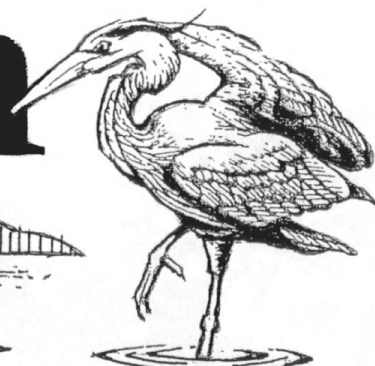


Whatcom Watch



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Whatcom Water Supply/ Demand Imbalance Time for Action

by Eric Hirst and Fred Likkel

Water is one of the most critical issues facing everyone in Whatcom County. We have a structure in place to manage our water resources, in the Watershed Management Board. But the process is failing with potentially serious consequences for our future.

Although we get plenty of rain and snow in the winter, summer is a different story. Streamflows drop dramatically, which increases stream temperatures and lowers dissolved oxygen levels, all of which are bad for salmon and other fish. At the same time, the hot, dry weather increases the need for water for homes, businesses, industry and, especially, agricultural irrigation.

Because of climate change, these forces are on a collision course. Here are a few relevant facts:

- The average Nooksack River flow in August is only 31 percent of the flow in January. For Fishtrap Creek, the comparison is even starker: August flows are only 5 percent of January flows. (1)
- Higher temperatures are leading to lower snowpack and shrinking glaciers; Mt. Baker glaciers have shrunk 40 percent over the past four decades. (2) These glaciers are a significant

source of summer flows throughout the watershed.

- Impervious surfaces (buildings and pavement) in many areas of the lower mainstem of the Nooksack River have climbed dramatically. This results in increased winter runoff, and decreased groundwater storage that could boost summertime flow.
- Water use, for all sectors of society, in August is 5.5 times (550 percent) as great as in January. (3)
- Summer flows throughout the Nooksack River watershed have been declining at about 2 to 4 percent per year (Fig. 1). (4)
- Summer flows will almost surely continue to decline over the next few decades. (5)

Summer stream temperatures have been increasing at about 0.1 to 0.2°C per year. (6) This has led to multiple incidents of salmon dying before they reach their spawning grounds in the South Fork of the Nooksack River.

These many factors, adversely affecting both water supply and demand, argue for prompt action to develop new supplies, store winter water for summer use, and improve water-use efficiency.

Watershed Management Board

To deal with these water supply-and-demand issues (and others related to habitat and water quality), we have a well-established organization, the Watershed Management Board (WMB). (7) The predecessors to this board were created about 25 years ago and today include representatives from major local and state governments. Members include Lummi Nation, Nooksack Indian Tribe, Whatcom County, City of Bellingham, Public Utility District #1 (PUD), the small cities, and the state Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The WMB meets roughly quarterly

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A volunteer-built bridge crosses a muddy part of a side trail.

photo: Stevan Harrell

Neighbors Offer Vision for Samish Crest

by Stevan Harrell

Editor's Note: Whatcom Watch has entered a cooperative agreement with Salish Current. When possible, we will share each other's content. Salish Current, an online-only news organization, covers the North Sound area and Whatcom Watch mainly covers Whatcom County issues. Visit <https://salish-current.org>.

The essays, analyses and opinions presented as Community Voices express the perspectives of their authors on topics of interest and importance to the community, and are not intended to reflect perspectives on behalf of the Salish Current.

On March 7, the City of Bellingham purchased 66 acres on the Samish Crest, one of the last remaining urban forests in Bellingham. Trails on public land now extend from Racine Street in the north to Governor Road in the south, realizing a long-term goal of the city's voter-supported Greenways Program. But, the

Stevan Harrell taught anthropology and environmental studies at the University of Washington Seattle from 1974 to 2017, after which he retired with his wife, Barbara, to Bellingham. He is planning a book on the history of agriculture in Whatcom County.

Crest is still threatened by development. The city must act soon if the area is to realize its potential, according to a plan put together by a devoted group of neighbors and friends: the "Samish Crest Neighborhood Vision for Trails and Open Space."

Designated Wildlife Corridor

Samish Crest, the top of Samish Hill, extends from Governor Road in the south to Racine Street in the north, and from 40th Avenue in the west to Yew Street Road in the east. Like most of Whatcom County, Samish Hill was logged until the mid-20th century. But the forest regrew, covering most of the hill with a magnificent canopy

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