



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

Dear Reader —

A week ago, Floyd McKay, our good friend, advisor and supporter of *Salish Current*, died after a short illness. We knew Floyd before the launch of *Salish Current* and he was a wise advisor and strong supporter of our efforts from the very beginning. “Keep up the good work, kids,” he’d say. In addition to his advice, Floyd wrote a Community Voices essay for the *Current* during the dark days last year after the Jan. 6 failed insurrection against our government. In [“Democracy in America: Nixon and Trump, 1974 and 2020,”](#) Floyd wrote: “In six decades as a reporter, commentator and professor, I have seen only two occasions when I feared for the future of our country” Read the essay and you’ll get the measure of the man.

Floyd’s son-in-law, Ted Wolf, shared that eight trumpeter swans flew overhead heading north the morning Floyd died. We don’t have eight trumpeters or trumpeter swans but thought it appropriate to dedicate the upcoming forum on local news and democracy to Floyd’s work and memory. [Please join us on March 17.](#) Floyd would have been there.

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

[Salish Sea News Week in Review 3/11/22](#): Tōhoku, fish sounds, container ship debris, Duwamish Tribe, octopus houses, B.C. cruise ships, Trans Mountain pipe conditions, buying Trans Mountain pipe, seaside habitat story maps, PS oil ban, B.C. rescue tug, Burrard Inlet, Washington transportation \$s, herring spawn

— 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 March 11, 2022

[Local news and democracy forum dedicated to journalist Floyd McKay](#)



Journalist and educator Floyd McKay knew from long experience why local journalism is important to democracy; shown here, McKay reads from his book, "Reporting the Oregon Story: How Activists and Visionaries Transformed a State."

By Mike Sato — The online forum "Trust 2022: Why Independent Local News is Important to a Strong Democracy" to be held on March 17 will be dedicated to the memory of journalist and educator Floyd McKay, who died in Bellingham on March 4. ([Read more.](#))

[Food security requires connection to land, each other](#)



Making connections to the land and each other is vital to meet the challenge of food security for all, say those involved in local food systems. A lunch break during an ag summit in the San Juan Islands this month brought an opportunity to do so.

By Sarah Reeves — Feeding communities is particularly challenging now, in the face of systemic upheaval, climate change and uncertainty. San Juan islanders making key connections to build resilience for future food security met recently in an ag summit. ([Read more.](#))

Masks off, vaxxed, ready to go ... what's next with COVID-19?



As the statewide indoor mask mandate lifts for some venues, many are looking forward to unmasking more indoors — and hoping for an easing of some of the anxiety the COVID-19 pandemic has infused into everyday life for the past two years.

By Kenneth Duncan — Washington residents won't be required to wear masks inside many public areas starting March 12. But experts advise not to throw out those masks yet and caution that vulnerable groups are still at high risk of infection from COVID-19. ([Read more.](#))

News from around the region

Health and Safety

British Columbia is scrapping its mask mandate starting Friday and will lift the Vaccine Card program and nearly all other protective measures against COVID-19 by April 8. ([The Tyee](#))

The Transportation Security Administration is extending the current mandate for mask use on public transportation and in transportation hubs through April 18. ([NPR](#))

A state-appointed technical advisory group of doctors, public health officers, state and local education leaders and community organizers voted 7-6 against recommending a COVID-19 vaccine requirement for students in K-12 schools. ([KNKX](#))

The state vaccine requirements ended March 1 and state mask requirements on March 12. (See: "[Masks off, vaxxed, ready to go out ... what's next with COVID-19?](#)" *Salish Current* March 11, 2022) We will continue

reporting through March COVID-19 risk ratings, infection rates per 100,000, vax rates (1+%, 2+%, and booster%).

[COVID Act Now](#). As of March 11:

Whatcom County, High Risk, 13.4/100K, 79.0% 1+vax, 71.2% 2+vax, 38.3% booster.

San Juan County, High Risk, 24.4/100K, 89.7% 1+vax, 81.5% 2+vax, 53.4% booster.

Skagit County, NO DATA, xxx/100K, 73.3% 1+vax, 66.6% 2+vax, 35.3% booster.

[Whatcom Health Department](#). As of Feb.26: Whatcom vax rates by school districts:

Bellingham 83%, Meridian 68%, Ferndale 72%, Mt. Baker 50%, Blaine 76%, Lynden 59%, Nooksack Valley 56%

Education

Amazon has donated \$100,000 to Northwest Indian College which will provide scholarships for Indigenous students to explore science through an Indigenous perspective. ([Cascadia Daily News](#))

High school students in British Columbia graduating in the 2023-24 year will be required to complete four credits of Indigenous-focused coursework. ([Times Colonist](#))

Government

San Juan County

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

The council continued its public hearing on the disposal of the sheriff's boat until its next meeting on March 22.

The council also announced delay of a public hearing on disposal of the sheriff's dog until a future date.

City of Bellingham

The city council will meet on March 14. [Agenda items](#) include:

Public Works and Natural Resources Committee:

- Report from the Feb. 16 Lake Whatcom Policy Group Meeting. [Report](#).

Community and Economic Development Committee:

- Introduction to the 2022-23 Consolidated Action Plan for Housing & Services. [Presentation](#).

Committee of the Whole:

- Discussion of In-Person Council Meetings. [Staff memo](#).
- Update on RVs and the 72-Hour Rule. [Staff memo](#).
- An Ordinance Amending the 2021-22 Biennial Budget Increasing Expenditures of American Rescue Plan Act Funding to Support the Childcare Industry. [Staff memo](#).

The council will meet again on March 28.

Whatcom County

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

The council unanimously authorized the County Executive to enter into a contract between Whatcom County and Opportunity Council to build a health, resource, and service navigation system that will provide timely connection of parents and children, pre-natal to five years, to a range of protective and supportive services, in the amount of \$77,797. [Staff memo](#).

The council unanimously approved docketing Comprehensive Plan and Development Regulation amendments (New Proposals: Capital Facilities, Comprehensive Plan Amendment, Growth Management Act, Zoning) [Staff memo](#). [Draft Resolution with Exhibit A](#).

The council unanimously approved holding a public hearing on March 22 on an ordinance repealing Ordinance 2022-005, temporary closure of Gulf Road. [Proposed Ordinance](#).

Council Appointments:

- The council with 5 votes appointed Ray Kamada to the Climate Impact Advisory Committee.
- The council unanimously approved the appointment of Alexandra Williams to the Flood Control Zone District Advisory Committee, alternate position.

The council will meet again on March 22.

Port of Bellingham

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

Consent Agenda:

A motion authorizing the Executive Director to sign a letter providing [Notice of Termination](#) to Western Washington University and the Western Crossing Development Corporation terminating the Memorandum of Understanding and dissolving the Western Crossing Development Corporation.

Presentation: Waterfront District Update

Action Item:

Motion to approve [Resolution No.1402](#) authorizing the sale of an additional 2,200 square feet of real property to Harcourt Developments Residential Bellingham, LLC, for Project No.2 and authorize the Executive Director to execute any and all documents necessary to complete the sale.

The commission will meet again on April 5.

For the people

Majority Democrats passed the largest Washington transportation budget at the close of the 2022 session, funding new spans over the Columbia River, wider highways, four new ferries, bus rapid transit expansions, free fares for youth, fish-friendly culverts and new bike trails and pedestrian bridges. [\(NW News Network\)](#)

[HB 1117](#), a bill to require salmon recovery to be included as a goal in the comprehensive plans made by cities and counties under the Growth Management Act, failed this session despite support from cities and

counties. Rep. Debra Lekanoff (D-40) was prime sponsor. ([Seattle Times/paywall](#))

[HB 1660](#) which would lift the statewide zoning restrictions against accessory dwelling units (ADU) failed to pass this session. Rep. Sharon Shewmake (D-42) was prime sponsor. ([The Urbanist](#))

Nature

Forecasts for returning chinook salmon on the Skagit and Samish river systems this year are neither better nor worse but other species may return in greater numbers, according to North of Falcon forecasts released this week. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Alana Quintasket, a Swimomish tribal senator, speaks about how warming seas and rivers are threatening ecosystems that are a lifeblood of tribal economics and cultures. ([NY Times/paywall](#))

Rosa Hunter, lab manager at the Salish Sea Research Center at Northwest Indian College on the Lummi Indian Reservation, uses Indigenous knowledge to identify toxic shellfish. ([Crosscut](#))

Business

The federal Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals will hear a dispute over whether the Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribe should be permitted to fish for salmon and steelhead in the Skagit River. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Washington State Ferries this week published its [COVID-19 Service Restoration Plan](#) giving top priority to the Anacortes/San Juan Islands run and identifying priority actions for resumption of service. (WSF)

Whatcom County executive Satpal Sidhu wrote in February in a [letter](#) to the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission regarding Puget Sound Energy's Clean Energy Implementation Plan that the plan "does not address the urgency of the climate crisis and needs to move more rapidly to reduce demand and convert to clean energy." ([Bellingham Herald/paywall](#))

The majority of the Skagit County's dairy farmers either break even or lose money, dairy farmer Ben Mesman said. Two dairies will be going out of business in the coming months. The Washington State University Skagit County Extension shows 23 dairy farms countywide at the end of 2020, three less than at the start of the year. There are currently 20 licensed dairies in the county, according to the state Department of Agriculture. Statewide, there are about 360 dairy farms, according to the Dairy Farmers of Washington. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

The provincial government of British Columbia amended its environmental assessment for the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion but continues to have concerns about response capabilities for potential oil spills. ([Vancouver Sun](#))

The five oil refineries on Puget Sound that provide almost all of Oregon and Washington's gasoline, diesel, and other petroleum products import millions of barrels of Russian crude annually. In 2021, they imported more than 10 million barrels of Russian crude. At last year's average world oil price of \$71 per barrel, the Northwest's 2021 imports from Russia cost more than \$700 million. Since 2009, the refineries have brought in 58 million barrels of Russian crude at an estimated cost of \$5.4 billion. ([Sightline Institute](#))

Whatcom County's Tidal Vision has developed a process for extracting a biodegradable biopolymer from crab shells that effectively binds with wastewater pollutants so they can be filtered out. The company was loaned \$75,000 by the Port of Bellingham in 2017 and has grown to 40 employees with plans to add 20 more jobs. ([KGMI](#))

The Uy Family Limited Partnership has proposed a new hotel in Fairhaven with restaurant, hotel rooms, conference rooms and apartments at 1514 12th St. ([The Front](#))

Community

John DeRousse, Deputy Chief, Everett Police Department; Dennis Flynn, Commander, Commerce, Colorado, City Police Department; and Rebecca Mertzig,

Police Chief, Stanwood Police Department/Snohomish County Sheriff's Office are semifinal candidates for the Bellingham Police Chief position. They will be introduced to the public at a virtual meeting on March 17, 5:30 p.m., and will answer questions from the public. Their biographies and instructions on how to participate in the virtual meeting are [found here](#). (City of Bellingham)

The Anacortes City Council voted Monday to remove all Russian flags from city displays because of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. ([GoSkagit](#))

The city of Bellingham is open to the community renaming what's now called Cornwall Beach Park and is taking suggestions. Learn about the park plans, read what others are suggesting and make your suggestion [here](#). (City of Bellingham)

Friends of the Forest is collaborating with Transition Fidalgo on an internship program that gives Anacortes High School students the chance to take part in forest monitoring in the Anacortes Community Forest Lands. ([Anacortes American](#))

Arts and Leisure

Salish Sea Early Music Festival: Russian Guitar and Beethoven's flute for our friends in Ukraine —Oleg Timofeyev, guitar, and Jeffrey Cohan, eight-keyed flute. Masks and vaccination required Suggested Donation: \$15, \$20 or \$25; 18 and under free.

- March 15, 7 p.m., Orcas Adventist Fellowship Church, [Eastsound](#)
- March 18, 7 p.m. St. Paul's Church, [Bellingham](#)
- March 19, 1:30 p.m., Brickworks, [Friday Harbor](#)
- March 19, 8 p.m., Grace Church, [Lopez Island](#)
- March 20, 1:30 p.m., Fir-Conway Lutheran Church, [Conway](#)

The Cold Millions by Spokane-based author Jess Walter is the Whatcom READS 2023 book selection. Leading up to the author events in March 2023, the Whatcom READS planning committee will work with community groups to create programs that explore themes from *The Cold Millions*. ([Whatcom Talk](#))

Jump in!

Register now for "[Trust 2022: Why Independent Local News is Important to a Strong Democracy](#)," a March 17 online public forum featuring Washington State Attorney General Bob Ferguson, *Washington Post* media columnist Margaret Sullivan, and journalist and documentarian Hedrick Smith speaking and taking questions. Presented by *Salish Current* and Village Books. [Register here.](#)

[Wings Over Water Northwest Birding Festival](#) returns on March 18-20 with in-person programs at Blaine, Birch Bay and Semiahmoo locations.

Check out the [Salish Sea Ecosystem Conference](#) program schedule for the three-day virtual conference Apr. 26, 27, 28. [Registration deadline](#) April 20.

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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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