

SAN JUAN COUNTY 2008 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

SAVE MITCHELL HILL

Position: Save Mitchell Hill. Through a private, local and federal partnership, find resources for the \$4.5-8 million value.

Discussion: Permanently preserve the recreational and natural resources of Mitchell Hill on San Juan Island by allowing the San Juan Island National Historic Park (SJNP) to acquire the property.

One of the largest threatened undeveloped parcels (approx. 320 acres) in the San Juan Archipelago, Mitchell Hill is a unique natural treasure providing excellent environmental, cultural, economic and recreation opportunities including; miles of hiking and biking trails, historic military roads and a critical watershed that supports endangered sea-run cutthroat habitat. The current manager of Mitchell Hill, Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has been working divest of properties not producing revenue for the trusts managed by the agency for the past several years. Early in 2006 DNR was discussing a "land swap" with a developer who would give DNR timber land in eastern Washington for the Mitchell Hill in order to develop a gated community of large estate homes.

In June of 2006, DNR gave San Juan County three years to work with Congress and the National Park Service to develop a plan that will keep this unique resource in the public trust. Current thinking is to ask the Conservation Fund to find and acquire a suitable trade property for Mitchell Hill. The Conservation Fund would then make the trade with DNR and hold the Mitchell Hill Property until the SJNP annexation plans and "payments" are funded over a period of years.

The SJNP has included language in its General Management Plan Revision that discusses the Park expanding into the Mitchell Hill property. Bills have been introduced in the past in Congress to change English Camp's boundaries, but they have not made it out of committee. Senator Cantwell and Congressman Larsen have both expressed their support for this action.

Action Needed:

1. The Washington Congressional delegation should support the completion and acceptance of Mitchell Hill into the national park and support annual appropriations until the property is acquired from the Conservation Fund.
2. Secure key endorsements from the Governor, members of the Washington State Legislature and other key individuals supporting the preservation of Mitchell Hill's environmental, cultural, economic and recreational resources.

FUND THE WASHINGTON STATE OIL SPILL ADVISORY COUNCIL AND YEAR-ROUND NEAH BAY RESCUE TUG

Position: Support the Coast Guard Reauthorization Act of 2007; Support State Funding for Oil Spill Advisory Council and the Neah Bay Rescue Tug if the Federal Legislation looks as though it may fail.

Discussion: It is essential that Congress pass the Coast Guard Reauthorization Act of 2007 with the federal budget language supporting the permanent year-round rescue tug at Neah Bay. Now that federal funding for the Washington State Oil Spill Council has been removed from this legislation, it is imperative that the State provides the resources for this critical work on an ongoing basis.

The quality of life in San Juan County, and Washington State, substantially resides in the health and biodiversity of the marine ecosystem. San Juan County recognizes the importance of aesthetic, recreational, educational, economic and scientific resources provided by a healthy marine ecosystem. Historic tribal and cultural practices are dependent on the protection and preservation of a healthy marine ecosystem and much of the local and state economy is dependent on a healthy marine ecosystem.

The risk to this quality of life is high. These straits and channels have active international shipping lanes serving three major commercial ports and two oil refineries.

Several conservation plans, including the San Juan Marine Stewardship Area Plan and the Federal Recovery Plan for Southern Resident Killer Whales, identified the potential for catastrophic oil spill, one of the greatest threats to the marine ecosystem. Additionally, the Puget Sound Partnership and the Washington State Oil Spill Advisory Council determined that sustained funding for a year-round permanent rescue tug at Neah Bay was one of the best defenses against a catastrophic oil spill recognizing that the Neah Bay tug has made 34 'saves and assists' since being on part-time duty since 1999, the last save coming on the day it was taken out of service in 2007.

The Coast Guard Reauthorization Act of 2007 includes key measures to protect the marine ecosystem from a catastrophic oil spill, including requiring a user-funded permanent year-round rescue tug at Neah Bay. The Washington State Oil Spill Advisory Council's independent work to review and make recommendations for adequate oil spill response and preparedness for our State's marine system is critical. Washington Governor Christine Gregoire and the Washington State Legislature must ensure that the Neah Bay Rescue Tug and the work of the Oil Spill Advisory Council are fully funded with or without Federal support.

Action Needed:

1. The Governor and State Legislators should write letters to the Washington Congressional delegation asking for Congressional action on the Coast Guard Reauthorization Act of 2007, including the year-round funding of the rescue tug.
2. The state must fully fund the Oil Spill Advisory Council and be prepared to fund a year-round rescue tug at Neah Bay, if it appears the Federal Legislation could fail.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING;

Position: Increase the income limits and set appropriate asset limits for access to affordable housing programs in areas with very high affordability gaps.

Discussion: San Juan County has the largest affordability gap between average price of house and average wage of any county in Washington. Most programs currently serve populations at 80% of median family income (MFI) and lower. Families that rely on wages to remain in San Juan County are finding it extremely difficult to remain in the county. San Juan and several other counties have employers that are unable to attract and retain employees at up to 120% of MFI. This includes teachers, EMT's, technical workers, entry-level professionals and service workers. In a county composed entirely of islands, the continued breadth of community and economy is at stake. It is time to find a logical, legal way to allow the subsidy programs to serve a higher level of income.

Action Needed:

1. Alter state law to allow affordable housing programs to serve populations of up to 120% MFI with appropriate qualifications.

FERRIES;

Position: Develop a predictable and sustainable source of state funding for ferry operations. Involve impacted local governments in important decisions that impact our communities.

Discussion: Ferries are not a convenience in a county of islands, they are a necessity. San Juan County is a self-contained economy that pays a penalty for the transport of goods and services. San Juan County has the largest senior demographic in the state with no hospital and difficult senior transportation issues. The impact of fare increases also falls disproportionately on workers, while the image of San Juan County is one of general affluence, the average net earnings per worker ranked 26th and average wage per job ranked 36th out of the 39 Washington Counties.

The recent ferry funding study identified a large number of needed capital improvements. The state should be careful to improve the ability of facilities to safely transport and receive passengers.

Action Needed:

1. Fund an independent economic analysis of the relationship and impact of ferry fares on ferry served communities. Allow no further ferry fare increases until the economic analysis is completed.
2. Provide a "seat at the table" for local governments in the creation of alternatives and solutions to address the WSF shortfall.

SUPPORT LOCAL LEAD ENTITY PROGRAM FUNDING;

Position: Support the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife \$400,000 Supplemental Budget Request for the Salmon Recovery Lead Entity Program.

Discussion: The Salmon Recovery Lead Entity Program is nationally known for successfully implementing ESA recovery on a local level by developing watershed-based, locally supported salmon recovery plans. Lead entities continue to play a critical role in effective implementation of recovery plans statewide, which has become a significant increase in their workloads. Lead Entities receive from \$40k to \$80k annually through WDFW to execute their responsibilities. Since the inception of the Lead Entity Program in 1999 by the Washington State Legislature under the Salmon Recovery Act (77.85 RCW), contract funding for the statewide lead entities has remained status quo. In a recent lead entity survey conducted by Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, 90% of the lead entities reported a substantial increase in time and resources over the past five years in supporting regional and statewide salmon recovery coordination. In addition, 50% of the lead entities reported substantial resources spent on facilitating local processes for project funding requests. In addition, lead entities are being asked to play a role in coordinating regional and statewide prioritization processes and may need additional expanded financial capacity to do this work.

Action Needed:

1. Ask the Governor to include in her 2008 Supplemental Budget the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife \$400,000 request for the Salmon Recovery Lead Entity Program.
2. Ask the Washington Legislature to support the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Supplemental Budget request for the Salmon Recovery Lead Entity Program.

SOUTHERN RESIDENT ORCA WHALE PROTECTION:

Position: Secure passage of state legislation creating interim protection measures for the Southern Resident Orca Whale population based on the Whale Watch Operators Association Northwest “Be Whale Wise” guidelines and funding for Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Marine Enforcement.

Discussion: With the encouragement of NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), in the summer of 2007, San Juan County passed a local ordinance to protect the endangered Southern Resident Orca Whale population from boaters that harass them. The San Juan County ordinance is based on the well-known “Be Whale Wise” guidelines developed by the Whale Watch Operators Association Northwest and the Whale Museum Sound Watch Boater Education Program. County marine enforcement can now issue citations for those boaters harassing the whales.

The County ordinance is meant to serve as an interim protection measure until the Federal Recovery Plan is completed as part of the recent Federal Endangered Species Act listing. Regional staff for NOAA have expressed that it appears that the Federal rule-making will take a minimum of two years with possible implementation by late 2009. If this aggressive schedule were maintained it would still allow for two more summer seasons with no protection measures in place. Scientists and Washington State residents alike believe that waiting two years to provide any protection for these magnificent endangered creatures is unacceptable.

While San Juan County has passed a local protection ordinance, it is understood that this is really a statewide issue. The Endangered Southern Resident Orca Whale pods (J, K and L) are not unique to San Juan County’s waters. The whales of the Southern Resident Orca Whale population spend time in the waters of all 14 Washington State coastal counties during a given year.

Further, the Southern Resident Orca Whale population serves as an important symbol, cultural icon and economic driver for Washington State. While it is San Juan County that is most frequently perceived as the “home” to the Southern Resident Orca Whale population, these whales are a Washington State treasure and should be protected as such.

Action Needed:

1. Introduce and pass state legislation creating statewide interim protection for the endangered Southern Resident Orca Whale population;
2. Pass a funding package to Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife marine enforcement of the regulations.