



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

**Dear Reader —**

While doing research on news readership for a presentation this week, I learned that, between 2004 and 2019, the combined Washington state readership of daily and weekly newspapers plummeted 36% from 2.5 million to 1.6 million. That's attributed to the demise of local news publications. But where did those lost news readers go?

Both absentee-owned daily papers in Whatcom and Skagit counties have also lost readership while populations have increased. There are enough people to read the news but it seems that the end of the road for the legacy newspaper business model of paid subscriptions, paywalls and advertising that underwrites news has long been approaching. But what next?

We think *Salish Current* is one answer, as it grows and develops. We want to provide local news people can read in order to engage in civil discourse and civic decisions. When I ask, "where do you get your news" and "what do you consider to be 'news'," I'm thinking about the future of our community, our cultures and our democracy.

We'll continue to ask and endeavor to answer those questions in our pursuit of independent, trustworthy, fact-based news. Please show your support with a [donation](#) to community-based news that's free to read and free from advertising. Thank you, for your support, and for reading!

And, if you'd like more news, here you are:

[Salish Sea News Week in Review 2/11/22](#): Women and Girls in Science, Snoqualmie Tribe land, microplastics, hot shellfish, Bigg's whales, stranded barge, Deschutes River, Bellingham electricity rule, Washington transportation \$, rogue wave, kelp nutrition, no Roberts Bank.

— 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 Feb. 11, 2022

### [Recent robberies prompt renewed look at security for cannabis retailers](#)



*An uptick in brazen robberies and burglaries of regional cannabis retailers since November has prompted local dispensaries to reinforce security, while the cash-only operations — legal here for eight years — remain stifled by banking regulations related to marijuana's federal illegality.*

*By Matt Benoit — Cannabis is around this way, notes a sign on a Samish Way store in Bellingham ... where security cameras abound also, as is typical for such outlets. While cannabis retailers operate legally in Washington, federal laws categorizing cannabis as an illegal substance compel retailers to operate on a cash-only basis, making them doubly attractive to potential thieves. ([Read more.](#))*

## Floods, COVID, retirements complicated snow removal



*Clearing roads after December's heavy snowfall was extra-challenging for local crews in Whatcom County, with over a foot of snow reported in some of the area's microclimate zones.*

By Chris O'Neill — A 24-hour work schedule for local road crews came as no surprise when it came time to clear roads after December's heavy snowfall. Public works managers were already contending with staff retirements and complications due to COVID-19 when lingering issues from heavy flooding in November added another level of challenge — even before flakes began to fall. ([Read more.](#))

## News from around the region

### Health and Safety

About 300 Lynden middle and high school students were organized through a parent Facebook protest group to demonstrate on Wednesday against being required to wear masks in school. The students were given the choice to wear masks in school or to go home, and some chose to go home. ([Bellingham Herald/paywall](#))

Whatcom County 2/11/22 [COVID ActNow](#) **Very High Risk**; 70.2/100K; 78.4% vaccinated

San Juan County 2/11/22 [COVID ActNow](#) **Very High Risk**; 36.6/100K; 89.0% vaccinated

Skagit County 2/11/22 [COVID ActNow](#) **Very High Risk**; 60.8/100K; 72.7% vaccinated

### Education

As of publication deadline, the Ferndale school levy measure had received 59.79% in yes votes, well

surpassing its required 50% for approval. The Bellingham School District bond measure was passing at 60.6% approval, meeting its 60% requirement.

As of Feb. 9, Skagit County school district levies were all passing: Sedro-Woolley 53%, Conway 53% and 57%, Burlington-Edison 57.5, Anacortes 64%. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

## **Government**

### **San Juan County**

The San Juan County Council will meet on Feb. 15.

[Agenda items](#) include:

- Discuss: Salmon recovery grants.
- Action: Schedule Public Hearing to Surplus Sheriff's Canine Asset for Tuesday, March 22 at 9:15.

### **City of Bellingham**

The city council met on Feb. 7. [Agenda items](#) included:

- The council unanimously approved the mayor's appointment of Julie Mellick to the Civil Service Commission and Mike McAuley and Russell Whidbey to the Planning and Development Commission.
- Public Works and Natural Resources Committee:
- The council unanimously approved granting a telecommunications franchise to Wholesail Networks, LLC (Ziply).
- Climate Action Committee:
- The council unanimously approved that the Chair of the Climate Action Committee work directly with Trevor Smith, Karl DeJong and Mark Riker to come up with topics regarding a Just Transition to a Clean Energy discussion at the Feb. 26 council meeting.
- Council Rules of Procedure
- The council unanimously approved modifying its rules of procedure by adopting ranked choice voting to fill council vacancies and to add profanity to the list of behaviors that, if disruptive, are prohibited at a Council meeting.

The council will meet again on Feb. 21.

### Whatcom County

The county council met on Feb. 8. [Agenda items](#) included:

- The council authorized by consent the County Executive to enter into a contract between Whatcom County and Washington State Health Care Authority to provide funding to accomplish activities under the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) program during the grant period 10/01/21–06/30/23 in the amount of \$1,175,834. [Staff memo.](#)
- The council adopted (4–3, Byrd, Elenbaas, Kershner opposed) an [ordinance](#) amending Whatcom County Code 2.02.085, Council Standing Committees - Committee Action
- The council unanimously approved an ordinance adopting amendments to WCC Title 20 (Zoning) regulating the production, processing, and retail sales of recreational marijuana in Whatcom County and repealing Ordinance No. 2021-066 [Staff memo.](#)  
[Ordinance.](#)

The council will meet again on Feb. 22.

### Port of Bellingham

The port commission will meet on Feb. 15. [Agenda items](#) include:

- [Presentation:](#) Community outreach update.
- [Action item:](#) Approve [amendments](#) to the Bellingham International Airport 2022 Capital Improvement Program (CIP) to include a new security project in Parking Lot A where a rash of vehicle and catalytic converter thefts has occurred. Improvements include perimeter security fencing and placement and integration of high-resolution CCTV cameras.

The commission will meet again on March 1.

### For the people

[House Bill 2051](#) which provides short-term disaster recovery financial assistance to agricultural producers passed the House unanimously this week and crossed over to the Senate. It was introduced by Rep.

Alicia Rule (D-42) and cosponsored by Reps. Shewmake, Ormsby and Ramel.

Second Substitute Senate Bill [5619](#) which provides for conserving and restoring kelp beds and eelgrass meadows passed the Senate unanimously this week. It was originally introduced by Sen. Liz Lovelett (D-40).

Washington state House and Senate Democrats this week proposed a \$16 billion, 16-year transportation revenue package to fund projects ranging from building new hybrid electric ferries and funding more walking and biking corridors to highway maintenance and replacing fish passage culverts. ([Associated Press](#))

### Elections

Candidates filing for 42nd legislative district positions include, to date:

Position 1: Alicia Rule (D-incumbent); Kamal Bhachu (R); Tawsha Thompson (R)

Position 2: Richard May (D); Joe Timmons (D); Kyle Christensen (R); Dan Johnson (R)

Senate: Simon Sefzik (R-incumbent); Sharon Shewmake (D); Ben Elenbaas(R); Russ Dzialo (Other)

Candidates filing for 40th legislative district positions include, to date:

Position 1: Debra Lekanoff (D-incumbent)

Position 2: Alex Ramel (D-incumbent)

Senate: None

### Nature

The Port of Vancouver says it can mitigate the impacts of expanding the Roberts Bank Terminal 2 on endangered species but scientists tell federal officials that the final plan still impacts more than 100 species of concern in the heart of the Fraser River estuary. ([The Narwhal](#)) The city council of Delta, B.C., says postpone or deny federal approval. ([Delta Optimist](#))

Wildlife agency and elected officials declared the Skagit County efforts to manage the local elk population along Highway 20 a success. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Bowman Bay in Deception Pass State Park hosted the birth of a northern elephant sea pup that prompted precautionary closure of the birth area. ([Whidbey News Times](#))

The Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve will be reopening its doors to training sessions for the Salish Sea Stewards from 1 to 5 p.m. Tuesdays, March 1 to May 24. [Register](#) before Feb. 23; space is limited to 26 participants. ([Skaqit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

### **Business**

The Pacific Coast Shellfish Growers Association says it is ending a ban on the molluscan shellfish trade between the U.S. and European Union that began in 2010 over differences in regulations. ([KGMJ](#))

Extreme climate events are making shellfish less safe for human consumption, leading to harvesting closures across the county. ([Cascadia Daily News](#))

Watch the City Club presentation of Jan. 26 featuring Eilyn Murphy, Chair of the Climate Impact Advisory Committee, and Chris Elder, Whatcom County Senior Planner, speaking about the Whatcom County Climate Action Plan. [View here.](#)

By unanimous city council action this week, Bellingham became the third Washington city to require new buildings to use electricity for heat as part of an effort to decrease the city's greenhouse gas pollution from fossil fuels that propel climate change. ([Associated Press](#))

Petrogas' Cherry Point facility, a liquefied petroleum gas exporter, faces fines and additional regulations from the Northwest Clean Air Agency and Whatcom County for expanding its facilities without required permits. ([The Northern Light](#))

### **Commentary**

Lee Cataluna in *Honolulu Civil Beat* writes about how all 25 attributes the public is asked to rank in the selection process for the city's next police chief need to be

checked in order to get the superstar the police department needs. ([Honolulu Civil Beat](#)) (See also: "Hope isn't a strategy: Bellingham again seeks a new police chief" [Salish Current](#), Feb. 4, 2022)

Daron Williams of the Puget Sound National Estuary Program writes that the Nooksack floodplain features a diverse population of people and wildlife such that only by working together around a set of shared values can the floodplain be managed in a way that works for everyone. ([Puget Sound National Estuary Program](#))

### **Community**

As of publication deadline, the Blaine Library bond measure had received 56.94% yes votes. It needs 60% to pass.

Independent investigator Sarah L. Wixson [in a report](#) found in 20 of 22 instances that no violations of law or policy existed in allegations by former Bellingham Municipal Court employees of a hostile work environment. ([Bellingham Herald/paywall](#))

A request for a formal apology from Customs and Border Patrol for a January 2020 detention of about 100 individuals of Iranian descent at the Peace Arch border has been ignored, according to U.S. Representatives Suzan DelBene (D-01) and Pramila Jayapal (D-07). ([The Northern Light](#))

### **Arts and Leisure**

"The Bengali," Feb. 4–13, a documentary film by Kavery Kaul, follows African-American writer Fatima Shaik across deep divides of culture to India where her grandfather came from and where she searches for the truth in the stories she grew up with. A CASCADIA International Women's Film Festival celebration of Black History Month, virtual screening, [tickets](#).

"Nancy Holt, Between Heaven and Earth" opened at [the Western Gallery](#) on Thursday, Jan. 13. The exhibition features the work of artist Nancy Holt, who built the sculpture "Stone Enclosure: Rock Rings."

Register now to meet "Greenwood" author Michael Christie at four [Whatcom READS](#) in-person and online events March 3–5. Registration required.

### **Jump in!**

Introduction to Forest Bathing. Feb. 12 and 19, 10 a.m.–Noon. Join April Claxton, Among the Trees PNW, for an introduction to Forest Bathing. This is a slow walk with guided exercises using our senses to connect to the forest. Most of our time together will be spent in silence at a local park. Space is limited. [PreFeb. 12; pre-registration for Feb. 19](#).

Climate and Sustainability Advisory Committee. San Juan County seeks county residents to become members of its newly established Climate and Sustainability Advisory Committee. [Apply here by Feb. 15](#). (*San Juan Update*)

Climate Action Fund. The city of Bellingham will host two virtual public [forums to discuss its Climate Action Fund](#) to finance its Climate Action Plan. The forums are at 7–8 p.m. on [Feb. 17](#) and on [Feb. 23](#).

A Million More Trees for Whatcom County? YES! Feb. 17, 6:30–7:30 p.m. online. Learn the why, who, what, and where and how of Whatcom Million Trees Project's exciting initiatives to plant one million trees in Whatcom County over the next five years. [Register here](#).

Youth Mental Health in the Age of Anxiety...And Why it Matters to Everyone. Online Feb. 23, Noon, City Club. Dr. Sislana Ledbetter, a clinical psychologist and Western Washington University's Vice President of Counseling and Wellness, will look at some of the root causes and talk about ways adults can help address these mental health issues so that society as a whole will be healthier in the future. [Register by Feb. 21](#).

The Woodstock Farm Story – and its Fruitful Future. Feb. 24 online 6:30–7:30 p.m. Discover the storied history of this wonderful 16-acre City of Bellingham waterfront park along Chuckanut Drive, and its orchard planting in progress that will enhance local food

resiliency while keeping the character of this special site. [Register here.](#)

Orcas Christian High School clothing and household textile drive, through March 14. The students ask your help by dropping off goods in clean and salable condition at the high school. They will use the goods to raise funds for their upcoming Mission Trip to Belize. Kami Griffin coordinates, [kgriffin@oics.org](mailto:kgriffin@oics.org)

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Mike Sato, Managing Editor**

*Salish Current* is a nonprofit online newsroom serving Whatcom, San Juan and Skagit Counties. Founded in 2020, *Salish Current* exists to protect and improve democratic governance by reporting and curating local news — freely accessible to all — with independence and strict journalistic integrity.

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