

# **Salish Current**

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

Dear Readers —

After we're done scratching our heads and shaking our fists at the return of COVID infections and mask mandates, we take a deep breath and do what we can: encourage vaccinations, wear masks and observe sanitary practices not because of political belief but a shared sense of community health. We also think a story about community policing by **Matt Benoit** can bring light rather than heat to our community. Our summer intern **Teya Heidenreich**'s story about the Skagit Fair is a story about the mental health of a community. **Stevan Harrell**'s commentary on Whatcom County's Climate Action Plan is about the future of our community, and **Jim Simon**'s story about local news is about how this community learns about itself and talks about itself. It's our community and *Salish Current* is a community service. And you can help us continue to bring you a paywall-free website, subscription-free content and an advertising-free business model that allows us to present important local news impartially and independently, without fear or favor. You make this possible by helping pay for professional journalists to do the reporting. Support local, community news. Thank you for reading and thank you for your [support](#).

— Amy Nelson, Publisher, and Mike Sato, Managing Editor

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

News from the Salish Current, week of Aug. 20, 2021

## [Police, mental health workers face challenge, confusion with new use-of-force law](#)



*Laws governing use of force followed last summer's marches and rallies calling for reforms in police practices (at left, marchers in Bellingham in June 2020). As laws aiming to do that begin to take effect this year, challenges and even confusion have followed among law enforcement officers, social services workers, legal authorities and community members.*

By **Matt Benoit** — House Bill 1310 established new rules about use of force by police when it took effect in Washington last month. Law enforcement and social service agencies continue to grapple with confusion related to challenges to the new law. ([Read more.](#))

## Skagit fair sates longing for fun, ‘normalcy’ in face of COVID-19



*A keenly felt need for “some kind of normalcy” during the COVID-19 pandemic sparked strong attendance at the Skagit County Fair, per fair manager Aric Gaither. Despite high temperatures and smoky skies, fair-goers showed up in large numbers to enjoy entertainment ranging from musical acts to a juggler and hypnotist, plus exhibitions of animals, crafts and produce — and carnival rides. While San Juan County’s 2021 fair is being held virtually, the Northwest Washington Fair in Lynden joined Skagit in holding an in-person fair and extended its run to 10 days.*

By Teya Heidenreich — After a year's hiatus, the Skagit County Fair resumed Aug. 11-14 with an increased attendance over past years — despite COVID-19 infections spiking in the county. ([Read more.](#))

## Community Voices / Addressing climate change



*Deadly heatwaves deemed virtually impossible without climate change have broken records in the Pacific Northwest and southwestern Canada this summer, and tested capabilities to keep animals as well as humans safe. At left, a cow at Steensma Creamery in Lynden keeps her cool under a misting hose on a 106-degree day. (Photo courtesy Kate Steensma)*

By Stevan Harrell — Climate change effects are here, and the county's Climate Impact Advisory Committee is calling for establishment of an office of climate action to lead planning to deal with the multiple problems climate change is bringing now and in the near future. ([Read more.](#))

*The essays, analyses and opinions presented as [Community Voices](#) express the perspectives of their authors on topics of interest and importance to the community, and are not intended to reflect perspectives on behalf of the Salish Current.*

## Out of the news desert: Bellingham to get a new startup



*Where do you find news? If it's print you're looking for, you're seeing fewer boxes such as these. A new publication launching in January will aim to help remedy the community's long-time “news desert,” per an announcement by the owner and the executive editor. The publication will operate on a for-profit model, with revenue from advertising and subscriptions.*

By Jim Simon / Post Alley — A local newspaper owner has announced he will launch a new for-profit local news site supplemented by a weekly print piece in Bellingham in January. ([Read more.](#))

## News from around the region

### Health and Safety

As of Aug. 23, face masks are required for everyone over 5 years of age in most public indoor settings regardless of vaccination status. ([WDOH](#))

Employees in school settings, in addition to health care workers, long-term care workers and cabinet agency state employees, are required to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 (at least two weeks after finishing the vaccine series) by Oct. 18, 2021. The requirement includes contractors, volunteers and any other positions that work in these settings. ([WDOH](#))

Close to 200 people attended Lynden School District's Aug. 12 meeting. Many were against the July 28 announcement that cloth face coverings or masks must be worn on school campuses by anyone, vaccinated or not. ([Lynden Tribune/paywall](#))

COVID cases and hospitalizations in Skagit County in August are the third highest since the pandemic began with 526 new cases, three deaths and 38 hospitalizations from Aug. 1-17. ([Anacortes American/Paywall](#))

Small groups throughout Skagit County this week took part in planned rallies decrying Inslee's mask mandate for schools. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Since Aug. 13, total cases in San Juan County have increased from 237 to 264, of which seven occurred in fully vaccinated individuals. ([SJ County Health/Orcsonian](#))

Whatcom County 8/20/21 [COVID ActNow](#) Very High risk; 30.8/100K; 71.9% vaccinated  
San Juan County 8/20/21 [COVID ActNow](#) Medium risk; 9.8/100K; 75.5% vaccinated  
Skagit County 8/20/21 [COVID ActNow](#) Very High risk; 41/100K; 61.5% vaccinated

### Education

Gabriel Miles is announcing the opening this fall of the Robert Williams School of Arts and Science in Bellingham, a state-accredited school providing kindergartners through sixth graders with a full-spectrum education that integrates the arts into the academic curriculum. ([Whatcom Talk](#))

### Government

#### Bellingham

The City Council will meet again on Aug. 30.

## Whatcom County

The County Council will meet again on Sept. 14.

## Port of Bellingham

The commission will meet again on Sept. 7.

## Elections

The Bellingham City Club will host on Aug. 24 a free, online election forum with Port of Bellingham candidates vying for the District 1 position (Michael Shepard, incumbent, and John Huntley) and the District 2 position (Ken Bell, incumbent, and Kelly Krieger). [Register by midnight Aug. 23.](#)

## **Nature**

The Birch Bay berm, officially called the Birch Bay Drive and Pedestrian Facility Project, is a 1.6-mile-long beach restoration project that will add sand and gravel to the beach to protect the road from storm surges. It will be dedicated on Aug. 21. ([Northern Light](#))

Disagreement over how to approach Seattle City Light's Gorge Dam during relicensing of the city's three-dam hydropower system on the upper Skagit River includes the extent to which Gorge, the lowest of the three dams, impacts Skagit River fish and how best to approach a potential remedy. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Joey Hulbert, a postdoctoral fellow at Washington State University-Puyallup, visited family on Fidalgo Island this month and noted that Western red cedar trees are dying and that the die-offs have "markedly increased since 2015." ([Anacortes American/paywall](#))

Scientists found an Asian giant hornet nest in east Blaine Aug. 19, one-quarter of a mile from where the first hornet of 2021 was spotted nearly a week earlier near H Street Road. ([Northern Light](#))

## **Business**

How hot is the Pacific Northwest real estate market? So hot that even in an isolated exclave such as Point Roberts, home prices are sizzling and some properties are changing hands sight unseen. ([KUOW](#))

The North Sound Transportation Alliance has discussed the possibility of a passenger-only ferry service from Bellingham to Friday Harbor April through September. ([San Juan Journal](#))

Bellingham-based shipbuilder All American Marine and investment company SWITCH Maritime launched the first hydrogen-fuel-cell-powered vessel in the U.S. in Bellingham this week. ([Bellingham Herald/paywall](#))

## **Community**

Three video episodes have been produced promoting Whatcom County tourism featuring travel personality Rick Steves and the first can be seen [here](#). ([Whatcom Talk](#))

## **Jump in!**

The North Cascades Bluegrass Festival has cancelled its Sept. 2-5 gathering in Deming due to the surge in COVID infections in Washington state and Whatcom County. ([North Cascades Bluegrass Festival](#))

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Salish Current is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, online local news organization serving Whatcom, San Juan and Skagit Counties. Salish Current exists to protect and improve democratic governance by reporting and curating local news with independence and strict journalistic integrity.

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