



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

News of the week: Dec. 16, 2022

Dear Reader —

I hope you've taken the opportunity to read the original reporting and community essays we've published since subscribing to our weekly newsletter.

This week, Eric Scigliano's series on the [Fraser River](#) describes the tensions between water management and salmon, Matt Benoit delves into the [business of cannabis](#) 10 years after legalization of recreational sales, Kathryn Wheeler reports on changes in island culture as the [wealth gap](#) widens, and John Dunne updates us on how Jo Ann and Mouse have found [safe shelter](#).

We have a few ways to demonstrate our likes and dislikes in our daily lives: we get to elect candidates and vote on issues, we can choose to buy certain merchandise or services, we donate to a cause of our choice.

After watching, listening and reading about the antics of Elon Musk and his management of Twitter, we will no longer participate on his platform. For news organizations, that's not an easy decision since we rely on the once-promised "town square" for shared news. But if saying "no" is a vote showing no confidence in his management, we make that choice. (We will continue to engage with you on [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Vimeo](#), and soon on Instagram.)

I hope you make a choice by [supporting Salish Current](#) and the kinds of stories we bring you every week, along with our local news summaries and Community Voices forum.

But we can only do all this — to continue and grow community journalism that's available for all to read without advertising and outside influence — with your support.

We're nearing the home stretch of our [2X fundraising campaign](#). Through December, thanks to generous local

donors and national NewsMatch funders, **every dollar you donate will be doubled** and put towards fact-based, community journalism.

To the many who have donated, thank you. To those who have not, please [donate today](#).

— Amy Nelson, Publisher

Want more environmental news? [Salish Sea News and Weather](#) is a weekday curated compilation of news from Salish Sea news sources. Free via email or on the web.

[Salish Sea News Week in Review Dec. 16, 2022](#):

Margaret Mead, “forever chemicals,” slow ships, Wild Olympics, fish farm phase out, Link Is, computer models, net pen suit, humpbacks, Ken Balcomb

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

News from the *Salish Current*

[Tacoutche Tesse, the Northwest's great ghost river — Part 4: The death of a thousand cut-offs](#)



The salmon-rich Coquitlam River flows through Colony Farm Regional Park on its way to the Fraser River. Watershed Watch habitat programs director Lina Azeez is among those wanting to see more connection between river and floodplain.

By Eric Scigliano: The plight of wild salmon and the waters that support them is about big things but also a lot of little, unassuming places: creeks and sloughs and flooded fields and braided side channels. [Read more](#).

[Marijuana 2022: 10 years of legal pot](#)



Since legalization 10 years ago in Washington, retail sales of cannabis in the state have averaged over \$1 billion annually; sales in Whatcom County generated more than \$85 million in tax revenue through December 2021.

By Matt Benoit: Ten years after retail legalization, the local cannabis industry continues to grow green, both literally and financially. [Read more.](#)

[By the numbers: wealth gap grows in the San Juan Islands](#)



Businessman Patrick McEvoy — assessing a new route in his Friday Harbor climbing gym — has watched young residents in particular struggle to be able to afford to stay in the San Juan Islands, and is among those working in support of more

affordable community spaces.

By Kathryn Wheeler: A shortage of affordable housing, increasing affluence and tourism, and loss of island culture top lists of negative trends reported in the San Juan Islands. [Read more.](#)

[Community Voices / Hope has arrived](#)



Jo Ann and Mouse, whom Salish Current readers met six months ago, have found safe shelter at a tiny home village.

By John Dunne: Constant worries about being attacked or robbed are

in the past for a woman who has found housing — for now — in a tiny home village. [Read more.](#)

Letters to the Editor

- **Helen Moran:** Assistance League of Bellingham brings Christmas cheer

Our policy: Salish Current welcomes letters to the editor from our readers. Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address and daytime phone number. Those accepted for publication will focus on issues addressed in news articles or commentaries in Salish Current and be factual. No snark or put-downs will be acceptable; general nastiness will be rejected. Letters should not exceed 300 words and may be edited for length and clarity. Salish Current will publish letters sent to the editor at its sole discretion.

News from around the region

(The links found here may have limited access for those who don't subscribe to the source publication. Sorry for any inconvenience!)

Health and Safety

Mask up. Skagit County Health Department advises people to wear masks while around others due to a spike in respiratory illnesses that include COVID-19, influenza and others such as respiratory syncytial virus or RSV. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Education

Walkout. Following criminal citation of three Bellingham Public School assistant principals for failure to report a student's sexual assault reports, more than 100 Squalicum High School students walked out of classes to protest what they said is a lack of care and accountability from administrators about sexual assaults. ([Bellingham Herald/paywall](#))

Legal defense. The Bellingham School Board voted to cover the legal fees of three administrators accused of not reporting a student's sexual assault. ([KGMI](#))

Federal lawsuit. A federal lawsuit against the Bellingham School District has been filed by a former Squalicum High School student who says she was sexually assaulted while on the campus. ([KGMI](#))

U housing. Bellingham city councilmember Lisa Anderson said Western Washington University can help solve the problem of housing affordability and availability by building more housing on university property. ([The Front](#))

Budget woes. The Anacortes School District said its forecasted \$2.6 million shortfall will be closer to \$3.8 million by next year. ([Anacortes American/paywall](#))

Nature

Orca man. Ken Balcomb, founder of the Center for Whale Research in Friday Harbor, died Thursday at 82. Balcomb kept track of the population of southern resident orcas starting in 1976. His pioneering photo-identification work provided individual profiles of all the whales in the three endangered pods – J, K and L. ([KNKX](#))

Orca diet. Southern resident killer whales prefer Chinook salmon but when that's not available will eat chum and coho salmon, steelhead trout, lingcod and Pacific halibut. ([Bellingham Herald/Mongabay/paywall](#))
See also: How much of orca decline is in their DNA? ([Salish Current, Dec. 9](#))

Bigger park. Deception Pass State Park is 78 acres bigger on the north side of Deception Pass to Rosario Beach thanks to state and county agencies, Skagit Land Trust and Fidalgo Island community members. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Business

Whatcom water. The City of Lynden, Birch Bay Water and Sewer District and five rural watershed districts have signed an interlocal agreement on shared water resource concerns and have invited the cities of Ferndale, Everson, Nooksack, Sumas and Blaine to join in, as well as the countywide Public Utility District. ([Lynden Tribune/paywall](#))

New job rule. State employers on Jan. 1 will be required to give detailed wage or salary and benefits descriptions in job postings to reduce pay disparity. ([KGMI](#))

Community

Paying rent. What percentage of income is spent on paying rent? 32.9% in Whatcom County; 29.9% in Skagit County; and 29.5% in San Juan County, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. [American Community Survey \(Bellingham Herald/paywall\)](#)

Nooksack disenrollment. The Nooksack Tribe, based in Deming, is demanding that about 60 residents, who've all been making payments on their houses under a federal low-income housing program, leave their homes and tribal land because they did not provide proof of enrollment with a federally recognized Indian tribe. [\(KNKX\)](#)

Mercy Housing. Affordable family housing constructed by Mercy Housing at the Trailview apartments in Bellingham's Barkley neighborhood is completed, providing 77 units with one, two and three bedrooms and with 77 parking stalls on site. Qualified renters make 30–50% of the county's median income with rents ranging from \$811 to \$1,111. [\(Bellingham Herald/paywall\)](#)

Skagit Housing. A 51-unit affordable apartment complex off College Way in Mount Vernon costing \$18 million will be home to 50 low-income families, 38 of them farmworkers, eight homeless veterans and four with disabilities. [\(Skagit Valley Herald/paywall\)](#)

Fish theft. Lummi Scott Kinley, owner of owner of Native American Fisheries, was sentenced to three years probation and ordered to pay over \$143,000 towards salmon restoration programs after being convicted of stealing over 7,000 pounds of endangered Columbia River Chinook salmon from a Yakama Nation fishery. [\(KGMI\)](#)

Flood fund. Donations to help still-needy victims of last year's November floods will be matched up to \$150,000 until Dec. 31 by the Whatcom Community Foundation. [\(Lynden Tribune/paywall\)](#)

Blaine hire. Michael Harmon has been hired as Blaine's city manager and will begin work on Jan. 16. [\(The Northern Light\)](#)

Blaine zoning. After a two-hour public hearing attended by about 30 people, the city's planning commission

tabled a proposed zoning text amendment that would allow large manufactured home parks in east Blaine.

[\(The Northern Light\)](#)

Commentary

Skagit planning. Beverly Faxon and Christie Stewart Stein write: "A series of puzzling, and at times controversial, decisions and actions by the Skagit County Planning Commission led to a push for more transparency from county commissioners regarding the process of planning commissioner appointments. A group of Skagit citizens from Home Rule Skagit, as well as other local good government advocates, are behind that push. There have been small successes in this process, but more needs to be done. At a time when issues of growth are so crucial, the power of the planning commission seems to put them in the driver's seat of the county's future." [\(Skagit Scoop\)](#)

Arts and Leisure

Arts fest. Allied Arts 43rd Annual Holiday Festival of the Arts is held until Dec. 24 and features over 100 local artisans and craftspeople presenting their holiday goods. [Info.](#)

Jump in!

Lighted stroll. Take a lighted Christmas stroll through Pioneer Village hosted by the Ferndale Heritage Society, Dec. 16–17, 5–8 p.m. [Information.](#)

Vegan eats. Check out the Bellingham Vegan Winter Market on Dec. 18 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at V Go's Grocery, 1215 Cornwall Ave. [More info.](#)

Government

San Juan County

League of Women Voters of San Juan County's observer corps report on the San Juan County board of health meeting. [\(San Juan Journal/paywall\)](#)

City of Bellingham

The city council will hold a special meeting on Jan. 4 and a regular meeting on Jan. 9.

[Whatcom County](#)

The council will meet on Jan. 10.

[Port of Bellingham](#)

The commission will meet on Jan. 10.

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subscribe by reply mail. Your email address will never
be shared and you can unsubscribe at any time. —
Mike Sato, Managing Editor**

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democratic governance by reporting and curating local
news — freely accessible to all — with independence
and strict journalistic integrity.

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