



News of the week: March 24, 2023

Dear Reader —

March is always a busy time for farmers. The San Juan Islands are seeing even more activity of late, with a surge of young farmers, as [Kathryn Wheeler](#) reports.

March is also National Kidney Month, so an ideal time to share [Helene Fellows'](#) story of her life-affirming and life-saving experience as a kidney donor.

This particular March is the third anniversary of the beginning of worldwide efforts to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic. [Matt Benoit](#) reports on whether Whatcom County is ready for a possible next pandemic.

One point in particular that public health director Erika Lautenbach makes in the article is disturbing: A few weeks after shutdowns began, broadly distributed misinformation began to fuel pushback to health measures. Messaging “became increasingly antagonistic ... a downhill slide to outright contempt and mistrust.”

Misinformation and disinformation are trust-killers, indeed. Yet we all need to trust, at least selectively ... human society falls apart otherwise. When misinformation and disinformation flood our feeds, trust in valuable expertise such as medicine and science is damaged. Also, tragically, during the COVID-19 pandemic people who were beloved family members, close friends, valued colleagues died as a result.

Want more tools to help fight the flow of bad information? [Sign up for your free ticket](#) for Truth, Trust and the News 2023, and join the discussion at Heiner Auditorium on April 13. Researchers Carl Bergstrom and Jevin West will share from their book “Calling Bullshit: The Art of Skepticism in a Data-Driven World.”

Salish Current was founded to counter misinformation and disinformation by providing reliable, accountable, nonpartisan local news, always free to read, produced with independence and integrity. Doing that requires transparency and diligence, and we're continually impressed by the effort and skill our reporters and editors put into doing that job. And every day we're grateful for the [support you provide](#) that makes 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 March 24, 2023:](#)

Exxon Valdez, Filthy Four, inbred orcas, suspect science, Swinomish v. BNSF, cruise ships, Washington ferries, fish farm closure, train derailment.

News from the *Salish Current*

[Is Whatcom County ready for the next pandemic?](#)



A tactic of the times: Social media campaigns featured call-outs to medical professionals among public health messages developed to reach young adults — an at-risk group— during the COVID-19 shutdown.

By Matt Benoit: Three years after COVID-19 upended society, are state and local organizations ready for the possibility — however unlikely — that another pandemic could strike? [Read more.](#)

Back to the land in the islands — Part 1: Locally growing



Young farmers such as Chelsea Thorpe of Rising Oak Farm is among those bringing new practices and new energy to the agricultural scene in the San Juan Islands, and working to bolster local food sources.

By Kathryn Wheeler: Can there be more than tourism in the San Juan Islands? [Read more.](#)

Community Voices / Donating a kidney is a life-affirming experience



Registered nurse and kidney donor Helene Fellows tells the story of her life-affirming — and life-saving — experience. March is National Kidney Month, bringing awareness to an often silent disease.

By Helene Fellows
Kidney donation was simply "the right thing to do": a donor tells her story. [Read more.](#)

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



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

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

Audit. State audit found that San Juan and Skagit counties lacked internal controls in preparing financial reports of how COVID-19 relief funds were spent but no misuse or fraud was found. ([Crosscut](#))

The Border

Nexus. The Nexus trusted-traveler program will ramp back up fully within five weeks, allowing frequent border-crossers to complete their applications and speed up their trips, the Canadian federal government said Monday. ([CBC](#))

Crossing. Planning will begin to replace the communication system that currently calculates wait times to cross the border, thanks to a \$450,000 federal grant to the Whatcom Council of Governments. ([Bellingham Herald/paywall](#))

COVID. A two-year study to be undertaken by Western Washington University's Border Policy Research Institute and Simon Fraser University will look at the impacts of travel restrictions during the pandemic with the goal of preventing future inequities. ([The Northern Light](#))

Nature

Inbreeding. New genetics study has identified how inbreeding among endangered Southern Resident killer whales may be pushing the species toward extinction. ([Puget Sound Institute](#)) See also: "How much of orca decline is in their DNA?" ([Salish Current, Dec. 9, 2022](#))

Train spill. The Federal Railroad Administration has confirmed that a safety device meant to keep trains from plunging into Puget Sound caused a BNSF train to derail on March 16 and spill oil on the Swinomish Reservation instead of into the Swinomish Slough. ([KUOW](#))

Business

Ferries. Legislators are debating lifting a "Build in Washington" requirement for new ferries, to obtain new vessels faster and cheaper. ([NW News Network](#))

Train suit. The Swinomish Indian Tribal Community suit against BNSF began in federal court this week to determine whether the railroad had intentionally violated a 1991 agreement limiting the number of cars and number of trips carrying highly combustible crude oil across tribal land. ([Seattle Times/paywall](#))

Birdwatching. Local organizations, farmers and the state Fish and Wildlife agency are launching the BirdWise program to educate visitors and reduce damage to Skagit Valley farmland during birdwatching and tulip viewing. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

New friend. Friends of the San Juans has named Eva Schulte as its executive director. She was formerly executive director of Whatcom Community College Foundation and is an executive committee board director for the Sierra Club Foundation and chair of the foundation's national grants committee. ([Friends of the San Juans](#))

Cherry Point. BP announced plans to invest \$1.5 billion and build at Cherry Point low-carbon facilities to produce sustainable aviation fuel and green hydrogen to meet its net-zero climate goals. ([Bellingham Herald/paywall](#))

Biofuel. [Senate Bill 5447](#), which has crossed from the Senate to the House, would provide large producers of

biofuel, a greener jet fuel, a preferable business and occupation tax rate of 0.275%. ([Post Alley](#))

Polluting costs. The Egg Lake Quarry, a San Juan Island sand and gravel mine, was fined \$53,000 by the Washington State Department of Ecology after years of noncompliance. ([CDN/paywall](#))

Community

Homeless. Skagit County's only day center for the homeless closed Wednesday, leaving those who used the center without a place to go. ([Skagit Valley Herald/paywall](#))

Commentary

What's fair? Danny Westneat in the *Seattle Times* writes that tying school construction projects to local property taxes is unfair but Wahkiakum County voters, where the school district is suing the state for more state funding, haven't supported local, state or federal financial help for schools. "Wahkiakum is arguing in court that 'We Belong Together,' while at the same time its voters say no to most any government support for schools, there or anywhere else. Not sure democracy can function with that level of nihilism." ([Seattle Times/paywall](#)) See also: "Bond system, wealth inequity are targets of school-funding suit" ([Salish Current, March 2, 2023](#))

Arts and Leisure

Quartet. Bellingham Festival of Music's final "Play it Forward" performance features the Quartet Integra, March 24, 7 p.m., Sehome High School Auditorium. Donation, \$15. The quartet includes members Kyoka Misawa and Rintaro Kikuno on violin, Itsuki Yamamoto on viola and Anri Tsukiji on cello. [Information.](#)

Makers Mart. Vendors sell handmade goods like soaps, fine art, food, clothing candles, jewelry and more at Bellingham's Market Depot, March 25, 10 a.m.–4 p.m. [Info.](#)

Salish Sea Early Music Festival • Obligato Harpsichord and Flute (1720-1760) • with David Schrader (harpsichord, Chicago) and Jeffrey Cohan (baroque flute). March 28, 7 p.m. Fir-Conway Lutheran Church; March 29, 6 p.m., Orcas Adventist Church;

March 31, 7 p.m., Bellingham First Congregational Church; April 1, 12:30 p.m., Lopez Grace Church; April 1, 7 p.m., Friday Harbor Brickworks. Donations \$20, \$25. 18 and younger always free.

Whatcom Reads. “Red Paint: The Ancestral Autobiography of a Coast Salish Punk” by Sasha Lapointe is Whatcom READS' 2024 featured title. ([Whatcom Talk](#))

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!

Ivy league. Remove invasive ivy along the Middle Fork Nooksack River with NSEA and the Whatcom Land Trust, March 25, 9 a.m.–Noon. [Registration required.](#)

Plant sale. The 35th annual plant and tree sale will be held March 25, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., at the Hillcrest parking lot at the corner of 14th Street and Old Fairhaven Parkway. [Info.](#)

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.](#)

Red knot. Learn about those red knots and their migration patterns! Paul DeBruyn, retired WDFW biologist, reveals all at the monthly meeting of the North Cascades Audubon Society, March 28, 7 p.m., Whatcom Museum, Old City Hall. \$5 donation, members free.

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.](#)

EOB. The 18th annual Essence of Bellingham photo completion is open to community member submittals that capture the essence of living, working and playing in Bellingham. May 1 deadline, [entry details here.](#)

Government

Whatcom sheriff. Sheriff Bill Elfo announced he will not run for reelection; Undersheriff Doug Chadwick and Blaine police chief Donnell Tanksley announced their candidacy. ([KGMI](#))

Climate budget. State senators proposed in their capital and operating budget investing in electrifying ports, schools and homes, conserving old forests, and helping relocate Indigenous communities who are vulnerable to climate change by using funds from the state's first greenhouse gas auction and Climate Commitment Account. ([Seattle Times/paywall](#))

Legislative Bill Tracker (*Crosscut*)

[Washington State Legislature Bill information.](#)

[SB 5352](#)

[Crossed over from House to Senate] 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 21. [Agenda items](#) included:

- The council unanimously approved starting a paid intern program with a budget not to exceed \$65,000.
- The council heard a presentation on the farmer/rancher listening sessions. (1:49:27)
- The council discussed adoption of a 1/10th of 1% sales tax for affordable housing made possible by RCW 82.14.530 and placed the action on its April 4 agenda. (2:43:37)

The council will meet on March 27. [Agenda items](#) include:

- Discussion of American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA) Funds update.
- Sheriff's office briefing on use of drones.

City of Bellingham

The council will meet on March 27. [Agenda items](#) include:

Public Works and Natural Resources Committee:

- Private Electric Vehicle Charging Stations in the Public Right-of-Way. [Staff memo.](#)

Public Health, Safety and Justice Committee:

- Healthy Children's Fund Implementation Plan. [Presentation.](#)

Community and Economic Development Committee:

- 2023-2027 Consolidated Planning Process. [Presentation.](#)

Committee of the Whole:

- An Ordinance Prohibiting the Use of Controlled Substances in Public Places. [Ordinance.](#)

The council will meet again on April 10.

Whatcom County

The council met on March 21. [Agenda items](#) included:

Public Hearing:

- The council approved 6-0, (Donovan abstained) a substitute resolution adopting the Healthy Children's Fund Implementation Plan with the amendment to Page 12 to read, "No individual or provider receiving or offering services shall be required to be vaccinated for COVID-19 to participate." [Substitute resolution.](#)

Consent Agenda:

- The council approved 4-2-1 (Byrd, Frazey opposed, Galloway abstained) authorization for the County Executive to enter into a contract amendment between Whatcom County, the City of Bellingham and Port of Bellingham for increased cost of joint consultation and government affairs services in the amount of \$48,000 per year.
- The council approved 5-2 (Elenbaas, Kershner opposed) 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:

- The council approved (6-1, Byrd opposed) 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 will meet again on April 11.

Port of Bellingham

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

Consent agenda adopted unanimously.

Public Hearing:

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

Presentations:

- Annual SBDC Update [[YouTube](#) 14:00]

- Quiet Sound/Whale Report Alert System [[YouTube](#) 42:56]

The commission will meet again on April 11.

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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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