

PRESERVATION TRUST AND LAND BANK PARTNER TO KEEP WATMOUGH BIGHT ON LOPEZ ISLAND FREE OF DEVELOPMENT

Conservation Partnership has Until September 7, 2007 to Raise \$1.225 Million

LOPEZ ISLAND, WASHINGTON – The San Juan Preservation Trust and the San Juan County Land Bank today announced that they have formed a partnership to purchase and conserve a 7-acre property that is susceptible to development inside the largely protected Watmough Bight on Lopez Island's southeast coast.

Local planning and development officials were prepared to approve an application to develop the 7-acre parcel adjacent to the beach at the head of the bay. That plan called for the removal of 60 percent of the trees on the property – about 20 thousand board feet, including trees that are at least 400 years old. It also called for the construction of a house on the slope overlooking the public beach, rocky cliffs, and sensitive wildlife habitat that have already been protected by the Land Bank and the federal Bureau of Land Management

“Many islanders will be surprised to learn that the pristine solitude of Watmough Bight is under threat,” said Sven Haarhoff, director of charitable giving at the San Juan Preservation Trust. “Imagine standing on the public beach, looking up to your right, and seeing a private home cut right into the adjacent hillside. The Lopez community worked very hard several years to protect much of the area for public enjoyment, but the southern shoreline remains in private hands and can be easily developed unless we work together to acquire it now.”

Two-for-One Conservation Opportunity

Recognizing the significance of Watmough Bight to the natural and cultural heritage of Lopez Island, Imogene “Tex” Gieling, a neighbor who owns the remaining private property within the bay, has offered to donate her land to the public. This gift, along with the purchase of the property under threat, would keep Watmough Bight free of development and accessible to the public.

Summer Fundraising Campaign has September 7 Deadline

Keeping the pristine, popular, and ecologically sensitive Watmough Bight undeveloped and open to the public requires a \$1.225 million community fundraising effort. The Land Bank has committed \$575,000 to the project, and the San Juan Preservation Trust will contribute \$150,000 of its own funds. The Preservation Trust must therefore raise the remaining \$500,000 from private individuals before the September 7, 2007 closing deadline.

“Watmough Bight provides the public with one of the best opportunities in the San Juan Islands for people to experience a sense of wildness and remoteness,” said Lincoln Bormann, director of the San Juan County Land Bank. “The Land Bank already protects a 70-foot stretch of beach and an adjacent 8-acre wetland, and the BLM much more. If we can successfully protect these last parcels, we will ensure the bight stays natural for the foreseeable future.”

Watmough Campaign Steering Committee Named

Fifteen community leaders have volunteered to serve on the steering committee for the Campaign to Keep Watmough Wild. They are: David Perera (co-chair); Charles Givens (co-chair), Bob Myhr (Honorary co-chair); David Ashbaugh; Peggy Bill; Holly Bower; David Black; Tom

Cowan; Cynthia Dilling; Imogene “Tex” Gieling; Jodi Green and Mike Halperin; Nancy Greene; Cherill Perera; Dianne Pressenda; Patsy and John Sangster.

How to Help Finish the Bight

To support the Campaign to Keep Watmough Wild, send tax-deductible donations to the San Juan Preservation Trust, Box 327, Lopez Island, WA, 98261. Make checks payable to the San Juan Preservation Trust/Watmough. To make secure online donations, go to www.sjpt.org. For each contribution of \$100 or more, supporters may receive a campaign ball cap with the Watmough logo on the front and “Finish the Bight” on the back. For more information about this project, please contact Sven Haarhoff of the San Juan Preservation Trust at 360.378.2461.

Last year, the Preservation Trust and the Land Bank formed a partnership to purchase and protect the 1,578-acre Turtleback Mountain on Orcas Island.

About The San Juan County Land Bank

The San Juan County Land Bank (www.co.san-juan.wa.us/land_bank) was created by citizen vote in 1990 to help preserve the unique natural heritage of the San Juan Islands. Since its inception, the Land Bank has protected over 3,000 acres of land, including picturesque shorelines and ridges, historical buildings and working farmlands. This public program is funded by a one percent real estate transfer tax paid for by purchasers of property in San Juan County.