numbers from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and compares them to typical living expenses such as childcare costs, food and housing. According to the calculator, the living wage for a family of three with two working parents in Bellingham is \$16.25, and the living wage for one single adult is \$14.33 — 67 cents less than minimum wage. ([Western Front](#))

Commentary

- In "How we should deal with Dr. Seuss books and cancel culture," Clyde Ford writes: "The fight to ban, topple and rename racist artifacts of our past has been an issue in Washington state, too." ([Crosscut](#))
- Local realtor Mike Kent explains how the pandemic has affected the local real estate market and what looking ahead might bring. ([Northern Light](#))

Community

If you plan to visit Skagit Valley tulip farms [RoozenGaarde](#) and [Tulip Town](#) in April, you will have to buy tickets and reserve a time to visit in advance due to capacity limitations required by the state's COVID-19 safety guidelines. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Jump In!

- The San Juan County Charter Review Commission will hold a virtual public meeting to gather public input on charter issues on March 13 from 2 to 4 p.m. For issues and to register, [click here](#).
- Learn about Navy jet noise and impacts to humans and wildlife in the region at a free public forum on March 16 from 4 to 6 p.m. featuring Lauren Kuehne and Rob Williams presenting from recently published scientific research. [Register here](#).
- March 26 is World Water Day and RE Sources invites you to volunteer for a socially distanced cleanup of Marine Heritage Park in Bellingham by [registering](#) for a time slot. Grabbers and trash bags provided.
- The Whale Museum's virtual "Gear Up Virtual Gear Up Workshop for Marine Naturalists" will be held April 24 focusing on underwater noise and vessel traffic. [Register here](#).

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