

Salish Current

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

Dear Readers —

It's a good week's work at *Salish Current* when this Friday newsletter comes together and we can bring you original stories that range from journalism intern **Mallory Biggar's** story on preventing COVID among young adult students, to **Gretchen Wing's** profile of marine biologist turned novelist Gene Helfman, to **Matt Benoit's** look at how justice delayed is justice denied. We know that all our readers don't read all the stories and items every week (if you do, thank you!) but we hope there's something every week that piques your interest. Are these stories and items a contribution to the health of the community? We think they are — and anybody can read what's on the website because readers like you make that possible when you [donate](#) to *Salish Current*. You're not subscribing like you might subscribe to the *Bellingham Herald* or the *New York Times* or *The New Yorker* for exclusive access. Your [donation](#) makes it possible for anyone in the community to read the stories and news items on the website — without charge. Because that's what we believe in: that real news, independently reported, should be freely available to everyone to read, digest and discuss. So, what do you think? A \$5, \$10 or \$20 monthly [donation](#) brings you — and you bring the community — the *Salish Current*. Please [donate](#) today. Thank you.

— 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 Oct. 22, 2021

[Continuing case backlog slows wheels of justice for Whatcom public defenders — and their clients](#)



The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an unprecedented backlog of pending cases in the hands of public defenders and prosecutors in Whatcom County courts, delaying both trials and settlements and presenting some defendants with difficult choices or extended stays in custody.

By Matt Benoit — Public defenders report having hard conversations about what they see as "completely unfair" options with in-custody clients, as the pandemic-driven halt to jury trials keeps people unsure of when their days in court will arrive. ([Read more.](#))

Fictional whale tale underscores real-life role of kinship in orcas' survival



*Fish scientist Gene Helfman brings decades of studying sea creatures and their behavior to *Beyond the Human Realm*, a new work of fiction underscoring the need for a kinship approach to preservation of orca whales.*

*By Gretchen K. Wing — In the newly published novel *Beyond the Human Realm*, Lopez Island scientist and author Gene Helfman draws on the real-life intelligence of orcas in a fictional story that affirms that preservation of the species requires the adoption of an approach of kinship. ([Read more.](#))*

COVID-19 cases highest among 18- to 24-year-olds as students return to campuses



Health officials, university and college leaders and students are watching closely to see whether vaccine requirements will help stave off COVID-19 infections, as campuses reopen for on-site classes.

By Mallory Biggar — At the same time students were returning to university, community college and technical college campuses that had been closed to in-person instruction for a year and a half — and where full vaccination against COVID-19 is now required — the 18- to 24-year-old age group was reporting the highest number of cases. ([Read more.](#))

News from around the region

Health and Safety

Whatcom County 10/22//21 [COVID ActNow](#) Very High risk; 25.7/100K; 69.7% vaccinated

San Juan County 10/22/21 [COVID ActNow](#) High risk; 12.2/100K; 78.1% vaccinated

Skagit County 10/22/21 [COVID ActNow](#) Very High risk; 50.7/100K; 64.7% vaccinated

Education

International student enrollment has gone down significantly at Western Washington University as students returning to campus face COVID-19 related challenges including changing travel restrictions and closed U.S. consulates. ([The Front](#))

Government

San Juan County

On Oct. 15, the San Juan County Planning Commission unanimously recommended that the county council set the limit on vacation rentals at 650 permits, which is the number of permits that were compliant as of July 31, 2021, for a period of five years following the adoption of the proposed ordinance. (229 for San Juan Island, 334 for Orcas, 85 for Lopez, and 2 for other islands.)

The San Juan County Council will meet on Oct. 25, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., and on Oct. 26, 9 a.m. to Noon.

City of Bellingham

The Bellingham City Council held its Public Comment Session III on Oct. 18. The next public comment sessions will be held on Nov. 1, 15 and 29. Log in here to [participate](#) (Meeting ID: 923 0705 9297 Password: 018602)

The city council will meet on Oct. 25. [Agenda items](#) include:

Public Hearing:

- 23137 [Resolution](#) and an [Ordinance](#) Amending Bellingham Municipal Code (BMC) Chapter 11: Parking Modifications

Public Works and Natural Resources Committee:

- 23087 Presentation on Whatcom Creek Bacteria Total Maximum Daily Load ([TMDL](#))

Parks and Recreation Committee:

- 23139 Presentation of Annual Report on [Greenways Program](#)

Climate Action Committee:

- 23141 Authorize the Mayor to Enter into an [Interlocal Agreement](#) Between City of Bellingham and Public Utility District #1 for Carbon Reduction Initiatives

Community and Economic Development Committee:

- 23142 Overview of Local COVID Recovery Response and Trends
- 23143 Human Services Contracts for 1) Contracting with Northwest Youth Services for Operating a Young Adult Winter Shelter, and 2) Expanding Support of the Homeless Outreach Team ([Staff Memo](#))

Committee of the Whole:

- 23026 [Ordinance](#) Renewing the Olympic Pipe Line Franchise Agreement
- 23125 An [Ordinance](#) Establishing the Property Tax Levy for 2022
- 23146 Extension and Renewal of an Ordinance Establishing a Moratorium on Development Applications and Permits Relating to the Redevelopment of the Manufactured Home Parks in Bellingham ([Staff Memo](#))

- 23147 A Proposal to Amend BMC 20.29, Incentive Program for Innovative Affordable Homeownership Projects, to Increase the Maximum Density Allowed for Qualifying Projects ([Staff Memo](#))
- 23149 LEAD Program [Update](#)

The council is scheduled to meet again on Nov. 8.

Whatcom County

The county council will meet on Oct. 26. [Agenda items](#) include:

Public Hearing:

- AB2021-590 [Ordinance](#) imposing a second interim moratorium on the acceptance and processing of permit applications for new or expanded recreational cannabis growing and/or processing facilities which are proposed to operate outdoors or in greenhouses

Council Finance and Administrative Services Committee:

- AB2021-595 Authorize the County Executive to enter into a contract amendment between Whatcom County and Opportunity Council to administer the Housing and Essential Needs Program in the amount of \$503,370 for a total amended contract amount of \$2,540,694 ([Staff Memo](#))

Council Committee of the Whole:

- AB2021-611 Discussion and possible motion to recommend rescinding [a previous action](#) of the council that established a no-shooting zone in Drayton Harbor

The county council is scheduled to meet again on Nov. 9

Port of Bellingham

The Port Commission met on Oct. 19. [Agenda items](#) included:

The commission unanimously authorized the executive director to approve the [revised Project Memorandum and Estoppel Certificate](#) for Harcourt's Waterfront Residential project. Signature this week of the finalized revised contract begins the two-year completion countdown for condominium units A and B and the three-year countdown for unit C's completion. Construction is expected to begin within the next two to three weeks.

Presentation of third quarter financials included projected cash flow in 2022: A beginning cash balance of \$22.7M plus cash in of \$62M and cash out of \$69.3M, leaving a projected ending cash balance of \$15.4M. Subtracting a required reserve of \$9.2M leaves a projected ending available cash balance in Dec. 2022 of \$6.2M.

On Oct. 25, the Port's 2022 strategy budget will be available at the port office and [online here](#). Public hearings will be held on Nov. 2 and 16 and public comment taken on the budget and proposed property tax levy until Nov. 16. The budget will be adopted by the port commission on Nov. 16 at 4 p.m.

Elections: Contributions/Expenditures

Candidates

Whatcom County Campaigns:

Barry Buchanan At-large Position A \$46,647.13 (raised) \$29,278.67 (spent)
Kamal Bhachu At-large Position A \$54,388.98 (raised) \$36,252.17 (spent)

Tyler Byrd Position 3 \$31,889.94 (raised) \$5,496.75 (spent)
Rebecca Lewis Position 3 \$54,027.24 (raised) \$47,509.86 (spent)

Eddy Ury Position 1 \$22,667.87 (raised) \$19,066.62 (spent)
Kaylee Galloway Position 1 \$52,913.68 (raised) \$35,936.98 (spent)

Bellingham City Council Campaigns:

Russ Whidbee Position 7 \$36,952.12 (raised) \$25,133.62 (spent)
Kristina Michele Martens Position 7 \$60,453.44 (raised) \$47,483.60 (spent)

Michael Lilliquist Position 6 \$21,071.71 (raised) \$15,465.85 (spent)
Eve Smason-Marcus Position 6 \$19,107.03 (raised) \$12,410.91 (spent)

Port of Bellingham Commissioner Campaigns:

John Huntley Position 1 \$30,424.00 (raised) \$32,518.46 (spent)
Michael Shepard Position 1 \$47,742.00 (raised) \$17,618.67 (spent)

Ken Bell Position 2 \$56,119.36 (raised) \$17,982.38 (spent)
Kelly Krieger Position 2 \$47,654.24 (raised) \$29,378.92 (spent)

Initiatives

"No on 4" has raised \$193,310.00 in cash and spent \$89,128.67 to oppose People First Bellingham's Initiative 4 ensuring worker's rights. ([Public Disclosure Commission](#))

The People First Bellingham initiative campaign has raised \$72,955.47 in cash and spent \$24,714.66. ([Public Disclosure Commission](#))

Nature

Lummi Nation officials say a triple whammy of warm water, low flows and bacteria in September killed an estimated 2,500 Chinook salmon, about 80% or more, before they could spawn in the South Fork Nooksack River. ([KUOW](#))

The Bellingham-based environmental group RE Sources presents artist Jane Chavey's story map world, Climate-Resilient NW Washington, in which bold climate action has been taken and orcas have recovered from the brink of extinction. ([RE Sources](#))

Skagit Valley Audubon Society member Tim Manns has been recognized as Audubon Washington's Helen Engle Volunteer of the Year with a framed Washington state personalized license plate sporting the name "TOWHEE" that serves as the award. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

An updated management plan for the 2,800-acre Anacortes Community Forest Lands recommends improving restrooms, adding trails meeting ADA Act standards, expanding the forest lands if adjacent land becomes available and closing the trail along the south shore of Little Cranberry Lake because of erosion. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Business

Negotiations to purchase the Intalco property at Cherry Point may bring aluminum production back to the facility or create a steel mill using recycled materials. Dave Gallagher reports. ([Bellingham Herald/paywall](#))

Local farms that suffered losses from drought and excessive heat can qualify for \$10 billion in federal funds included in the short-term funding bill passed by Congress. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Bellingham mayor Seth Fleetwood proposes to reduce the community's greenhouse gas emissions two ways: by requiring all new housing projects using federal pandemic relief funds to be fully electric and not rely on natural gas, a fossil fuel; and by investing \$5 million in electric cooling and ventilation systems in municipal buildings, which could then serve as locations where community members can escape wildfire smoke and high temperatures. ([Bellingham Herald/paywall](#))

Marta Green of San Juan County received the 2021 Legacy Award from the Pacific States/British Columbia Oil Spill Task Force for her leadership in developing and advancing the San Juan Islands' Oil Spill Prevention Strategy and securing grant funding and managing two projects to advance oil spill prevention measures for the shipping lanes through Haro Strait and Boundary Pass. ([San Juan Islander](#))

Commentary

Zane Gustafson and Eric de Place in [Sightline](#) write: "About 90% of the petroleum products consumed in Cascadia — our gasoline, diesel, jet fuel and more — are refined at five refineries sitting on the shores of the Salish Sea. These refineries are super polluters. They comprise four of the top eight sources of carbon pollution in the state and are responsible for over 26% of Washington state's greenhouse gas emissions from large industrial facilities. And ... Washington's oil refineries have a checkered past of violating the regulations designed to protect their workers, the environment, and people living in their vicinity."

Arts and Leisure

Local Anacortes historian Bret Lunsford reads and discusses his book, *Sounding for Harry Smith: Early Pacific Northwest Influences*, on Oct. 24, 4 p.m., at Village Books in Bellingham. Lunsford details how Smith, an underground influencer of 20th century music, art and film, grew up in Anacortes and Bellingham, then left in the late '40s with little trace. Smith's impact on American culture continues, and has accelerated since his death in 1991, with numerous books, all-star music events, albums and documentaries devoted to his work. [Reservations required.](#)

Jump in!

"Do Crows Have Language?" will be answered by Doug Wacker, an associate professor of animal behavior at the University of Washington Bothell, at the North Cascades Audubon Society's Oct. 26 meeting, 7 p.m. Wacker will discuss his research on crow calling behavior and introduce the crows that roost near the campus, explore crow vocal communication and discuss how their vocalizations compare with human language. The meeting will be held at the Whatcom Museum (vax cards, masks and distancing required) and on the Whatcom Museum's [YouTube channel.](#)

Bellingham City Club presents a virtual forum discussing "[Washington's New Law Enforcement Reforms: Did We Get it Right ... Yet?](#)" featuring Sen. Jamie Pedersen (43rd Legislative District, Seattle), Chair, Senate Law and Justice Committee; Steve Strachan, Executive Director, Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs (WASPC); Nickolaus Lewis, Lummi Indian Business Council Councilmember; and Jessica Shook, President, Washington Association of Designated Crisis Responders. Oct. 27, 12:10 p.m. [Reservation by Oct. 25.](#)

Sign up for the virtual Cherry Point Science Forum featuring local scientists speaking on marine mammals and the implications of the summer heat wave and on longer-term patterns of environmental and ecological change in our coastal marine ecosystems. Oct. 30, 10 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. Hosted by RE Sources, [reservations required.](#)

Nonprofit *Salish Current* is Women- and Minority-Led.

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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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