



News of the week: March 17, 2023

Dear Reader —

Housing continues to make headlines this week.

[Kai Uyehara](#) reports on a house-building boom in Blaine, part of continuing efforts across our region to provide enough homes to meet demand — at all income levels. From one end of the spectrum, commentator [John Dunne](#) brings an update on the struggles of one formerly houseless person.

In the realm of the natural environment we all call home, [Nancy DeVaux](#) reports on a celebration marking the development of a management plan for the 10-year-old San Juan Islands National Monument.

Can we build housing fast enough to meet the need — to be precise, our share of the 1.1 million homes the state needs to add in the next 20 years, [according to the Department of Commerce](#)? The department has created new tools for localities to use as plans are updated over the next few years, to identify how much housing is needed for each bracket and to ensure sufficient emergency housing.

As local journalists, our role at the *Salish Current* is to keep you informed, without bias, without fear or favor, of what the issues and opportunities are in Whatcom, San Juan and Skagit counties. We have worked hard at that on the issues of homelessness and housing, with more than [two dozen articles on those topics](#) over the past three years. We will continue to do so; we share a commitment to the belief that everyone deserves a safe place to call home.

The influence of *Salish Current's* local news extends beyond our three counties. KUOW public radio, broadcasting throughout Western Washington, recently followed up on coverage by our reporters, interviewing Nancy DeVaux on San Juan Islands recycling and Kai Uyehara on shorelines threats from rising seas.

Thank you for reading the *Salish Current*, thank you for sharing our articles with friends and colleagues, and thank you for your [donations](#), which make it possible to keep publishing news that is always free to read for all. Being informed with the facts makes a valuable difference; it's the only path to better solutions for our community.

—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 March 17, 2023](#): Sleep Friday, sunflower sea star, Kiska, seaweed, methane, orca hunting, 'forever chemicals,' Haisla LNG, Audubon name, B.C. LNG, Trans Mountain pipe, Intalco.

News from the *Salish Current*

[House-building is booming in Blaine](#)



A single family home in the new Horizon at Semiahmoo development has been sold while still under construction.

By Kai Uyehara: Who's building, who's buying and who's left out as

construction takes off? [Read more.](#)

Management plan in place as San Juan Islands monument turns 10



Iceberg Point on the south end of Lopez Island is among 1,000 acres in the archipelago now protected under a management plan for the San Juan Islands National Monument.

By Nancy DeVaux: A celebration of the San Juan Islands National Monument 10th anniversary by federal officials and locals is planned for March 25 at Friday Harbor Grange Hall. [Read more.](#)

Community Voices / An unfortunate change of plans



Determined to walk again after a severe stroke, Jo Ann continues to wait for placement in assisted living. She suffered the stroke while living in a tiny-home village following a period of homelessness.

By John Dunne: Jo Ann, who with her dog, Mouse, moved from her RV to a tiny-home village, suffered a massive stroke which paralyzed her entire left side. [Read more.](#)

Truth, Trust and the News: 'Calling Bullshit' — free tickets!

Truth, Trust and the News
CALLING BULLSHIT
An evening with Carl Bergstrom and Jevin West

How do **YOU** decide what is true?

Thursday, April 13, 7:00 p.m.
FREE
Heiner Auditorium, Whatcom Community College

So much information! What is true? How do YOU know?

The authors of “Calling Bullshit: The Art of Skepticism in a Data-Driven World” tell how to sort it out. [Read more.](#)

Letters to the Editor

- Tom Wooten: Oil spill considerations

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

Masking. Local health providers are evaluating mask policies before the statewide mask mandate for health care facilities ends on April 3. Some providers may continue to require masks. ([Skaqit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Education

School funding. The lawsuit against Washington state that claims reliance on local taxpayers to fund basic construction costs is a violation of the state's Constitution was heard in the state's Supreme Court this week. The court's judgment could mean a massive shift in the way school construction is funded, or no change at all. ([Seattle Times/paywall](#)) See: "Bond system, wealth inequity are targets of school-funding suit" ([Salish Current March 2, 2023](#))

Nature

Sea stars. Research at the University of Washington Friday Harbor Labs seeks to breed a new generation of sunflower sea stars which have been decimated by disease and are candidates for listing as endangered by the federal government. ([Seattle Times/paywall](#)) See:

"Devastating wasting illness of influential, iconic sea stars still a mystery" ([Salish Current, Oct. 21, 2022](#))

Name change. The National Audubon Society has chosen to keep its name and not sever its ties from its enslaver namesake. ([Washington Post/paywall](#)) See: "Changing names to step out of a racist shadow" ([Salish Current Sept. 29, 2022](#))

Creek estuary. The Blaine-Birch Bay Park and Recreation District 2 completed a land purchase from the Whatcom Land Trust in February to complete a 24-acre park along California Creek that will provide a kayak launch, trail access and habitat conservation for salmon and migratory shorebirds. ([The Northern Light](#))

Daylighting. Padden Creek in Bellingham is being restored to improve salmon habitat and water quality, and tie the broader community together. ([The Planet Magazine](#))

Outstanding waters. The Cascade River in Skagit County is among three rivers and one lake designated under the Clean Water Act as Outstanding Resource Waters, which gives them the highest level of water-quality-based protection in the state. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Derelict gear. The Northwest Straits Foundation has started the second year of a program to find and remove derelict crab pots. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Business

End of the line. Alcoa Corporation announced on Thursday the permanent closure of the Intalco aluminum smelter near Ferndale. ([Bellingham Herald/paywall](#)) See: "Intalco restart: can 'green' aluminum get 'clean' power?" ([Salish Current July 7, 2022](#))

Seaweed. Can seaweed feed us, combat climate change, support coastal communities, provide wildlife habitat, and more? ([Hakai Magazine](#)) See: "Can kelp farming help save our marine environment?" ([Salish Current Oct. 7, 2022](#))

Spill. A BNSF train derailed on the Swinomish Reservation just after midnight Thursday morning, and

spilled about 3,100 gallons of diesel fuel between the shore of Padilla Bay and an RV park next to the Swinomish Casino and Lodge. ([KUOW](#))

Carbon-neutral. Kaiser Borsari Hall, Western Washington University's new electrical and computer engineering, energy science, and computer science building, is expected to be the only carbon-neutral academic facility in the region when completed in early 2025. ([Bellingham Herald/paywall](#))

Public works. The city of Nooksack has hired Scott Fox as its public works director succeeding Bob Skillman, who retired at the end of 2022 after nearly a decade with the city. ([Lynden Tribune/paywall](#))

Community

Shelter. First Step Center, Skagit County's only low-barrier homeless shelter in Burlington, will remain open until the end of April after receiving a \$270,000 grant from the state Dept. of Commerce. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Obit. Frank Leeming, publisher and editor of the *Journal of the San Juans* from 1983 to 1992, died in Arkansas in February this year at the age of 84. ([San Juan Journal/paywall](#))

GoFundMe. Local activist Stoney Bird suffered a horrific fall in late November and a GoFundMe campaign has been established for his medical expenses and caregiving. For more information and to donate, [go here.](#)

Opioid suit. Skagit County Commissioners will decide whether to settle a suit against drug manufacturers and distributors for \$362,000 a year for 17 years to fund Skagit County substance abuse programs. The county previously settled a suit against manufacturers for payments of \$181,000 a year. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

New trestle. The state Department of Natural Resources has granted the city of Anacortes \$10,000 to study replacing the recently repaired Tommy Thompson Trail trestle's old creosote-soaked wood pilings with metal. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Commentary

Cursed? Matt Benoit in Whatcom Talk writes: "For decades, an urban legend has persisted in Bellingham. Maybe you've heard of it: long ago, several Chinese miners were buried or drowned, accidentally or intentionally, in the old Sehome coal mine...But where did this supposed 'curse' originate? Did Chinese laborers really die in an old coal mine?" ([Whatcom Talk](#))

Arts and Leisure

Poetry contest. The Sue C. Boynton Poetry Contest is open to Whatcom County poets until the end of March. [Details here.](#)

Showtime. The photography exhibit, "Vintage Vaudevillians," promoting early vaudeville acts in Bellingham, returns to the Lightcatcher in partnership with Whatcom READS. Through May 31. [Info.](#)

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

Jump in!

Birds. The Wings Over Water Northwest Birding Festival comes to Blaine, Birch Bay and Semiahmoo for its 20th annual event. March 17–19. ([The Northern Light](#))

Work party. Skagit Land Trust invites you to the Day Creek work party to plant native trees in areas that were former pasture lands and not a restored creek. March 18, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. [Info and registration.](#)

Planting. The Lummi Island Heritage Trust invites you to come and help plant 800 trees to reclaim a former gravel mine on the southeast side of Lummi Island on March 18 and 19, 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. [Info here.](#)

Relations. Bellingham City Club presents Professor Kristen Harris discussing "US–China Relations: Where are we, how did we get here, what can be done?" March 22, Noon. [Register here.](#)

Sea wonder. Learn about magnificent marine mammals — and a dog, beaked creatures (including octopuses!), small fish that have a big impact, and giants — in the

seaweed world, as well as the many stories that bring this wondrous ecosystem to life at "Wonders of the Salish Sea," on Zoom, March 27, April 3, 17 and 24, 7 p.m., \$25. [Info and register here.](#)

Lake Whatcom. The Lake Whatcom Management Program holds its annual joint council and commissioners meeting on March 29, 6:30–8:30 p.m. in Bellingham council chambers and via zoom. Public is invited. [Information.](#)

Comp Plan. The Bellingham-Whatcom chapter of the League of Women Voters presents an online forum, "Comprehensive Planning—What Is It and How Can It Help?" on March 30, 6–7:30 p.m. [Info.](#)

Government

Candidates. Kim Lund is challenging Bellingham Mayor Seth Fleetwood; Atul Deshmane and Jon Scanlon are contending for the Whatcom County Council seat that Carol Frazey is vacating; Lisa Anderson and Hannah Stone are running for election to the Bellingham City Council; Bellingham Port Commissioner Bobby Briscoe and Whatcom County Auditor Steve Oliver will campaign for reelection; and Peter Donovan is a candidate for Mount Vernon mayor. [\(CDN/paywall\)](#)

Legislature

Meet up. 40th Legislative District legislators Sen. Liz Lovelett, Rep. Debra Lekanoff and Rep. Alex Ramel will hold an in-person Town Hall on March 18, 11 a.m. to Noon at the Aqua Room, Skagit PUD #1, Mount Vernon. To submit questions in advance, [go here.](#)

Meet up. 42nd Legislative District legislators Sen. Sharon Shewmake, Rep. Alicia Rule and Rep. Joe Timmons will hold an in-person Town Hall on March 18, 1–2 p.m. at the Ferndale High School. To submit questions in advance, [go here](#)

Bill progress. Housing, firearm bills push past cutoff; rent control, recycling bills left behind [\(NW News Network\)](#) See also: Legislative Bill Tracker [\(Crosscut\)](#)

[Washington State Legislature Bill information.](#)

[HB 1363 did not reach the House floor. Rule\]](#)
[\[SB 5352](#) crossed over] Concerning vehicular pursuits.

[HB1340](#)

[Passed out of the House; in Senate Health and Long Term Care.] Concerning actions by health professions disciplining authorities against license applicants and license holders. [Lekanoff, Ramel]

[HB 1337](#)

[Passed House; forwarded to Senate.] Expanding housing options by easing barriers to the construction and use of accessory dwelling units. [Lekanoff, Ramel]

[HB 1110](#)

[Crossed over to Senate.] Increasing middle housing in areas traditionally dedicated to single-family detached housing. [Lekanoff, Ramel]

[SB 5371](#)

[Passed Senate; in House Agriculture and Natural Resources.] Protecting Southern Resident orcas from vessels. [Lovelett, Shewmake]

San Juan County

The council met on March 13. [Agenda items and video link are here.](#)

Discussion:

- Argyle Lots RFQ follow-up.
- Legislative bills update.

Observer Corps. League of Women Voters San Juan meeting reports. [Board of Health March 15 meeting](#)

The council is scheduled to meet on March 21.

City of Bellingham

The council met on March 13. [Agenda items](#) included:

Committee of the Whole:

- Ordinance prohibiting use of controlled substances in public places.

Rejected. City Council rejects proposed ordinance on public drug use in Bellingham ([KGMI](#))

Final Consideration:

- The council adopted (6-0, Lilliquist absent) an ordinance to require 120 days' notice of any rent increases for residential units.

Executive Session:

- Property acquisition. The council approved for \$463,000 acquisition of three properties totaling about 13.5 acres of land in the Lake Whatcom watershed. [\(KGMI\)](#)

The council will meet again on March 27.

Whatcom County

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

Public Hearing:

- Resolution adopting the Healthy Children's Fund Implementation Plan. [Memo and resolutions.](#)

Consent Agenda:

- Request authorization for the County Executive to enter into a contract amendment between Whatcom County and Pyramid Communications for public communications for the Incarceration Prevention and Reduction Task Force in the amount of \$138,850, for a total amended amount of \$227,650. [Staff memo.](#)

Other Items:

- Request authorization for the County Executive to enter into a contract amendment between Whatcom County and Opportunity Council to support operations at the permanent supportive housing facility 22 North in the amount of \$25,000 for a total amended contract amount of \$268,950. [Staff memo.](#)

The council is scheduled to meet again on April 11.

Port of Bellingham

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

Consent Agenda:

- Motion to the Port Commission to approve the [modified Interlocal Agreement](#) for Joint Consultation and Government Affairs Services between Whatcom County, the City of Bellingham, and the Port of Bellingham.

Public Hearing:

- Amend the comprehensive scheme of harbor improvements. [Plan.](#)

Presentations: [[YouTube](#)]

- Annual SBDC Update
- Quiet Sound/Whale Report Alert System

The commission will meet again on April 11.

Like this newsletter? Share it. And it's easy to subscribe by reply mail. Your email address will never be shared and you can unsubscribe at any time. — 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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