

Salish Current

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

Dear Reader — Hooray for milder weather this week and seeing some buds and shoots making their promise of a coming spring. We're still in crisis mode here with the COVID-19 omicron surge and some common-sense risk management is still called for: wear a mask, wash your hands, keep safe distances, and avoid large crowds and poor ventilation. Oh, and get those vaccinations.

Reporter **Matt Benoit** concludes his three-part series this week on how Bellingham, the city of subdued excitement, is becoming a two-daily-news-reporting town. *Salish Current* will keep an eye out for how, we hope, both the *Bellingham Herald* and *Cascade Daily News* rise to the high standards of reporting the local news this community needs and deserves.

But we do want to keep our feet on the ground and invite you to read **Gretchen K. Wing's** story on the past, present and future of a small picturesque rural cemetery that is approaching a problem of space and environment.

If that's not enough to edify and entertain you over the weekend, there's more at [Salish Sea News Week in Review 1/21/22](#): Aloha Squirrel Friday!, Nooksack River, park co-management, Glacier Peak, water and landslides, orca decline, Lorraine Loomis Act, B.C. fish processing, Upper Skagit mining, B.C. old growth, Springer, green crab emergency, dead pigs, storm destruction

— Amy Nelson, Publisher

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

News from the *Salish Current*, week of Jan. 21, 2022

[Bellingham to be a two-newspaper town again — in a brave, new information world](#)



An October 1918 edition of what was then known as The Seattle Daily Times was published during a time when Seattle, like many other cities including Bellingham, was served by multiple daily papers. Times have changed, with local papers closing or shrinking radically over the past few decades. The situation is about to change in Bellingham. (Image courtesy The Seattle Times)

By Matt Benoit — A new digital and print publication launching this month will make Bellingham a two-newspaper town once again. The publication launches

into an information environment much different from the last time the town had two papers, and observers look forward to the prospect of seeing more local news on government, agriculture and other topics. ([Read more.](#))

[Paradise full: Finding space to rest at Lopez Island cemetery](#)



Occupied or available? Lopez Union Cemetery co-sextons (and sisters) Cass (at left) and Marty Clark track plot data in their laptop. With space in the cemetery in high demand, managers plan to use a high-tech solution to survey underground and determine which plots are occupied — one of several innovations in the business of final farewells. (Courtesy photo)

By Gretchen K. Wing — At 140 years old, pastorally situated Lopez Union Cemetery is encountering high demand — but running out of space. Managers are looking to ground-penetrating radar technology to help determine just how much space is available in the nonprofit cemetery, and considering other options as well.

News from around the region

Health and Safety

San Juan County reported its first COVID-19 related death. The deceased was unvaccinated. ([San Juan Journal](#)) Since Jan. 14, 106 new COVID-19 have been confirmed in the county, a total of 856. ([Orcasonian](#))

Jury trials in San Juan County District and Superior courts have been canceled as of Jan. 19 until mid-February due to a high transmission rate of COVID-19 in the county. All potential jurors who have been summoned for service between now and Feb. 18 are released from service by these orders.

Whatcom County 1/21/22 [COVID ActNow](#) **Severe Risk**; 182.8/100K; 77.3% vaccinated
San Juan County 1/21/22 [COVID ActNow](#) **Severe Risk**; 79.6/100K; 87.8% vaccinated
Skagit County 1/21/22 [COVID ActNow](#) **Severe Risk**; 152.6/100K; 71.7% vaccinated

The federal government is making available four free at-home COVID-19 test kits to each residential address. [Order online](#); the kits will start shipping late this month. The Washington State Department of Health is also preparing to offer free at-home COVID-19 test kits to state residents. ([Seattle Times/paywall](#))

Last weekend's tsunami alert brought to mind the simulations of what a major tsunami generated from the Cascadia subduction zone hitting the Washington coast might look like. Here's one for the [San Juan Islands](#) and one for [Bellingham](#). (Washington Dept. of Natural Resources)

Education

The entire Blaine School District will go to remote learning next week because a total of 455 students and 78 staff were absent last Thursday, 23% of the district's student and staff population. ([The Northern Light](#))

Newly elected board member Tonya Hickman and returning board member Kelli Kettels were sworn in at the Lynden School Board meeting on Jan. 13. Hickman defeated incumbent Steve Jilk by more than 3,000 votes with a campaign pledge that, "The Lynden public education system should be a safe place for our kids to receive a quality, pro-American education, safe from all the divisiveness of ideology that harms our relationships." ([Lynden Tribune/paywall](#)) ([Lynden Tribune Facebook](#))

Government

City of Sumas

At the Sumas City Council meeting of Jan. 10, Todd Daniels, Richard Postma and Joshua Clawson were sworn in to four-year terms in City Council positions 1, 2 and 4. ([Lynden Tribune/paywall](#))

City of Everson

Mayor John Perry was sworn in for a third term, and council members Jennifer Lautenbach, Matt Goering and Trevon Myhre began four-year stints, at the Everson City Council meeting of Jan. 11. ([Lynden Tribune/paywall](#))

San Juan County

The county commissioners will meet on Jan. 25 on a [retreat agenda](#).

City of Bellingham

The council will meet on Jan. 24. [Agenda items](#) include:

Public Works and Natural Resources Committee:

- 23239 Post Point Resource Recovery Overview of Triple Bottom Line Plus (TBL+) Process. [Staff Report](#). [Project Presentation](#).
- 23240 Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan Updates — Proposed Community Engagement and Outreach. [Staff Report](#). [Outreach Presentation](#).
- 23137 An Ordinance Regarding Public Parking; Amending Bellingham Municipal Code Chapters 2.44, 11.33 and 11.36 [Staff Memo](#). [Parking Ordinance Draft](#)
- 23221 Resolution Amending City Parking Rates [Staff Memo](#). [Parking Resolution Draft](#).

Parks and Recreation Committee:

- 23241 Proposed Revisions to BMC 7.04.030 and BMC 8.04.070 Restrictions on Animals in Parks — Leash Length. [Staff Memo](#).

Climate Action Committee:

- 23241 Proposed Climate Action Fund Discussion. [Staff Memo](#). [Presentation](#).

Public Health, Safety and Justice Committee:

- 23250 Discussion of 2022 Priorities for Public Health Safety and Justice Committee Council [Memo](#).

Committee of the Whole:

- 23243 Update on GRACE and LEAD Programs
- 23243 Bellingham Police Department Staffing Update
- 23193 A Work Session to Consider Amendments to BMC Chapter 17.10 and the Washington State Energy Code — Commercial, Requiring Electrification and Efficiency Standards for Certain Multi-Family and Commercial Buildings. [Staff Memo](#). [Draft Ordinance](#).

The city council will meet again on Feb. 7.

Whatcom County

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

Consent Agenda:

- AB2022-043 Request Authorization for the County Executive to enter into a contract between Whatcom County and the Washington State Office of Public Defense for the enhancement of Public Defense in the amount of \$209,111. [Staff Memo](#).
- AB2022-058 Request authorization for the County Executive to enter into a contract amendment between Whatcom County and Lydia Place to provide emergency housing for families experiencing unsheltered homelessness in the amount of \$107,000 for a total amended contract amount of \$600,074. [Staff Memo](#).

Council Committee of the Whole:

- AB2021-209 Resolution regarding permanent affordability of childcare in Whatcom County. [Proposed Resolution](#) (3/23/21)

The council will meet again on Feb. 8.

Port of Bellingham

The Port of Bellingham commission met on Jan. 18. [Agenda items and minutes](#) include:

Consent agenda was approved unanimously.

A public hearing was held on the [Comprehensive Scheme of Harbor Improvement Plan](#)

The commission unanimously approved [Resolution No. 1400](#) establishing [Commissioner District Boundaries](#).

The commission unanimously [authorized](#) the executive director to execute grant agreements regarding engineering design and to amend the 2022 strategic budget by \$2,600,000 for the Lignin Parcel Affordable Housing Project in the Waterfront District.

In other business:

Staff provided [updates](#) on reopening the Alcoa plant at Cherry Point, the \$4 million granted for broadband in the county, the location and operation of the Dockside Market, the RFP for the Boardmill Building, storm damage, and the low load factor of Southwest Airlines due to border restrictions.

Commissioner Bell said legislation requiring [riparian buffers](#) will cost farmers about 30,000 acres of farmland in the county; Commissioner Briscoe said buffers will do nothing for salmon and the answer is the removal of seals and sea lions.

Commissioner Bell said that legislation inhibiting [policing](#) affects economic development and community safety; Commissioner Briscoe said he is against HB 1788.

The commission will meet again on Feb. 1.

[For the people](#)

[House Bill 1571](#) would improve communications between the government and indigenous families and provide grants for human trafficking survivor rehabilitation; [House Bill 1725](#), sponsored by Rep. Debra Lekanoff, D-Bow, would create an emergency alert designation specifically for missing and endangered Indigenous people. ([Seattle Times/paywall](#))

[Senate Bill 5897](#), sponsored by Sen. Simon Sefzik, R-Ferndale, would suspend the state gas tax through the end of 2022, immediately reducing the price of gasoline and diesel fuel in Washington state by 49.4 cents a gallon. ([Lynden Tribune/paywall](#)) [SB 5896](#), introduced by Sefzik and co-sponsored by Liz Lovelett, would require the Department of Enterprise Services to report on the use of electricity to recharge vehicles at state office locations. ([Washington Votes](#))

Nature

[Nooksack River](#). Western Washington University environmental sciences associate professor John McLaughlin forecasts that the Nooksack River system is in "grave danger" of irreversible changes and ecosystem collapse that would result in Chinook salmon becoming "virtually certain" to go extinct by 2050, water becoming even more scarce for farmers and flooding continuing to devastate communities. ([Bellingham Herald/paywall](#))

[Adjudication](#). The Washington Department of Ecology will hold quarterly Zoom meetings about the Nooksack River adjudication process. The first meeting is scheduled for Jan. 27, 5:30 p.m., and will address, "What is adjudication and why is it happening in the Nooksack?" [Register here](#). ([Dept. of Ecology](#))

[Killer whale](#). The National Marine Fisheries Service published a five-year review of the Southern Resident killer whale on Jan. 4 and recommended the orca's status under the federal Endangered Species Act

remain unchanged. Despite billions of dollars spent and dozens of studies authored since the Southern Resident orca was listed as endangered in 2005, there are now 15 fewer whales than there were in 2005. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Glaciers. The glaciers on Mount Baker observed by scientists have receded in the last two decades by more than 305 meters as temperatures have risen. ([The Planet Magazine](#))

Skagit River. The British Columbia government has purchased the mining and related rights on more than 14,000 acres in the headwaters of the Skagit River held by Imperial Metals for \$24 million, thereby removing the mining threat in the region. ([Seattle Times/paywall](#))

Business

Local publication. The first issue of *The Flame*, a monthly periodical, was distributed last week in the Blaine/Birch Bay area to postal customers by Washington state publishers living in Snohomish County. Co-publisher and editor-in-chief Nicole Orozco said *The Flame* is a nonpartisan newspaper and that she believes the U.S. political system is corrupt to its core. *The Flame* is partnered with RiseUp Washington, a 501(c)(4) organization. ([The Northern Light](#))

Skagit Development. After getting negative responses from Mount Vernon, Sedro-Woolley and La Conner city councils and the public, the Skagit County commissioners this week suspended a study on impacts of fully contained communities in rural areas. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Tribal Salmon. The Sauk-Suiattle tribe has sued Seattle City Light for violating the rights of salmon and tribal spiritual customs and beliefs by operating hydroelectric dams on the upper Skagit River. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Green Crabs. Governor Jay Inslee declared an emergency and authorized measures to combat an invasive infestation of green crabs threatening local shellfish and tideland ecosystems. ([KUOW](#))

Blaine Port Zoning. Port of Bellingham commissioners voted unanimously at their Jan. 4 commission meeting to deny a lease modification request for a Blaine Harbor property that would expand its residential units and make it consistent with the city of Blaine's zoning policy. Commissioners argued expanding residences could set a precedent to gentrify the port's working waterfront. City of Blaine staff and council member Richard May objected to the port's decision because it was inconsistent with the city's zoning. ([The Northern Light](#))

Water Technology. CODA Farm Technologies, a Bow company that developed Farm HQ, a device that can save farmers about four million gallons of water and hundreds of gallons of fuel in a growing season, has received \$2.2 million in investor funding to expand into national and international markets. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Community

Getting Out. The Vamos Outdoor Program, created in 2018, is connecting Latine youth to outdoor programming in Whatcom and Skagit counties. The program provides representational mentorships and guidance to youth that might not have access to outdoor recreation otherwise. ([The Planet Magazine](#))

Worker Housing. Workers on Orcas Island serving tourists and residents want more shelter than yurts, cabins and tents. They want decent, affordable housing. ([KUOW](#))

Sumas Library. Whatcom County Library Foundation has established the Sumas Library Recovery Fund, www.wcls.org/sumasrecovery, to pay for the \$50,000 in repair and replacement costs not covered by insurance. At the Sumas Library, equipment, furniture, shelving, books and other materials were destroyed. ([Lynden Tribune/paywall](#))

Arts and Leisure

Children of the Setting Sun Treaty Day Film Festival Jan. 22, [10 a.m.](#) and [2 p.m.](#)

Bellingham Folk Festival, Jan. 20-23, various venues. In-person music, workshops, education events. For the full schedule, [click here](#).

Up Close and Personal: The Body in Contemporary Art. The exhibition examines the human body through the expressive lens of 60 artists. Curated by Amy Chaloupka from the Collection of Driek and Michael Zirinsk, Lightcatcher Building, Whatcom Art Museum, through Feb. 22.

Jump in!

2021 Whatcom County Climate Action Plan, City Club, Jan. 26, noon. Discussion of the Action Plan adopted by the City of Bellingham, featuring Ellyn Murphy, Chair of the Climate Impact Advisory Committee, and Chris Elder, Whatcom County Senior Planner. [Register in advance by Jan. 24.](#)

Wood Songs, Jan. 27, 7 p.m., Whatcom County Library System. Local luthier Devin Champlin discusses in an online talk musical instrument making and the treasured woods that are used in the craft. [Register in advance.](#)

James Webb Telescope Launch Party, Jan. 29, 2 p.m., Burlington Public Library. Watch footage of the launch and make your own galaxy pinwheel and star lifecycle bookmark. This event is free and a library card is not required to attend. Masks will be required for all attendees ages 5 and up and recommended for ages 3-4. This event is made possible by NASA @ My Library and the American Library Association.

Tapping Bigleaf Maples for Syrup: How the Impossible Became Possible, Jan. 29, 11 a.m., Whatcom County Library System. Some of the rarest and tastiest maple syrup is tapped right here in Whatcom County — sustainably! Hear this Acme farm's history — and future plans — from owner Neil McLeod and others during an intriguing on-site tour. [Space is limited; pre-registration is required.](#)

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

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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