



## ISLAND COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH

Department of Natural Resources

PO Box 5000

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To: Island County Board of Commissioners  
Conservation Futures Citizen Advisory Board

From: Island County Department of Natural Resources

Re: 2022 Conservation Futures Funding Applications– DNR Evaluation

Date: April 4, 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to evaluate the 2022 applications for Island County Conservation Futures Funding. This document details how the Island County Department of Natural Resources (IC DNR) staff evaluated the Habitat and Water Resources sections of the Acquisition Project Technical Evaluation Criteria. The information in this memo is intended to provide technical guidance to the CFF Citizen's Advisory Board (CAB) on the habitat section of the CFF scoring. The following Island County Department of Natural Resources (IC DNR) staff evaluated the 2022 Conservation Futures Funding Applications:

Jennifer Johnson, Natural Resource Manager

Clea Barenburg, Watershed Planner

Alexandra Plumb, Lead Entity Program Coordinator

The IC DNR staff evaluated these proposed projects using the following Acquisition Project Technical Evaluation criteria:

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<b>A. Habitat</b> <i>(Evaluated by Island County Natural Resources)</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Biological function and environmental benefits, quality and importance of habitat type for specific species including salmonids.</li><li>2. Connectivity to and enhancement of other protected lands and important water bodies.</li><li>3. Site significance of habitat ecosystem: locally, regionally, or statewide.</li></ol>
<b>B. Water resources</b> <i>(Evaluated by Island County Natural Resources)</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Provides for protection of groundwater resources through aquifer recharge area protection. Groundwater susceptibility is currently mapped as Low, Medium or High susceptibility (as part of the county's CAO).</li><li>2. Provides for protection of groundwater resources / seawater intrusion risk (ICC 8.09.099).</li><li>3. Reduces impact of surface water discharge.</li></ol>

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### LAGOON POINT CFF ACQUISITION REVIEW

#### **A. Habitat**

## 1. Biological function and environmental benefits, quality and importance of habitat type for specific species including salmonids.

The Project will protect ~200-acres of healthy, unfragmented forest, with streams and wetland habitats while capturing carbon to help maintain climate resilience. The Project area includes a variety of forest types, with dominant vegetation dependent on the harvest history, slope, aspect, and moisture. About half of the Properties were harvested 30-35 years ago and have grown back into mostly red alder and Douglas fir with understory generally comprised of sword fern, salmonberry, and scattered huckleberry. Large swaths of forest located along the slopes, wetland, and stream corridors were left intact with mature trees. Several small, seasonal streams meander through the properties and wetter areas are composed of red alder, cedar, and an understory of salmonberry, sword fern, and slough sledge (Categorized as Native Plant Wetland on County maps Native Plant Wetland: A Wetland with visible evidence that at least much of its vegetated surface area is covered by Native Species at some time of the year). The predominant vegetation in dryer areas include Douglas fir, red alder, and Western hemlock with an understory of sword fern and scattered huckleberry.

The more mature areas of the properties provide excellent wildlife habitat and the unusually large area of unfragmented forest serves as a significant movement corridor to support a diversity of species, particularly migratory birds. Protection will facilitate continued wildlife movement and species dispersal through a narrow section of Central Whidbey. Numerous forest bird species are present, such as the Olive-sided Flycatcher, Purple Finch, Rufous Hummingbird, various Vireos, and Swainson's Thrush. The habitat is also ideal for raptors such as Northern Harrier, Bald Eagles and many owl species. Other wildlife inhabiting the area include the Western toad, red-legged frogs, Douglas squirrels, coyote, and deer.

Historically the Lagoon Point Community Forest project area has been marked as a habitat area for, Western toads – a Species of Greatest Conservation Need under the State Wildlife Action Plan – have been identified on the properties, along with red-legged frogs, indicating the value of the site for amphibians and reptiles, both extremely sensitive to habitat and water quality, and pointing to healthy forest habitats. This site is also mapped to show fish bearing streams, wetlands, and the properties lie near historically documented bald eagle nesting sites. See Island County maps of Bald Eagle Nesting sites.

## 2. Connectivity to and enhancement of other protected lands and important water bodies.

The proposed properties for purchase and conservation easements, as part of this project, are initial steps of a larger habitat corridor that connects the Land Trust's Greenbank priority area (centered around Lake Hancock and Greenbank Farm and Forest) and the Mutiny Bay Priority Area (centered around Trillium Community Forest). These properties connect previous land acquisition projects by the Land Trust and would result in a 1.25 mile stretch of protected forest and wetlands if all the properties proposed to be conserved are able to be purchased. Rare opportunity to connect to existing conservation easement properties. These connections can create valuable expanded Wildlife corridors "Wildlife Corridors connect large, protected habitat areas and provide increased areas to breed and find refuge, shelter, and access to food and water. The movement, migration, and dispersal of plants and animals that results from having protected corridors also increase genetic diversity amongst species. It is the intention of the

Land Trust to continue to protect wildlife corridors through fee simple land and conservation easement acquisition”

([https://conservationcorridor.org/cpb/Whidbey\\_Camano\\_Land\\_Trust\\_2018.pdf](https://conservationcorridor.org/cpb/Whidbey_Camano_Land_Trust_2018.pdf)). It is also worth noting, that without proactive protection of the few remaining large blocks of habitat in Island County, including the project site, common species will become rare in the future. Many common native species have seen significant declines due to fragmentation and other habitat degrading activities. Therefore, the conservation value of this project area is founded upon the principle that protecting remaining large contiguous areas with corridor connections to other protected lands is crucial to ensure we continue to enjoy native wildlife on the islands for future generations to come.

4. Site significance of habitat ecosystem: locally, regionally, or statewide.

Locally, the most notable site significance is the potential for this site to connect the habitat corridors of two other large conservation areas: Greenback farm to the north and the Trillium Forest to the south. Nearby areas have developed trail systems, and this opportunity exists to provide direct trail access between these areas and to other protected lands with future goals of connecting Greenbank to South Whidbey State Park. Additionally, the climate resilience value of these properties is high as climate change increasingly impacts and shapes the future of the Island.

**B. Water resources**

1. Provides for protection of groundwater resources through aquifer recharge area protection. Groundwater susceptibility is currently mapped as Low, Medium and/or High susceptibility (as part of the county’s CAO).

The groundwater susceptibility for this site is mapped as limited-moderate susceptibility. The conservation of this land would protect aquifer recharge areas with potential for groundwater contamination.

2. Provides for protection of groundwater resources / seawater intrusion risk (ICC 8.09.099).

Intact riparian vegetation helps prevent erosion of stream banks, mitigates extreme temperature fluctuations and stream flows, and enhances water quality.

Additionally, this area is identified as an area of low risk for seawater intrusion (Island County Water Resource Management Plan, 2005).

3. Reduces impact of surface water discharge.

The potential addition of impervious surfaces on these properties would increase the amount of surface water discharge. Impervious surface area associated with residential development and appurtenances increases the amount of surface water pollutants compared to undeveloped property. The potential development could result in reduced on-site infiltration and may result in concentrated surface water flows with degraded water quality. The conservation of the subject property would allow surface water to naturally infiltrate and will reduce potential negative impacts to critical areas and adjacent properties.