

Skagit Audubon Conservation Notes March 7, 2023

The first two items below were on the agenda for Skagit Audubon's March 7, 2023 board meeting.

1. North Fork Stillaguamish Landscape Analysis Project: Environmental Assessment

On May 20, 2022, Skagit Audubon joined Pilchuck Audubon in submitting a comment letter to the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest on the scoping phase of this project. The project addresses a variety of proposed actions and activities on almost 62,000 acres in the North Fork Stillaguamish River drainage, mostly within Skagit County. These acres are part of the national forest designated the "Finney Adaptive Management Area" under the Northwest Forest Plan. The project plan addresses vegetation management such as timber harvest, recreational activities, and habitat enhancement to improve conditions for aquatic and terrestrial wildlife. Several Skagit Audubon board members attended a U.S. Forest Service field trip to the project area last August. After considering the scoping comments, the Forest Service has written a draft Environmental Assessment (EA), which is open for public comment through March 16, 2023. The project documents are at [Forest Service \(usda.gov\)](https://www.usda.gov/forest-service). Instructions on how to comment are at [snoq \(govdelivery.com\)](https://www.govdelivery.com). Skagit Audubon will submit comments on behalf of the chapter.

2. 2023 State Legislative Priorities for Audubon Washington

Biodiversity Funding for WDFW

One of Audubon Washington's priorities during the current legislative session is to support Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's (WDFW) request for funding to research, manage, and protect non-game species. Washington has a significant level of biodiversity as we birders know, but WDFW has very little funding to identify and address threats to this biodiversity. You can express support using this form provided by Audubon Washington: [Tell your Legislators: Prioritize Vulnerable Species in the State Budget | Audubon Washington | Audubon Washington](#) (replace my name and address with your own).

HB 1181, adding climate to the Growth Management Act

Another of Audubon Washington's priorities, one shared by many other environmental groups, is passage of House Bill (HB) 1181 ([Washington State Legislature](#)) to add a requirement for climate planning to the Growth Management Act of 1990 (GMA). Under the GMA counties and municipalities of a certain size are required to each develop a Comprehensive Plan addressing development and land use. Although some have proactively included climate resiliency, sea level rise, etc. in updating their plans, others, such as Skagit County have not. This bill would likely have reached the Governor's desk last session had the clock not run out. The state constitution requires the legislature's regular session to end April 23rd in long session years, such as this one. During 2022's short session the deadline was March 10th.

HB 1181 passed the House on March 3rd, five days ahead of the cut-off deadline for bills to pass out of their house of origin (see the legislative calendar for all the cut-off dates during the session: [Washington State Legislature 2023 Session Cutoff Calendar](#)) The bill now has to make its way through the Senate. At this writing there is not yet a scheduled date for that to begin or an indication of the committee which will first consider the bill.

Surveying Puget Sound marine shoreline habitat: SB 5104

Hard armoring or other types of development have degraded approximately 80% of Puget Sound's shorelines. Certain forage fish (e.g., smelt, sand lance) which loom large in the diets of many seabirds, salmon, and marine mammals spawn on beaches with substrate having certain characteristics. Degraded shorelines produce far fewer forage fish with resulting effects up the food chain. To efficiently restore these degraded shorelines a basic need is accurate, up-to-date mapping of the degraded areas. Senate Bill 5104 would fill that need. As of this writing the bill awaits a vote on the Senate floor. See [Washington State Legislature](#). If SB 5104 does not pass the Senate by March 8th so that it can move on to the House, it will die for this session.

Other Audubon Washington priorities

You can check the progress of Audubon Washington's priority bills and other legislation of interest at [Bill Tracker: 2023 Legislative Session | Audubon Washington](#)

Audubon Washington succinctly states its policy priorities for the session in a one-page information sheet at [2023 audubon legislative priorities one pager 12.2022_0.pdf](#). This being a year for writing the state's biennial budget, you will see that several Audubon Washington priorities, in addition to the biodiversity funding mentioned above, relate to expenditures rather than policy bills. We will hear more about progress on those fiscal priorities as the session continues.

Environmental Priorities Coalition

As part of the Environmental Priorities Coalition Audubon Washington also supports the coalition's legislative goals, some of which directly overlap Audubon's specific priorities mentioned above: [Environmental Priorities Coalition - Washington Conservation Action \(waconservationaction.org\)](#).

For ideas on how you can voice your opinion using the Washington Legislature's website go to [Legislature Home \(wa.gov\)](#) and look for "Let your voice be heard" on the right side of the page. Also see previous Skagit Audubon Conservation Notes (<https://skagitaudubon.org/conservation/notes>) and Conservation Reports in the *Skagit Flyer* newsletter (<https://skagitaudubon.org/conservation/essays>).

Other issues Skagit Audubon is following

1. Washington Department of Natural Resources' Trust Land Transfer Program

On February 27th an important bill for habitat protection in Washington State passed the House on a bi-partisan vote. HB 1460 would improve the Trust Land Transfer Program in the Department of Natural Resources. Since 1989 this program has provided a means for ecologically significant lands in DNR's portfolio to be taken out of timber harvest and replaced by other acres that will produce equivalent revenues for the trust beneficiaries. The beneficiaries are various public institutions and governmental entities. The legislature approves expenditures in the capital budget to fund the program. A notable local result of this program is the protection of the core 1,600 acres of the Blanchard Forest (renamed the Harriet Spanel Forest) which were removed from timber harvest in 2019 ([Blanchard Mountain | Conservation Northwest \(conservationnw.org\)](https://www.conservationnw.org/)).

Over the years, Skagit Audubon has written in support of the Trust Land Transfer Program, sometimes in collaboration with Washington Wild. This statement from Washington Wild describes the program:

“In Washington state, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) manages more than three million acres of state trust land. Revenue generated by these trust lands—such as timber from working forests or leasing for agriculture grazing—enters a fund that supports K-12 schools, universities, capitol buildings, and state institutions, as well as essential services such as fire, EMT, ports, and libraries. As such, ensuring strong economic returns from trust lands has been, and will always be the primary focus.

“However, DNR also recognizes that certain state trust lands provide valuable fish and wildlife habitat and excellent recreational opportunities. To balance these different objectives, it can be beneficial to reclassify economically underperforming assets. This is where the Transfer Land Trust (TLT) program comes in.

“When it is determined that certain trust lands under-perform financially and provide significant social and/or ecological benefits, the TLT program provides funding for DNR to conserve those lands while purchasing more economically profitable replacement lands elsewhere.”

In a recent news release Washington Wild describes how HB 1460 would update the TLT program: [Washington Wild Bill to Revitalize Trust Land Transfer Passes State House, Push for Full Funding Continues - Washington Wild \(wawild.org\)](https://www.wawild.org/). The news release includes the current list of proposed DNR properties to be protected under the program this session via an appropriation in the capital budget. During the current, alternate year long session, the legislators will write the state's three budgets: operating, capital, and transportation.

Having passed in the House, HB 1460 (now SHB 1460, for Senate House Bill ...) is now in the Senate scheduled for a public hearing March 9th in the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources & Parks. Senator Ron Muzzall (Legislative District 10, covering portions of Island, Skagit, and Snohomish counties) is the ranking minority member of this committee. When a bill is scheduled for a committee hearing you can testify online, submit written testimony, or simply indicate support or opposition before the hearing via the

Washington Legislature's website. Go to [Washington State Legislature Participating in the Process](#) and look at the right side of the page.

2. Proposed billboard at the Conway I-5 interchange

The Skagit Audubon board approved a February 24th comment letter to Skagit County Planning & Development Services (PDS) concerning a billboard proposed for installation at the 76 gas station by the Conway I-5 interchange. In every direction from this location the agricultural fields are frequent foraging areas for Trumpeter and Tundra Swans and other birds. The location is within the Agricultural Scenic Corridor designated by state law in 2010. As of this writing the PDS website does not indicate a decision on the applicant's special use permit (Pacific Outdoor Advertising, File Number: PL23-0007).

Other Continuing Issues for Skagit Audubon

See earlier Conservation Notes for continuing issues on which there is no new information at this time: [Skagit Audubon Society - Conservation Notes](#).

Issues Needing Action

Audubon members can advocate for regional and national protection of birds and other wildlife and their habitat by responding to action alerts from Washington Audubon and National Audubon. Enroll in Audubon Washington's Action Network at [Join Our Action Network | Audubon Washington](#) (overwrite with your name and address). The National Audubon website ([Advocacy & Action | Audubon](#)) has abundant information on Audubon's numerous current conservation campaigns. Sign up there to receive national alerts ([Join Our Action Network | Audubon](#)). Also see the Audubon Washington blog for information about a variety of interesting and important issues: [AuduBlog | Audubon Washington](#).