

# **Salish Current**

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

**Dear Readers —**

Our readership has grown over the last two months, thanks to your introducing us to your friends and associates. This week, reporter **Matt Benoit** details the backlog in our local courts and the huge effort required to make sure justice is not denied. **Heather Spaulding** provides an update on studying the groundwater situation in the San Juan islands, and there's a full menu of news briefs. We post this newsletter on Friday afternoons but our news stories are posted on our [website](#) throughout the week so look for upcoming stories on the Bellingham People First initiatives, this summer's fire and smoke danger, Guemes Island water and a decision to limit fossil fuel refining activity at Cherry Point. Also, it's primary election time and we'll have some stories about what the candidates have to say. It's our community and [Salish Current](#) is a community service. Thank you for reading and we sincerely appreciate your financial [support](#).

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

**News from the *Salish Current*, week of July 23, 2021**

## [Local courts work to catch up on COVID-backlog delays in delivering justice](#)



*With plexiglass screens, air purifying systems, hand sanitizer and other COVID-prevention means in place, a Whatcom County courtroom is ready for an in-person trial. Courts at every level in the county are working at catching up on a backlog of cases caused by the pandemic shutdown.*

*By Matt Benoit — Courts in Whatcom County are trying to regain the flow of delivering justice that was in play prior to the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown — and the recovery is proceeding differently at each level of the court system. ([Read more.](#))*

## [Have enough water? San Juan prepares to find out, with USGS study](#)



*Lopez Island aquifers logged some of the highest recharge rates in the county when water supply was last studied. A new study next year will provide important data for managing supply as well as planning for the future as the population continues to grow.*

*By Heather Spaulding — A study funded by the state legislature and the U.S. Geological Survey will address a major barrier in both predicting San Juan County's future water needs and managing current systems: the capacity of wells in the county is unknown. ([Read more.](#))*

## Letter to the Editor

- [Let others know our mail-in voting works well and support Senate Bill 1, For the People Act of 2021](#), July 23, 2021

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

## News from around the region

### Health and Safety

Canada announced Monday it will begin letting fully vaccinated U.S. citizens into Canada on Aug. 9, and those from the rest of the world on Sept. 7. ([Associated Press](#)) The U.S. extended its border closure until Aug. 21. ([Washington Post](#)) Border opening may face strike by Canadian Border Service Agency officers. ([CBC](#))

Whatcom County Councilwoman Kathy Kershner posted to her Facebook account a July 14 email exchange with Health Director Erika Lautenbach about funding for a program that promotes COVID-19 vaccination among young adults. The posting resulted in threatening calls Lautenbach reported to the Sheriff's Office. ([Bellingham Herald/paywall](#)) See also: Whatcom council axes young adult social media COVID campaign despite vaccination success ([Salish Current, July 16](#))

San Juan County reported three new cases, one each on Lopez, Orcas and San Juan islands, of COVID-19, attributed to the Delta variant strain in people fully vaccinated. ([San Juan Journal](#))

Whatcom County 7/23/21 [COVID ActNow](#) Medium risk; 6.5/100K; 69.1% vaccinated  
San Juan County 7/9/21 [COVID ActNow](#) Medium risk; 1.6/100K; 74.6% vaccinated  
Skagit County 7/9/21 [COVID ActNow](#) High risk; 9.5/100K; 58.4% vaccinated

Goatsrue, a noxious weed which displaces native and beneficial plants and is toxic to humans and livestock, has been found in Whatcom County. ([Whatcom Public Works](#))

## Government

### San Juan County

The San Juan County Charter Review Commission presented six proposed amendments to the county's Home Rule Charter on July 13 to the county council which, if approved by voters in November, would: amend the introduction to the charter to include a Coast Salish land acknowledgement, update the preamble and provide a statement of shared community values; establish a three-term limit for county council members; create a San Juan County Climate and Environment Commission; create a San Juan County Justice, Equity and Inclusion Commission; incorporate nondiscrimination language and related provisions into the charter; and ease the rules governing the initiative and referendum process within the county. ([San Juan Journal](#))

### Bellingham

The Bellingham City Council is limiting public comment at its July 26 meeting to letters and to electronic comments entered through its Engage Bellingham [web form](#). According to the city, "Registration is required to sign in and write comments. All comments are impartially moderated by a third party, per our Engage Bellingham [moderation policy](#) and as described in our [FAQs](#). Comments are subject to the public records/public disclosure requirements of RCW 42.56." The change was instituted by council president Hannah Stone and the city administration as an interim measure in response to "medical misinformation" about the new coronavirus pandemic and COVID-19 vaccines and treatments made by speakers during the council's online sessions. ([Bellingham Herald/paywall](#))

The Bellingham City Council will meet on July 26. [Agenda items](#) include:

[23059] Public Works and Natural Resources Committee: Proposed [ordinance](#) renewing the Cascade Natural Gas franchise

[23061] Planning Committee: [Report](#) on the status of the City's accessory dwelling unity ordinance

[23064] Committee of the Whole: Discussion of council feedback on proposed opiate [treatment facility](#)

[23051] Committee of the Whole: Incarceration Prevention and Reduction Task Force [annual report](#)

The council will meet in executive sessions and report to the public 1) potential litigation and 2) Litigation: Lev vs. City of Bellingham

The council will meet next on Aug. 2.

### Whatcom County

The Council will meet on July 27. [Agenda items](#) include:

[\[AB2021-440\]](#) Special presentation on police reform in Washington state

[\[AB2021-403\]](#) Public hearing: Ordinance adopting amendments to the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan and Whatcom County Code relating to the Cherry Point UGA fossil fuel facilities, renewable fuel facilities, piers, SEPA, greenhouse gas emissions, and other matters

The Council will meet on Aug 10.

### Port of Bellingham

The Port Commissioners will next meet on Aug 10.

### **Nature**

J-Pod was last seen in the San Juan Islands on April 10. While members of all three pods have been spotted at Swiftsure Bank off the western end of the Strait of Juan de Fuca in July, none of them have taken their typical summer route to follow Chinook salmon migrating towards the Fraser River. ([Orca Behavior Institute](#))

Concern is growing over what high temperatures this summer will do to rivers and streams. Temperatures above 61 degrees can affect fish health, including through their food and oxygen availability. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

A Lopez Island-based nonprofit says the protection of critical habitat for native plants can also preserve a wealth of traditional knowledge. The group is working with private landowners to raise awareness of culturally important plants hidden in the bogs and underbrush of Puget Sound's natural areas. ([Salish Sea Currents Magazine](#))

A disease the state Department of Fish and Wildlife determined in early June was killing deer on the San Juan Islands is now believed to be affecting deer in Anacortes. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission last week issued a study plan determination for the relicensing of Seattle City Light's three-dam Skagit River Hydroelectric Project that includes 32 studies from Seattle City Light's list. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

### **Business**

A Samish Bay oyster recall was issued last week and harvest closed due to bacteria-related illnesses caused by the marine bacteria *vibrio parahaemolyticus*. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

The *Bligh Island*, a 79-foot wooden hull purse seiner in Port of Bellingham custody as a derelict vessel since 2017, sank off Point Whitehorn July 13 while being towed from Blaine Harbor to Bellingham. ([The Northern Light](#))

## **Commentary**

Columnist Danny Westneat writes about how Canada, number one in vaccination rates, is opening its borders only halfway to Americans — those who are vaccinated — and putting us in our place. ([Seattle Times](#))

## **Community**

City Club of Bellingham on July 28 hosts a virtual presentation by Dr. Melissa Rice from the Western Washington University's Mars Lab are on NASA's Perseverance Rover team about the history of water on Mars. The free talk begins at 12:10 p.m.; [registration](#) closes at midnight, July 26.

Site preparations are underway for the new Gardenview 30-unit tiny house village in Bellingham at the former site of the City's "Clean Green" facility. The first residents are expected to occupy them in October. ([City of Bellingham](#))

## **Jump in!**

Entrants and vendors are welcomed to enter the virtual "[Lettuce Entertain Ewe](#)" San Juan County Aug. 18-21.

***Like this newsletter? Share it. And it's easy to subscribe by reply mail. Your email address will never be shared and you can unsubscribe at any time. — Mike Sato***

*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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