

THE UNDERSTORY

Newsletter for Skagit Land Trust Volunteer Land Stewards

Winter 2016

Hiking Vacation in Saas-Fee, Switzerland by Stan Zyskowski, Day Creek Land Steward

Day Creek Land Steward, Stan explains how hiking in the Swiss Alps compares to hiking the North Cascades.

This past September my folks (Trust members and volunteers Gerald and Mary Zyskowski) and 8 additional family members visited Saas Fee, Switzerland for a hiking vacation. My father enjoys planning hiking vacations and he encourages interested and available family members to join in. For myself, this makes for an easy vacation with enjoyable family time.

Saas Fee is a traditional mountain village on a high plateau of the Saas Valley, above the other three Saas communities (Saas-Almagell, Saas-Grund and Saas-Balen). The streets are narrow, free of cars and lined with shops and chalets. Lodging is comfortable and reasonable and includes breakfast and a multi-course dinner. A lift (cable cars and chair lifts) and bus pass is included with lodging and allows free travel throughout the valley. The elevation of Saas Fee is 1800 meters and the 350 kilometers of walking paths range from 1500 to 3000 meters. There are 18 majestic 4000 meter peaks which encircle the valley. The village also has a sports facility (tennis courts, track etc.), mountain bike tracks and glacier skiing year round.

A typical day of hiking starts with a map and discussion the evening before, additional information is available at the tourist information center and from most hotel proprietors. Any necessary supplies (lunch fixings or forgotten items) are readily available throughout the village. Trails can be accessed from the valley floor or higher up from a lift. Hiking difficulty ranges from routine to challenging. Busses provide transport to trails and lifts. The easy access makes the trails ideal for beginners to advanced hikers.

Once on the trail you will enjoy majestic views of mountain ridges and valleys. Trails travel through local farms, sections of forest, meadows and mountain ridges. There are a few lakes and a couple reservoirs. Lunch can

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Saas-Fee , Switzerland



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Learning Something New by Regina Wander, Stewardship Manager

A few years back, Conservation Director, Michael Kirshenbaum and I were on our second monitoring visit to check out one of The Nature Conservancy's properties that Skagit Land Trust had begun monitoring – the Smith Preserve. This large (61 acre) property is located near the confluence of the Sauk and Skagit Rivers, just north of the Concrete Sauk Valley Road. We had previously walked through the entire property in the winter, but this was our first spring visit – May 28th, to be exact. It was a gorgeous day to be out in the forest.

We began hiking in on the same road system we had followed before, but soon stopped because we found a small patch of Policeman's helmet. Policeman's helmet is a beautiful, but aggressive invasive species that, at first glance, looks very similar to a native species, Jewelweed. We stopped and spent half an hour pulling every Policeman's helmet seedling we could find. Luckily, it is very easy to pull and before long, we had a large and satisfying pile. We started hiking again, and before another minute had passed we hit more of the undesirable plant. We continued through a field on the property that we had hiked on our previous visit without any evidence of the infestation. The Policeman's helmet surrounded us on every side, growing straight up through the reed-canary grass field. We continued across the property and found that it extended into the riparian forest and wetlands.

I returned in spring the next year, prepared to map the patch with a GPS unit, and found that the Policeman's helmet covered nine acres of the property, making it the largest patch of Policeman's helmet I had ever seen.

Policeman's helmet is an annual, meaning that each year, the plant completes its entire life cycle and dies back. On our winter visits, we are too late and there is no sign of the extensive infestation. If we visit too early (for example, in April), all we see are thousands upon thousands of tiny seedlings that we could easily misidentify. At that seedling stage, Policeman's helmet and our native Jewelweed are indistinguishable. We've worked to control portions of the patch for several years now. We have tried weed-whacking the patches as late as early July, but when we returned in August, found that some plants had survived and re-rooted from nodes on the stem.

I learn more about this invasive species every time I visit the property and can observe it during a different point in its life cycle. I have learned when it is old enough to distinguish it from Jewelweed, and when it is too late to keep the seeds from spreading. I have learned where we need to focus control efforts the following year and what techniques did not work.

This story highlights why regular monitoring is so important. If we didn't visit the center of the property for the entire summer because the brush was too thick, we would never have known about the infestation. I learn something new every time that I visit a property in a different season. I don't just learn about invasive species – I also know that the blackcap raspberries at Smith produce delicious fruit in June, and that flowering coltsfoot might survive even if there is

Policeman's helmet present because it flowers and produces seed in April, before the invasive seedlings can shade it out. I hope that every time you visit your property and send in a monitoring report, you learn something new to share with us as well!



Policeman's Helmet close up



Invasion at TNC Smith Property



Above: Trail Through Farmland
Top Right: Ibex.
Below: Wildflower & Insect
Bottom Right: Trail View



Continued from page 1 be eaten along the trail or ordered at the many lift top restaurants and hike-to huts. Climbing the high peaks can be done with rental equipment and local guides. The most observed animals are Ibex and Chamois along with marmots and numerous birds. Ibex and Chamois are both in the goat family with the former sometimes sporting massive horns. The forests are comprised of a mix of conifers and some deciduous trees. Large groups of larch dominate the upper elevation forests. The forests are broken up by many natural and man-made openings. Above the forests there are mountain meadows and rocky areas. During most hikes you will experience numerous wildflowers (depending on time of year and elevation).

So how does hiking in the Swiss Alps compare to the North Cascades? The land use and access are the major differences. Switzerland (as well as the rest of Europe) is far more developed with access to most places. Domestic animals are found grazing in open areas up to the ridges. High elevation reservoirs are common, providing electric power for the nearby villages. Hiking is from trailhead to trailhead or from hut to hut. Wilderness as we know it does not exist and there is little or no backpacking. Of course there are numerous quiet remote places, but there is always a place to stay at the end of the day.

In conclusion, Saas-Fee is extremely hiker friendly and a most enjoyable place to take a hiking vacation.



Do you have a story you would like to share?

Contact Lisa for details on an upcoming edition.

Meet our newest Volunteer Land Stewards, Staff, & AmeriCorps

Heidi & Matt Hixson - Big Lake Wetlands Conservation Area Stewards

Heidi and Matt have lived in Skagit County for over 15 years. Matt has volunteered with the Mount Vernon Trail Builders and has a true passion for protecting sustainable land. Heidi works for the Mount Vernon School District and hopes to help impart the caring of the Skagit onto the next generation. They feel that Skagit County is certainly one of the most beautiful places. Preserving, maintaining and enjoying it were their main goals for becoming Land Stewards.

Laura Hartner - Development Director

Laura joins the Trust with ten years of nonprofit and small-business experience in Washington State from Pullman to Seattle to the Skagit. Raised in the Mat-Su Valley of Alaska, Laura understands the important relationship nature and natural resources play in vibrant communities. We are excited for Laura to bring to the Trust her creative ideas, well-honed organizational skills, and a passion for community involvement.

Hannah Williams - AmeriCorps Volunteer: Community Stewardship & Engagement Volunteer Coordinator

Hannah grew up in Tacoma sailing throughout the Puget Sound. She graduated from University of Washington with a bachelor's in Environmental Studies and has multiple years of experience in youth development. Her passion for environmental education was driven by her work at Boys & Girls Club of the Long Beach Peninsula and many outdoor summer camp positions. She is very interested in how environmental policies and management can help facilitate outdoor engagement and conservation.

Welcome to the team Heidi and Matt Hixson, Laura, and Hannah!

Land Stewards and their Conservation Areas

- ~ Barney Lake - Brenda Cunningham & Tim Manns ~~~ Barr Creek - Russ Dalton ~
- ~ Big Lake Wetlands - Heidi & Matt Hixson ~~~ Butler Creek - Jim Owens ~
- ~ Cumberland Creek - Jim Johnson ~~~ Day Creek Berquist & Day Creek Forest - Stan Zyskowski ~
- ~ Day Creek Kosbab - Jim Fukuyama ~~~ Day Creek Slough - Hal Lee ~
- ~ Grandy Creek - John Freeman ~~~ Green Road Marsh - Heidi Nichols ~
- ~ Guemes Mountain - Carolyn & Ed Gastellum, Ian Woofenden & Kit Harma ~
- ~ Hurn Field - Steffany Raynes & Lin Skavdahl ~
- ~ Lyman Slough - Richard Raisler ~~~ March Point - LaVerne & Jim Scheltens ~~~ Minkler Lake - Hal Lee ~
- ~ Mud Lake - Mike Olson ~~~ Presentin Ranch - Ranae & Jim Watson ~
- ~ Samish Ochs - Pete Haase ~~~ South Cascade River & TNC South Cascade - Bob Boudinot ~
- ~ Sumner Lake - Tami Thomas & Tom Mayes ~
- ~ TNC Preserves Dupuis, Rankin & Wilcox - Phil Kincare ~
- ~ Tope Ryan - John Day ~~~ Utopia - Kinsey Shilling ~

COMING SOON: VOLUNTEER LAND STEWARD AIDE POSITION

As stewardship tasks have become more regular and Land Stewards contribute an increasing amount of time and energy staff will begin implementing an additional layer of support to you. Trust staff have reviewed responses from surveys earlier this year and many noted that having additional volunteers to call on would be helpful. This will be an apprentice-like position; A *Land Steward Aide* is an interested volunteer and will have availability to help perform many essential duties of a Land Steward. A Land Steward Aide **does not** have an assigned property.

Once the Land Steward Aide positions are recruited their contact information will be provided to all stewards for coordinating if you would like company or assistance during monitoring visits. Lisa is happy to help make connections too. These aides will become strong volunteer candidates for future properties to steward.

More details coming soon. If you know someone that would be interested in the Volunteer Land Steward Aide position please let Regina or Lisa know today!

AND: CONSERVATION CLASSROOMS

Skagit Land Trust has embarked on a process to exponentially increase the presence of local youth involved in conservation. Over 400 youth annually are involved in our Engaging Youth in Conservation Program that seeks to develop the next generation of conservation citizens in the Skagit. The Harrington-Schiff Foundation, the Satterberg Foundation, Cascade Natural Gas Eco Fund and others have given generously in the past three years to expand this program. Our success has led to a new opportunity for creating an outdoor classroom component for groups and schools to visit; we call it the "**Conservation Classroom**".

Conservation Classrooms will invite youth groups, organizations, and school classes out to Trust-owned Conservation Areas near their communities for experiential learning in a natural setting. These sustainable outdoor classrooms will further engage youth in natural sciences and can be used to teach many components of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) curriculum; while promoting lifelong stewardship ethics.

Skagit Land Trust properties will be a place for teachers and educators to have programs that are adaptive to the schools' needs. Ten Conservation Areas, listed below, have been selected as Conservation Classrooms in 2017.* Conservation Classrooms can be used once or adopted for regular visits and observations. Land Stewards are encouraged to join these events, share their knowledge and experience with youth to help foster a love for nature. If you would like to be a part of the advisory group for this program contact Lisa.

Lyman Slough
Green Road Marsh
Tope Ryan
Butler Creek
Barr Creek

Big Lake Wetlands
Minkler Lake
Mud Lake
Barney Lake
Utopia

Outdoor classrooms are becoming more common and we are learning from Feather River Land Trust's Learning Landscapes. You can find out more about Learning Landscapes at www.frlt.org/learning-landscapes

* The current list of Conservation Areas were selected for their appropriateness to host groups of young people, safe access and parking, nearby restrooms and similar factors.



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PLACE
STAMP
HERE

Upcoming Stewardship Events

1st Saturday & 3rd Friday of every month

- ◇ youth events listed here are not open to the public but Land Stewards are encouraged to join us.

- ◇ Barney Lake - Martin Rd - w/ Emerson HS- Jan. 5
- Minkler Lake - Jan. 7
- ◇ Butler Creek - w/ Emerson HS - Jan. 19
- Barney Lake - Bell - Jan. 20
- ◇ Barney Lake - Signe Pl. - w/ Emerson HS - Feb. 2
- Amphibian Monitoring Training - Feb. 4
- ◇ Big Lake Wetlands - w / Emerson HS - Feb. 16

Please join us, and visit a new property!

Don't forget to send your Quarterly Monitoring Reports to Lisa ◇

Due March 31 ~June 30 ~September 30 ~December 31

Check out our newest
conservation stats, achieved with
your support!

Acres Protected

Conservation Easements (36): 3,568 acres
Trust-Owned Lands (29): 1,708 acres
Trust-Assisted Projects (27): 1,498 acres
TOTAL acres protected: 6,774

Conservation Values Protected

Forested Habitat: 4,496 acres
Agricultural Lands: 781 acres
Lakes and Wetlands: 755 acres
Intertidal Habitat: 541 ft.
River Shoreline: 29.6 miles
Saltwater Shoreline: 13,920 ft.