

News of the week: Feb. 17, 2023

Dear Reader —

First, a glance at the week's news ... then some news about news:

- Reporter [Kai Uyehara](#) takes a look at amendments proposed to the state's Death with Dignity Act, and shares insights into what the experience entails.
- Artist [Tony Angell](#) shares an image of the raspy-voiced Caspian tern, who populates our shorelines each summer.
- Author [Candace Wellman](#) and interviewer Dean Kahn discuss Candace's new book about "complex and weird" Edmund C. Fitzhugh, an influencer in early Washington Territory politics and around Bellingham Bay.

"The Decline of Local News and Its Impact on Democracy," the insightful and comprehensive study by the League of Women Voters of Washington, received more scrutiny this week, in an area that has experienced the decline first-hand.

Managing Editor Mike Sato and I joined San Juan Island journalists Heather Spaulding and Sharon Kivisto in a panel discussion hosted by the LWV of San Juan County early in the week to discuss the study. Like many other counties in the state in recent years, San Juan has seen newspapers disappear and staffs shrink. The concerns about what happens in the face of those losses are sobering: lower voter turnout, fewer people running for office, less engaged residents and a thinner sense of how well our public servants are serving us.

We heard specific examples of those concerns in the discussion in Friday Harbor, and in meetings later in the week with *Salish Current* supporters in Eastsound and Lopez Village.

Clearly, robust local journalism is vital for strong democracy and healthy communities. Media literacy and trustworthy news sources are vital, in the face of the polarizing threads of misinformation and

disinformation insinuated into our social media channels.

We've come away newly inspired by those conversations to keep building the *Salish Current*, expanding our coverage to build connections in our communities and bring more of the news strong democracies and healthy communities need.

Thank you to our generous donors for making it happen; for supporting always-free-to-read, in-depth news — [your donations](#) make it possible.

— 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. 17, 2023:](#)
Cabbage Friday, green crabs, "rights of nature," totem pole return, RCMP sued, GasLink pipeline, logging deferral, Denman Island protest.

News from the *Salish Current*

[Proposed changes to state's Death with Dignity Act spark debate](#)



Death doulas such as Nancy Simmers listen to patients as they review their lives and assist them in navigating the medical system, in line with Washington's Death with Dignity Act.

By Kai Uyehara: Amendments are being considered for Washington's Death with Dignity Act, as patients continue to work through the complex process. [Read more.](#)

[Determined Flight](#)

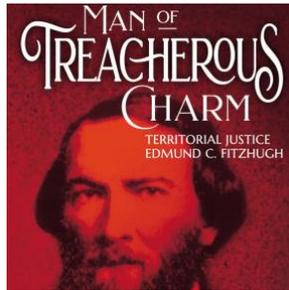


In Determined Flight, two Caspian terns are portrayed in a lithographic print enhanced with pastels.

Contributed by Tony Angell:
One of the larger terns — the Caspian — migrates throughout the world and

now resides in the Salish Sea. [Read more.](#)

[Who was Edmund C. Fitzhugh?](#)



"A thoroughly complex and weird man," influential in early Washington Territory politics and the development of industry around Bellingham Bay, is the subject of a new book.

Candace Wellman provides a portrait of a complex man who put Bellingham Bay on the economic and political map. [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

City vax. Bellingham ended its order requiring COVID-19 vaccinations for City of Bellingham employees, volunteers and on-site indoor contractors, effective Feb. 14. ([City of Bellingham](#))

Nurses. The legislature is proposing to address the shortage of nurses and the stresses they experience in hospitals by creating a nurse-to-patient ratio to require a limit on the number of patients a hospital nurse can care for at any given time. ([KUOW](#))

Education

Archives. Special Collections at Western Washington University Libraries is located on the sixth floor of the Wilson building, and features an immense archive of medieval texts, photographs, pieces of art and artifacts. ([The Front](#))

School art. The Anacortes Arts Festival and the Anacortes Schools Foundation have committed to fund the program that provides three elementary school art specialists for more three years. ([Anacortes American/paywall](#))

Small club. The Society of Professional Journalists at Western Washington University is currently the smallest club on campus with four members, all of them officers. ([The Front](#))

Nature

Orca rights. The San Juan County Council on Feb. 7 adopted a proclamation acknowledging the cultural, spiritual and economic importance of the Southern Resident killer whale to the people of San Juan County, the Salish Sea, the State of Washington and the world. ([San Juan Journal/paywall](#))

Mussel power. Public health agencies, tribal communities, scientists and citizens alike look to this small shellfish to determine the safety of clam harvests in Bellingham area. ([The Front](#))

Climate. Lauren Clemens is Whatcom County's climate manager, a new position, created to oversee the county's 2023 Climate Action Plan. ([CDN/paywall](#))

Business

Online shopping. Consumers' online buying took off during COVID-19 and continues now, say local city officials; in Lynden, about five-eighths of all transaction dollars have an out-of-town origin. ([Lynden Tribune/paywall](#))

Goodwill. Evergreen Goodwill plans to open a thrift store and multipurpose learning space in Sedro-Woolley in mid-2024. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Overtime. Farmworkers working more than 48 hours in a week now get paid time-and-a-half. Next year they will get paid overtime if they work more than 40 hours in a week, but new proposed legislation would allow farm owners to push the overtime threshold to 50 hours for a 12-week period, like during peak harvest season. ([KUOW](#))

Ferry union. Guemes Island ferry crew members voted unanimously last week to reject the latest contract offer from Skagit County. The most recent contract expired at the end of December 2019, but was extended through a memorandum of agreement until the end of 2021. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Community

Samish housing. The Samish Tribe will build affordable housing, Xwch'ángteng, which will be located in Anacortes near other Samish resource buildings so that the citizens who move into the new homes will have close access to healthcare, child care and their Samish community. ([Crosscut](#))

Short-term rentals. The Lynden City Council is reviewing its short-term rental policy to protect neighborhoods while also making the process of applying for a permit to own a short-term rental property easier in the hopes that fewer people will skirt the proper legal process. ([Lynden Tribune/paywall](#))

Manufactured homes. A second public hearing has been scheduled for April 15 by the Blaine Planning Commission about whether large manufactured-home parks should be allowed in east Blaine. ([The Northern Light](#))

Blake. Legislators need to respond to the state Supreme Court's February 2021 ruling, known as the Blake decision. That ruling struck down the state's felony drug possession law, essentially invalidating decades of criminal convictions and related penalties, like orders to pay restitution for such violations. Lawmakers earlier this month voted [Senate Bill 5536](#) out of the Senate Law & Justice Committee. [\(Crosscut\)](#)

Arts and Leisure

Textile dyeing. The Whatcom Museum presents "Katazome Today," contemporary visions of a unique and historically significant Japanese textile-dyeing process. Though June 11. [Information.](#)

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!

Work party. Join Skagit Land Trust at the Samish Island work party to plant native shrubs and trees. Feb. 25, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. [Register here.](#)

Raptors. North Cascades Audubon Society's Tuesday, Feb. 28, program features "Veracruz River of Raptors" with Sue Cottrell who will share the trip she co-led to Veracruz, Mexico, this past October to experience the "Rio de Rapaces." 7 p.m., Whatcom Museum Old City Hall Rotunda.

Government For the People

DUI judge. Whatcom Superior Court Judge Robert Olsen has ruled that newly elected Whatcom County District Court Judge may not hear 123 pending DUI

cases because Rands was a DUI defense attorney before he was elected last November. ([KGMI](#))

[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 may be found at [LWVSJ](#): County Council (Feb. 7); Port Commission (Feb. 8).

City of Bellingham

The council met on Feb. 13. [Agenda items](#) included:
Committee of the Whole:

- Council unanimously approved letter in support of Stakeholder Advisory Committee recommendations. [Updated Draft Letter.](#)

Old/New Business:

- The council will return to open public comment after regular City Council meetings beginning Feb. 27 for 30 minutes. Individuals can sign up ahead of time if desired and the discussion will be streamed and recorded via Zoom.

The Council will next meet on Feb. 27.

Whatcom County

The council will meet on Feb. 21. [Agenda items](#) include:

Consent Agenda:

- Request authorization for the County Executive to enter into an interlocal agreement amendment between Whatcom County and Washington State Department of Social and Health Services for developmental disabilities services in the amount of \$519,222 for a total amended amount of \$4,616,019.
- Request authorization for the County Executive to enter into an interlocal agreement amendment between Whatcom County and Washington State Department of Commerce to provide resources necessary to obtain and maintain housing stability to people who are experiencing homelessness or at imminent risk of homelessness in the amount of \$1,961,269 for a total amended agreement amount of \$10,013,119. [Staff memo.](#)

Port of Bellingham

The commission will meet on Feb. 21. [Agenda items](#) include:

Consent agenda:

- Authorize the Executive Director to execute [Amendment No. 1](#) to the Personal Services Agreement with DH Environmental, Inc. to support the Port's 2023 Environmental Compliance Assessment Program. The contract will be extended to Dec. 31, 2023, at a cost of

\$35,172.04, an increase of the total contract to \$65,171.88.

Presentations:

- Port of Bellingham EDA Revolving Loan Program Update
- SeaFeast Update

The commission will next meet on March 7.

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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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