

2006 legislative session brings opportunities

The Washington state Legislature is entering the second year of the 2005-2007 biennium. That means that the Legislature will have a shorter session and make fewer fiscal decisions than last year. But there are still many opportunities to benefit Washington's native species this year.

The Nature Conservancy has identified several priorities on which it will focus this winter, and you can help. Here are some of the programs we will be advocating:

- **ADDITIONAL MONEY FOR WWRP:** Last year the Legislature provided \$50 million for the wildly successful Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program. If they provide an additional \$10 million this year, half or more of the 30 recommended habitat protection and recreation projects that were left out last year can move forward (see Summer 2005 "Friends Focus" newsletter).

- **PUGET SOUND CLEAN-UP:** This is a priority for the broader environmental community this year (see inside). The Conservancy supports the following specific projects for which the state's Department of Ecology has requested funding: Bellingham Bay clean-up, Port of Tacoma Pier 25 clean-up, Local Innovative Stormwater Grants, Nearshore Habitat Projects in Puget Sound.

- **NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM:** The Washington Natural Heritage Program collects and distributes information about native and rare species to prioritize conservation actions across the state (see www.wa.gov/dnr/nhp). This state program is a regular partner of the Conservancy in our conservation planning efforts. The \$200,000 requested would enable the inventory of native species on state lands, a necessary step in prioritizing native and rare species recovery.

- **NATIVE SEED PRODUCTION:** There is not an adequate supply and variety of seeds from local, native plants for restoration efforts in Washington, including many projects involving Conservancy staff and volunteers, as well as public agencies. State funding can help develop a market and support in-state growers of native plant seeds.

- **CONTROL OF NON-NATIVE NUTRIA IN SKAGIT COUNTY:** Nutria, large rodents originally from South America, have invaded Skagit County, destroying vast swaths of marshes and wetlands and threatening infrastructure. The Conservancy has provided matching private funds as an emergency measure until state money becomes available. \$75,000 is needed to control this serious pest before it gets out of hand.

- **PRIVATE LANDOWNER INCENTIVES.** The Washington Biodiversity Council, which the Conservancy helped establish, is conducting pilot projects to improve non-regulatory incentives for changing management practices in order to enhance the state's biological diversity (see www.iac.wa.gov/biodiversity). State funding would provide expert technical and financial assistance to private landowners, with a special emphasis on ranchers for modifying animal behavior and implementing new practices to reduce impacts of grazing.

Impress your representatives by contacting them about these relatively unknown efforts. Your voice can make a real difference this year.

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Take action!

Make sure your elected representatives act to preserve our natural heritage. These Web sites will help you identify and contact them:

- Washington State Legislature: www.leg.wa.gov (On this Web site you can find out who represents you in Olympia.)
- Governor: www.governor.wa.gov

Let us know if you do contact these officials, and how it went. We'll keep in touch about our progress.

Thank you!

Celebrating the Skagit: a river of life

Thirty years ago, The Nature Conservancy bought its first piece of land along the Skagit River near Rockport. It was the beginning of the Skagit River Bald Eagle Natural Area, a swath of the Upper Skagit that is now more than 10,000 acres in size, embraced by a wide variety of partners, and, most importantly, a place rich in eagles, salmon, and other wildlife. The Conservancy continues its efforts to ensure that the upper Skagit remains a wild home for native critters that people can enjoy.

Today, the Conservancy is working with partners to conserve the entire Skagit system in a way that enables both natural and human communities to thrive. The Skagit Delta is a vibrant rural community—one of the last strongholds of farming in Western Washington. At the same time, the delta is rich in wildlife. Though altered over the years by diking and draining, the delta continues to support life-giving tidal marshes and riverine habitats—nurseries for salmon, cod, rockfish, and sole and vital habitat to hundreds of thousands of birds.

The Conservancy and its partners have come to realize that the delta's ecological integrity and agricultural base are intertwined. Thus the Conservancy is working with others to find common ground. We've begun a new program, for instance, that financially rewards farmers for planting wildlife-friendly cover crops, and we're developing projects that restore habitat, provide flood protection, and improve drainage for farm fields. As a result of these innovative and collaborative approaches, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in November named the Conservancy's Skagit Delta Project one of 12 nationwide to receive funding under its Targeted Watershed Grant program.

Strategic projects such as these demonstrate the importance of working in partnership with all who have a stake in a community's future. The goal is to achieve on-the-ground results that truly make a difference—for both our natural heritage and the health of our communities.



Don't miss the 19th annual Upper Skagit Bald Eagle Festival February 4–6. See the "Conservation Calendar" in this newsletter.

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The Conservancy has also been meeting regularly with more than a dozen other organizations to explain priorities and seek common ground. These groups have been discussing ways they can collaborate during the upcoming legislative session for greater effectiveness, and have agreed on four "Priorities for a Healthy Washington." These priorities represent current issues facing Washington that have broad ramifications for conservation and public health. They will be endorsed and supported by the loose coalition of organizations, even as groups like the Conservancy continue to focus on their own missions and key issues. [See our Friends Web site at nature.org/Washington/friends to learn more.]

To learn more about the collaborative Priorities for a Healthy Washington and to get involved, visit www.environmentalpriorities.org.

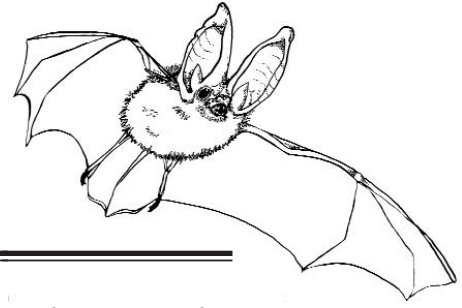
Spring field trip for the Friends: May 20

Join fellow Friends on a visit to state natural areas near Seabeck on the Kitsap Peninsula on Saturday May 20th.

Kelly Heintz, Natural Areas Manager for the Department of Natural Resources South Puget Sound Region, will show us around Kitsap Forest Natural Area Preserve and the new Stavis Creek Natural Resource Conservation Area. Kelly will share the inside story about these public treasures, including their natural significance, how they have benefited from public funding programs, and what challenges they face.

Contact Jeff Compton to RSVP or for more information.

(See "About the Friends" for contact info.)



January 13 event in Seattle: Stories of Fire

Many Americans can finish this sentence: “Only you ...” Smokey the Bear is a powerful image, a voice that reminds us that we should be careful with campfires. And we should. But there’s another side to the story of fire.

Just as fire can devastate a fire-sensitive ecosystem, the absence of fire can wreak havoc on a natural system that has adapted to fire. And in some instances, that absence of fire leads to a tinderbox ready to erupt. As blazes have raged across the West in recent years, so have the debates: Should fires be suppressed immediately or allowed to run their course? How have public policies aided or lessened the potential for catastrophic fires? These issues are of major consequence in a range of ecosystems where The Nature Conservancy is working to restore forest health.

Join us for an evening in Seattle, entitled, “Stories of fire: the re-education of Smokey Bear.” Speakers include Rocky Barker, seasoned environmental journalist and author; Peter Dunwiddie, Ph.D., botanist and Nature Conservancy director of research programs; and Betsy Bloomfield, Nature Conservancy South Central Washington program manager. See Calendar on back for event details.

About the Friends

The Friends of Our Natural Heritage is a group of approximately 1,600 citizens throughout Washington state who provide a voice for the conservation of natural areas. By taking simple steps to educate officials and community leaders about the value of our state’s natural heritage, Friends are helping to safeguard some of the most ecologically valuable lands remaining in Washington. Stay involved—and invite your friends to join the Friends!

For more information about the program or to sign up, visit our Web site at nature.org/washington/friends, or contact Jeff Compton at The Nature Conservancy of Washington: (206) 442-1871 or jcompton@tnc.org.

Federal opportunities: Ebey’s Landing, Spartina control, Puget Sound habitat

We continue to pursue important opportunities at the federal level to preserve and restore habitat for native species here at home. There are several efforts this year that could succeed with your support, including:

EBEY’S LANDING: The National Park Service is seeking \$500,000 from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) to purchase an easement on Nature Conservancy property. The Conservancy in turn will use this money to establish a stewardship endowment for Ebey’s Landing. We supported this request last year, but it was not funded, so we are trying again.

SPARTINA CONTROL IN WILLAPA BAY: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Southwest Washington is seeking \$1.2 million to continue its effective efforts to control Spartina, the aggressive, non-native cordgrass that chokes estuaries and crowds out migratory shorebirds.

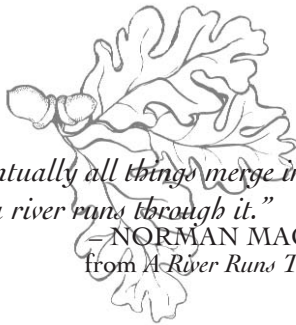
PUGET SOUND RESTORATION: The Conservancy is actively pursuing several appropriations that would support restoration and preservation of marine and nearshore habitat within Puget Sound.

If you would like to know more about these initiatives, feel free to contact us. We will be in touch when specific decisions are pending. Thanks.

Online resource for the Friends!

We’ve added a section to our Web site for the Friends of Natural Heritage. Here we’ll post more information about our public priorities, links for finding officials, and other information to help you speak up for nature.

Go to nature.org/Washington/friends. You can bookmark this page. Your feedback is welcome.



*"Eventually all things merge into one,
and a river runs through it."*
— NORMAN MACLEAN,
from *A River Runs Through It*



Conservation Calendar

January 9, 2006

LEGISLATIVE SESSION BEGINS IN OLYMPIA

For up-to-date information on bills or to find out who represents you, visit the official legislative Web site: www.leg.wa.gov

January 13, 2006

STORIES OF FIRE: THE RE-EDUCATION OF SMOKEY BEAR (See inside story)

REI store in Seattle, 2nd floor meeting room, 222 Yale Avenue North. 7 - 8:30 pm
Refreshments provided.

January 26, 2006

ENVIRONMENTAL LOBBY DAY

Hosted by People for Puget Sound (PPS) All day event—begins at 9:00 am, United Churches of Olympia 110 E. 11th, Olympia, WA; evening reception to follow. Join other Washingtonians who care about our environment in Olympia for Citizens Lobby Day 2006. Spend the day learning about environmental legislation, then go lobby your legislators!

Please visit the Lobby Day Web site to register and learn more: go to www.pugetsound.org and click the events button at the top; then look for this Jan. 26 event.

February 4-6, 2006

UPPER SKAGIT BALD EAGLE FESTIVAL

Experience the 19th annual festival! There's a full schedule of events for the weekend, plus lots of other suggestions for things to do throughout the winter.

For great information on where to go and what to do in the upper Skagit, visit the Upper Skagit River bald eagle Web site: www.skagiteagle.org

Plea for e-mail addresses

Every Friend who converts to e-mail saves us precious time and money. Please help us work faster and smarter by providing your e-mail address. In exchange, we'll maintain your privacy and send no more than 10 messages per year. **To sign up** for the e-mail version of this newsletter and alerts, send your name and e-mail address to Jeff Compton at jcompton@tnc.org.