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Natural Resources Special Edition

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The Island County Conservation Futures Fund and Why It Matters

By Michala Milewski, Island County Department of Natural Resources

You step outside of your vehicle. A soft breeze caresses your skin as you inhale the crisp yet salty air. The sunlight dazzles your eyes as it bounces off the subtle waves before you. The jagged silhouettes of mountains hang on the horizon, cutting through the hazy blue sky. Gulls squawk and float lazily on the wind. You have arrived at the English Boom County Park on Camano Island. English Boom represents one of the many natural spaces in Island County that have been protected from future development using Conservation Futures Funds.



The Island County Conservation Futures Citizens' Advisory Board and Department of Natural Resources Staff tour Fossek Forest in March 2023. The conservation of the Fossek Forest property was a proposal submitted by the Whidbey Camano Land Trust for the 2023 Conservation Futures application cycle.

What is the Conservation Futures program?

Conservation Futures is a land preservation program that protects, preserves, maintains, improves, restores, and limits the future use of threatened areas of open space, forests, wetlands, habitat areas, culturally significant sites, and agricultural farmlands within Island County.

The Conservation Futures Fund is the main feature of the land preservation program. It is a competitive annual grant that garners money from a local property tax in Island County.

What does the annual grant application cycle entail?

The grant application cycle opens each year on January 15th and closes on February 28th. The following eligible Island County organizations are encouraged to apply: Island County government, cities, towns, special purpose districts, non-profit nature conservancy organizations (as defined in RCW 84.34.250), and non-profit historic preservation organizations (as defined in RCW 64.04.130).

During the months of March and April, proposed projects are reviewed and ranked by a Citizens' Advisory Board and Island County Technical Experts. Taking the recommendations provided by the Citizens' Advisory Board and county staff into consideration, the Board of Island County Commissioners deliberate and select the winning applicant(s). The Conservation Futures program awards funding to the selected applicant(s) so these important natural and cultural resources can be preserved for the future.

How can I get involved?

One way to get directly involved with the Conservation Futures program is to join the Citizen's Advisory Board. The Citizens' Advisory Board is composed of nine voting members that represent conservation and community planning expertise and technical knowledge. As of April 2023, there are vacant positions on the advisory board. Click [HERE](#) to learn more about the vacant positions and how to apply.

Why is the Conservation Futures program important?

Since 1991, the Conservation Futures program has led to the acquisition of 1,722 acres of property for \$9.7 million, protection of 2,519 acres with conservation easements for \$7.4 million, and investment of approximately \$1.3 million in maintenance and operations projects on properties acquired through or protected by the program. The Conservation Futures Fund is important because it gives local organizations, who typically would not have the resources to compete on a regional or state level for grant money, the opportunity to have their land acquisition or conservation easement projects funded. Conservation Futures money has also been incorporated into the funding of larger projects, such as the preservation of 231 acres on the Kristoferson Farm.

Naturalist John Muir once related that "everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in where nature may heal and cheer and give strength to the body and soul." Thanks to Island County's Conservation Futures program, you can rest assured that your tax dollars are working to preserve natural spaces for future generations to enjoy. With your help, the natural beauty of Whidbey and Camano Islands will stand the test of time.

For more information, please visit the Conservation Futures webpage or contact
DNR@islandcountywa.gov.

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