

News of the week: Feb. 10, 2023

Dear Reader —

One of the most vital things *Salish Current* can do in the way of local journalism is present the local impacts of statewide, national and even international trends. This week, we do that in three ways:

- [Matt Benoit](#) focuses on retail cannabis trends statewide: why some still buy on the illegal market, and why the medical market is struggling.
- [Ava Ronning](#) describes how La Conner faced first-ever flooding from the Swinomish Channel, and is preparing for future similar events.
- [Vernon Damani Johnson](#) looks at how a divided populace is dealing with — or not — talking about racism, three years after the summer of rallies here and around the world following George Floyd’s murder.

Independent local journalism is the best way to inform and stimulate civil civic discussion. We’ve been energized by discussions around the League of Women Voters of Washington State study on [The Decline of Local News and Its Impact on Democracy](#) at the state level and in [a Bellingham / Whatcom County panel](#); we’ve been invited to participate in another discussion next week with the San Juan County chapter.

Our legislators are talking about local journalism as well, with not one but two bills under consideration. One would give for-profit news outlets a break in paying excise tax, and one would establish a fellowship for young journalists, giving shrinking newsrooms a boost — both in support of local journalism.

The news media are looking at the role and value of local news in individual communities as well. Two insightful (and sobering) recent articles are “[When Americans Lost Faith in the News](#)” in the *New Yorker* and “[A Bold Experiment in Local Journalism Hits the Rocks](#)” in *The Tye*.

We’ll keep doing our part to publish our local stories,

and are looking forward to more opportunities to meet with readers and supporters of local news around the area in the next several months.

All of our content is always free to read, with our work supported by [generous donors](#). Thanks for reading, thanks for giving — thanks for helping to revive local journalism!

— Amy Nelson, *Publisher*

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

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 Feb. 2, 2023:](#)

Umbrella Friday! Woodfibre LNG, electricity import, Indigenous marine protected area, sea lice, pink urchins, Big Oil profits, B.C. LNG, BP Cherry Point, salmon coalition.

News from the *Salish Current*

[Retail \(and illicit\) cannabis markets endure; medical in 'dire straits'](#)



From edibles to dried flower and more, retail stores offer myriad choices in cannabis products. Retail stores are the dominant source for Washington buyers, while medical patients find fewer outlets meeting their needs.

By Matt Benoit: The illegal cannabis market still exists alongside Washington's growing legal retail and struggling medical cannabis markets. Changes may be in store. [Read more.](#)

[Surprising channel flood leaves La Conner planning for future](#)



Restaurateur Albie Bjornberg was among those surprised when water from the Swinomish Channel flooded businesses and homes in La Conner — a first — on Dec. 27. The town council has established a commission to prepare for future

emergencies and prevent flood damage.

By Ava Ronning: “Climate change is real” is one lesson from Dec. 27 flooding that damaged La Conner’s downtown. [Read more.](#)

[Community Voices / Ongoing racial reckoning in post-George Floyd era](#)



Marchers in one of several Black Lives Matter rallies in Whatcom County were among many thousands across the country in the summer of 2020 protesting racism, following the murder of George Floyd by police.

By Vernon Damani Johnson: Commentary — Three years after the Summer of Racial Reckoning, a divided populace still grapples with damaging and sometimes deadly effects of racism, and with how to talk about the issues. [Read more.](#)

[Letters to the Editor](#)

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

Jail report. The Justice Project presented its final Whatcom County Public Health, Safety and Justice Facility Needs Assessment on Feb. 7 to the Whatcom County Council. ([Needs Assessment Report](#)) ([Presentation](#)) The report identified three possible locations for building a new Whatcom County jail: LaBounty Drive in Ferndale, adjacent to the current jail and the Irondale district in Bellingham. ([KGMI](#))

Noise. Bellingham's adoption of "Quiet Zones" and installation of safety equipment at railroad crossings to ensure safe horn volumes remains incomplete after more than a decade. ([The Planet Magazine](#))

Education

Black History Day. Celebrate Fredrick Douglass's birthday at Western Washington University on Feb. 14, 9 a.m. to Noon, with talks on Douglass and educator, activist, and writer Mary Ann Shadd Cary. [Info.](#)

School cuts. 80% of the Anacortes school district's budget is made up of staff salaries and benefits and the remaining amount of about \$5 million needs to be reduced by \$3.8 million to balance the budget, leaving only \$2 million for sports, clubs and extracurricular activities. ([Anacortes American/paywall](#))

Island school funds. San Juan island school districts are seeking legislative fixes to state school funding inequities based on regionalized property values and to lifting the levy lid. ([San Juan Journal](#))

The Border

"Got lucky." B.C. photographer Ryan Miller took more than 2,000 photographs to capture one breathtaking, perfect killer whale image. ([Times Colonist](#))

Nature

Surge. Climate change, art and building a bridge between them will be the theme of an upcoming exhibit, "Surge: Mapping Transition, Displacement, and Agency in Times of Climate Change," opening later this year at the Museum of Northwest Art in La Conner.

([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Woodstock Farm. Applications are open until March 1 from organizations or individuals who wish to manage the City of Bellingham's Woodstock Farm, a 23-acre facility along Chuckanut Drive. ([The Front](#))

Business

No limit. Environmental groups point out that the recent U.S. Army Corps of Engineers rule limiting BP Cherry Point refining capacity to 191 million barrels per year is no limit at all since the refinery can currently process 250,000 barrels a day (about 91 million barrels a year) and is now allowed to double its shipping capacity. ([The Northern Light](#))

Preserving farmland. Washington lost nearly 100,000 acres of farmland between 2001 and 2016. The Skagit County's Farmland Legacy Program, a county-funded initiative, recently finalized projects that will protect more than 105 acres of farmland. ([KUOW](#))

Tollbooths. Washington State Ferries will begin construction of four new tollbooths at its Anacortes terminal, including one ADA-accessible tollbooth and an ADA-compliant restroom in the toll plaza. Cost \$5 million; completion, July. ([Anacortes American/paywall](#))

Community

Reopening. After \$210,000 for renovation and repair, the Sumas Library will open on Feb. 15 since being flooded in November 2021. Local author Carl Crouse will read from his book, "The Waters Are Rising," at 6 p.m. ([KGMI](#))

Obit. Entrepreneur and civic activist John Charles "Jack" Delay passed away on Dec. 28, 2022, at age 80. ([Legacy](#))

Obit. Frances "June" Kite, 88, died on Dec. 31, 2021. June started the Starbird neighborhood group Friends of Conway Country Living (FOCCL) to successfully stop

the Bertlesen Farms proposed golf course and housing developing at the Starbird Road interchange with I-5. ([Legacy](#))

Free pass. Bellingham Public Library patrons can receive free admission passes for up to four people to the Whatcom Museum, the Spark Museum or the Mindport Exhibits, and get a new museum pass once every 60 days. ([KGMI](#))

Commentary

Trust. Half a century ago, most of the public said they trusted the news media. Today, most say they don't. What happened to the power of the press? Louis Menand writes. ([The New Yorker](#))

Arts and Leisure

Film Fest. Friday Harbor Film Festival's FREE Best of the Fest series Feb. 10 presents "Stepping into History: On the Old Military Road Trail," a short film directed by SJ islander Michael Noonan, and "Waterman," a feature documentary about Hawaiian great Duke Kahanamoku. San Juan Island Grange, 7 p.m. [Info here.](#)

Murder. Bellingham City Club's online forum, Feb. 22 at Noon, is "A Nicer Kind of Murder: The Evolution of Crime Fiction." What does the way crime victims are portrayed say about a society's culture? Author Matthew Sullivan speaks. [Register here.](#)

Early music. The Salish Sea Early Music Festival presents the Viennese Biedermeier Serenade (1815-1835) • with Oleg Timofeyev (guitar, Iowa City), Lindsey Strand-Polyak (viola) and Jeffrey Cohan (8-keyed flute). Feb. 21 Fir-Conway Lutheran Church, 7 p.m.; Feb. 22 Orcas Adventist Fellowship Church, 6 p.m.; Feb. 24 Bellingham First Presbyterian Church, 7 p.m.; Feb. 25 San Juan Brickworks, 12:30 p.m.; Feb. 25 Lopez Grace Church, 6 p.m. By donation.

Jump in!

Book sale. The Friends of the Bellingham Library holds its first book sale of the year, a one-day, five-hour pop-up sale on Feb. 11, 10 a.m.–3 p.m. at the Central Library Lecture Room. [Info.](#)

“Free Weekend.” Visit The Whale Museum for free Feb 11 through Feb. 14, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., while all admission fees will be waived. [Info.](#)

V-Day beach clean. Bring your sweetie to the NW Straits Surfrider Foundation Valentine's Day beach cleanup, Feb. 14, 11 a.m.–1 p.m., which starts at 1100 Hilton Ave. in Bellingham. Gather by the trailhead.

Snowy owl. Join award-winning author and photographer Paul Bannick on an intimate visual exploration of the life history of the Snowy Owl, based upon his 2020 book, “Snowy Owl: A Visual Natural History.” Feb. 15, 6–7:15 p.m., online, \$10, North Cascades Institute. [Info and registration.](#)

Land Bank. San Juan County Conservation Land Bank will hold an in-person open house meeting on plans for three Lopez preserves: Spencer Spit, Richardson Marsh and Lopez Hill. Lopez Center for Community and Arts, Feb. 15, 4–6 p.m. [Info.](#)

Government

For the People

[Washington State Legislature Bill information.](#)

[HB 1389](#)

Concerning residential rent increases under the residential landlord-tenant act and the manufactured/mobile home landlord-tenant act.

[Ramel, Lekanoff] SB 5435 [Lovelett]

[HB 1363](#)

Concerning vehicular pursuits. [Rule, Timmons, Lekanoff]

[HB1340](#)

Concerning actions by health professions disciplining authorities against license applicants and license holders. [Lekanoff, Ramel] SB 5400 [Lovelett, Shewmake]

[HB 1337](#)

(On floor calendar) Expanding housing options by easing barriers to the construction and use of accessory dwelling units. [Lekanoff, Ramel]

[SB 5190](#)

Increasing middle housing in areas traditionally dedicated to single-family detached housing. [Lovelett, Shewmake] HB 1110 [Lekanoff, Ramel]

[HB 1215](#)

Concerning the protection and restoration of riparian areas. [Lekanoff, Ramel] SB 5266 [Shewmake]

[SB5125](#)

Creating the Washington future fund program.

[Lovelett] HB 1094 [Ramel, Lekanoff]

[SB 5371](#)

Protecting southern resident orcas from vessels.

[Lovelett, Shewmake] HB 1145 [Timmons, Ramel]

Crosscut's Washington Bill Tracker: Crosscut will update their bill tracker throughout the rest of the session, which is scheduled to end on April 23. [Check it out.](#)

San Juan County

The council met on Feb. 7. Agenda items and video recording are found [here](#).

Observer Corps meeting reports are at [LWVSJ](#): County Council (Feb. 7); Port Commission (Feb. 8).

City of Bellingham

The council will meet on Feb. 13. [Agenda items](#) include:
Planning Committee:

- Work session on ordinance amending ADA unit regulations and process. [Staff memo.](#)

Committee of the Whole:

- Council response to Stakeholder Advisory Committee recommendations. [Updated Draft Letter.](#)

The Council will next meet on Feb. 27.

Whatcom County

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

Consent Agenda:

- Unanimously authorized the County Executive to enter into a contract amendment between Whatcom County and Washington State University to continue the jointly shared costs for faculty positions and program support for WSU Extension in the amount of \$255,071 for a total amended contract amount of \$2,986,499.90.

Other Items:

- Authorized 4-3 (Byrd, Elenbaas, Kershner opposed) the County Executive to enter into a contract amendment between Whatcom County and Hunt

Forensics for increased costs of services in the amended amount of \$285,820 for the first year for the total contract of \$3,356,602.

The council will meet again on Feb. 21.

Port of Bellingham

The commission met on Feb. 7. [Agenda items](#) included:
Presentations:

- Drayton Harbor Oyster Marine Ecotourism Update
[\[YouTube 17:45-53:48\]](#)

(See: "[Ocean-to-table journey of uniquely tasty oysters takes work](#)" *Salish Current*, Jan. 31, 2023)

- End-of-year financial update [\[YouTube 53:48-1:14:32\]](#)

Action Item:

- Unanimously approved [Resolution 1354\(H\)](#) to adopt the Harbors' Rules, Regulations, and Rates Handbook (Rules & Regulations) applying to Squalicum Harbor, Blaine Harbor, and Bellingham Cruise Terminal.

Other items:

- Commissioner Briscoe announced he will run for re-election.
- ABC Recycling will return to load scrap metal in the next week or two.

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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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