

From the editor –

Farmers, fish, trees, cold water

When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe. – John Muir

Here is an editorial aimed to gain agreement from all sides for restoring riparian tree habitat to achieve robust, comprehensive, long-term and adequately financed investment into ensuring cold water for salmon migration waterways:

– Ken Stern

Musings – on the editor’s mind

Remember the sun? It was out for a bit in mid-January. Then, a weekend turning into a week, and then more, of morning fogs, bringing cold, damp and gloom, the days of fog extending into weeks, bringing more morning cold, damp and gloom. It becomes hard to believe, as Thoreau wrote, “ But alert and healthy natures remember that the sun rose clear.”

But it does. Even if February’s morning starts continue the overcast and damp handed off by January, know that we have made it. When the sun is out, even as a white ball on the other side of cloud cover, do you see in it the brighter light, the softer shadows, the later sunsets, the higher angle of the sun and its more northerly creeping out of the southern sky? Winter is not over but the darkest, shortest days of the year are.

Yes for the glorious last month of winter. Every year, come November, my step slows and my frown lengthens with the obviously advancing earlier sunsets and the longer nights. The next eight weeks – over now – are a long slow crawl, the winter, if not of my despair, certainly of darkness, coldness and accompanying gloom. No wonder throughout December we welcome lights on trees, indoors and out, on fences and rooflines and look to Santa so.

But alert and healthy natures remember that the sun rose clear. We can see for ourselves, if not today, some days, and more of them, soon, perhaps by this week’s end.

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LETTERS

President Biden worse than Carter

Kevin McCarthy, the congressional house minority leader, was asked what he thought Joe Biden’s greatest accomplishment in his first year in office was? His answer was that he managed to change Americans long held opinion of Jimmy Carter. Denny Sather Greater La Conner

Costs of saving salmon

Gov. Jay Inslee recently patronized the Swinomish and other local Indian tribes drumming up support for the proposed Loomis Act, HB 1838. (Weekly News, Dec. 22) The act is intended to “save salmon” and would impose enormous costs on local farmers, landowners and taxpayers by requiring the planting of trees and vegetation on public and private lands bordering streams and waterways. The Skagit Valley Herald’s lead article on Jan. 23, “Creating Division,” addressed local opposition to the proposal. Further, an opinion piece published in the Everett Daily Herald (Jan. 9) also argues just the opposite and that “Inslee has dug up a bad idea to protect salmon habitat. The real threat is urban development.” The writer asserts that voluntary efforts and millions of tax dollars spent during the past 20 years doing the very thing the Loomis Act advocates has resulted in no measurable fish habitat gains ... and that “the vast bulk of damage to our watersheds comes not from farming (activity) but from urban development.” In other words, repeating the same process and expecting different results equals insanity! It is highly likely that urban development will continue to occur throughout western Washington unabated, and that in 50 years or so, the entire Puget Sound region will look like the San Francisco Bay Area does today. This urban development will overwhelm any efforts at preserving fish habitat regardless of effort or cost. It should be noted that Indian tribes have no standing regarding state laws and are subject only to tribal law and federal statutes. Any concession the state makes is purely a gift, and Washington governors have been especially generous, e.g., Booth Gardner’s “Centennial Accord” that gave Washington tribes a voice in state government; Christine Gregoire’s self-serving decision to forgo federally prescribed tribal casino revenue sharing that has cost Washington taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars in lost revenue; and now Jay Inslee’s support and promotion of the Loomis Act. The issue boils down to which has priority, humans or fish? Ideally, we would choose to benefit both, but when that is not possible geographically or economically, human interests must prevail. Bruce Elliot La Conner

Town council members fill committee assignments

By Bill Reynolds

The newly formed La Conner Town Council began laying the foundation for 2022 by finalizing committee assignments and tightening up ordinance language related to hazardous buildings during its one-hour Zoom session last week. New Councilmember Ivan Carlson, III flagged what he termed “broad” and “subjective” terminology in an ordinance section for abating structural dangers, questioning non-tangible references to infringements upon aesthetic and sensory standards. “They’re too broad,” said Carlson. “I feel there would be unintended consequences. It might cause undue economic hardships on the working-class people of La Conner.” Town Administrator Scott Thomas agreed in principle, noting that the vague language could be eliminated without weakening it, that other sections more clearly define enforceable nuisance conditions. “Our preference,” Thomas said, “is for buildings to be maintained without the Town needing to go to the ordinance. At the end of the day, we need to make sure properties are safe.” Thomas said addressing overgrown grassy lots or garishly painted homes and buildings in the historic preservation district were not the primary purpose of the ordinance. “Excluding the language to which Ivan objects would be okay,” he said, that nuisance situations have over time been defined by code and in common law. The council unanimously moved to do just that. Members were also in a consensus-building mood in accepting committee assignments. Prior to the meeting, all had responded to a sign-up list in the prior two weeks to determine their preferred committees. Only one minor shuffle was required when three – Carlson, Rick Dole and MaryLee Chamberlain – signed up for the two-member Streets & Safety committee. Carlson volunteered to break the logjam.

February’s king tides are here

This morning’s 11.5 foot high tide at 6:49 a.m. and Thursday’s 7:22 a.m. will be the highest this month, but an 11.4 foot high tide is scheduled for Friday morning with Saturday’s 11.2 foot 8:25 a.m. tide finishing six days in a row of 11-plus foot tides on the Swinomish Channel. The month ends with an 11 foot high tide scheduled for Sunday, the 20th, at 7:41 a.m. with 10.9 foot tides set for the 19th and 21st. Data from NOAA Tide Predictions: tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/. ed its supply of free COVID-19 tests it will ship directly to households at no cost. The state Department of Health advises watching its social media channels for updates; it expects more tests soon. The state website: sayyescovidhometest.org.

Get free at home COVID-19 tests

The federal government is providing four free at-home rapid antigen COVID-19 tests to every home in the U.S. The kits started shipping last week and are being delivered by the U.S. Postal Service. Orders will ship in 7-12 days. Order at: covidtests.gov. Washington state has exhaust-

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Editorial –

# Loose lips still sink ships

During World War II the U.S. government promoted the campaign “Loose Lips Sink Ships,” engaging the public to protect the country – ourselves- challenging us to review our thoughts before speaking: without self-reflection people might let slip information the Germans and Japenese could use to their advantage in the war. Citizens were united in fighting an enemy that could kill their families, friends, co-workers and neighbors and defeat the nation. Lives were at stake and shortening the war was every-one’s goal.

Today the uncovered lips of our fellow citizens pose the same threat to the health and security of every person in the United States. The coronavirus pandemic – pandemic means worldwide epidemic and epidemic means out of control community disease spread – has every country worldwide battling to save their citizens. Public health is exactly that: its definition is, simply, the health of the entire community. When political leaders and idealogues thump their chests, beat on podiums, wave banners to “unmask the children” and organize rallies against school leaders, they are dragging red herrings and waving bloody shirts. They are not addressing the public health tragedy that has killed their constituents in every county in the country and filled to overflowing the beds of hospitals in every state.

The unmaskers have as much right to their position as those who found witches in 17th century Salem. They have as much evidence as the witch hunters did in that cause and today are bringing immeasurably more damage. Freedom of belief is one issue. It belongs in this public health crisis like a bathing suit at a high school prom. People need to prepare and dress appropriately for every occasion.

No one has to wait history’s judgment for the Republican response to the coronavirus pandemic. Whether they win control of Congress in 2022 or win the presidency in 2024, our children will not crown them with success. This will not be looked back on as their shining moment in the sun.

Cartoonist Gary Trudeau started drawing then President Donald Trump with blood on his hands last September in every panel in which he placed him. The Republicans may win and rule every election till kingdom come. In the long term no one will judge their campaign of promoting lose lips in public a success. Whatever their short term gains, they have betrayed the people they want to rule.

– Ken Stern

## Musings – on the editor’s mind

Is the editor of the La Conner Weekly News a crank and a scold? Does he – me – criticize the town council unfairly, randomly or casually, without cause? Do I have an agenda or a vendetta?

I do, actually. Let me propose that I am just doing my job, sometimes more aware and sometimes less. My failure to pay attention earlier to all the details and the players around the sale of the Hedlin ballfield property has sharpened my focus. Then I was not on top of the issue, as your local newspaper editor has to be.

What does the newspaper’s editor need to be doing at government meetings? Show up, having read the agenda and supporting documents ahead of time. Watch. Listen. Take notes. Go back to the office. Reflect. Connect past and present dots. Think. Present the facts. Report. Share the connected dots in an analysis.

Just paying attention and taking those steps is doing my duty, as in the old days, when the press was called the community’s watchdog.

I almost never think about my dad, but he came to mind after the last council meeting. He was a career journalist, the last 20-plus years as editor of the Toledo Union Journal, a labor weekly published by the Jeep local of the

United Auto Workers.

He chose to cover city council, keeping the 10,000 members and their families current with local government.

In the 1960s Toledo was a union town with primarily Democratic Party elected officials. One day my dad’s boss, the regional UAW director, told him to stop covering council. Maybe the issue was fair housing. Maybe it wasn’t. What was certain was that my dad’s critical reporting of council meetings did not sit well with council members.

I don’t know who told me that. Not my dad. He never shared anything. I was 15 in 1970. I probably heard that story years later.

My dad had a strong integrity. He took pride in his work. He probably paid attention to details and connected the dots, because that is the job of the press. Over time facts create a pattern and from that there is perspective and actions come into focus.

It is not a matter of council members being good people or bad people or kind of unkind. It is matter of reporting what they say and do, meeting after meeting and month after month. It is a matter of paying attention.

## Masks . . .

(Continued from Page 1)

Jo Wolfe, director of the Skagit County Historical Museum, sees the possibility of case “numbers will continue to rise and we will have to totally shut down again.”

Jensen, a naturalist, noted that without a very high percentage of a vaccinated population providing herd immunity “it was only a matter of time for the variant to spread faster than the original virus. As for the future, we hope that those who haven’t been vaccinated, will have this done and we can put the pandemic behind us! Otherwise variants will still develop and we’re in an endless circle. It depends on this outcome how our businesses in town will be doing in the future!”

## LETTERS

### Pushback against editorial

Ken Stern, editor and publisher of the La Conner Weekly News, seems determined to demonize the town administration, mayor and town council members in at least two areas: the Maple Avenue ball-field transaction and now parking fees for the new library.

In a scathing editorial Aug.18 he paints an (incorrect) depiction of myself and fellow councilmen Bill Stokes delaying start of construction of the library by trying to extract parking fees for the code, which requires 10 excess (additional – ed.) parking spaces which future operation of the library will require.

Au contraire ... Mr. Stokes and I were requesting more information on the financial impact to the town if the requested deferral was approved. When the discussion was tabled for further discussion/fact-finding and upon hearing that this process would delay project start, Councilmember Stokes and I immediately requested an expedited discussion so as to minimize the construction schedule impact.

Mayor Hayes then suggested we join a previously scheduled meeting the next morning that would include the library project team. We both dutifully attended the next morning and a satisfactory agreement amongst all parties was achieved. There was no delay of the project’s start attributable to our efforts to protect future necessary town revenues and to maintain conformance with an existing code.

Speaking on behalf of myself, Mr. Stokes and our other council colleagues, we serve on the town council to collectively protect and further the town’s overall interests.

Come on Ken Stern: please stop needlessly stirring the pot of animosity where there is none. John Leaver  
Town Council Position 2

## Gem retires . . .

(Continued from Page 1)

to get her talking. It’s worth the effort.”

Gem has been passionate about building the large print section. Though officially retired, she was visiting the library the other day, when a woman came in looking for large print books for her 92-year-old mother. Gem went right over and asked her a few questions about reading preferences and then started making suggestions. The woman left, happily loaded with eight or nine books, saying: “This will keep my mom busy for a week!” Gem said quietly, “I just love doing that.”

## Bid now at Rotary Club auction

The La Conner Rotary Club’s annual auction starts today, going live at 7 p.m. The best packages await your bids.

The silent auction started Aug. 18. It closes 12 p.m. Thursday.

This year’s theme is “Harvesting Hope” for La Conner students, local families, local communities and projects abroad. Funds raised will go to targeted project, with the majority going to local support.

Register at <https://rclcf2021.ggo.bid>.

# If I ran the zoo

By MEL DAMSKI



I lost my wallet. I had no idea where, it just wasn’t in my pocket or on the top of the dresser where I leave it at night.

Big hassle. Canceling and replacing credit cards and ID cards and my driver’s license.

Oh, let’s not forget the \$400 plus I had in cash in that wallet. For starters, I got a new wallet and I carried my passport in it so I had one form of ID. I got new credit cards and spent time at the DMV waiting in line to apply for a new driver’s license.

Got it all done. Big sigh of relief and then, a month later, I lost my new wallet! And my passport! A few hundred more dollars wasted. Oy vey!

It took me a week or so to get over my frustration and self-incrimination. And while sitting in front of the television, my puppy Rosie drags the original wallet out from underneath the sofa and it’s chewed up with cards beyond recognition. Needless to say, I must have left my wallet on the coffee table where Rosie could easily reach it.

Soon after, I sold my house at Lake Tyee and there was a really nice piece of art that the woman who had sold me the house left on the wall just above a book case. When I resold it, I decided one good deed deserves another so I left the same small painting on the wall, totally forgetting that I had hid my new wallet there so neither my dog nor any of my human visitors could get their hands on it.

Several days later I get a call from the realtor saying the woman who purchased my place found the wallet behind that painting. And passport. And a few hundred dollars in cash.

There’s a thing called a “dummy check” you should always do when you are moving from one house to another. But I forgot to make a mental note that I had stashed my wallet away and moved out of that house without doing a dummy check.

I profusely thanked the young woman who bought the house from me and I somehow managed to combine the two lost wallets into one.

There is an old saying that “no good deed goes unpunished” and originally that was the case for me. I left a nice painting on the wall for the new buyer to claim as her own and that caused me to lose my second wallet and passport.

But, this is a story with a happy ending because of the fact that the wallet ended up back in my pocket.

Both of them, And my passport. So a good deed can indeed go unpunished and even rewarded and the storyteller here has learned to be much more careful and much more conscious about where he puts important items!

Now I narrate whatever it is I’m doing if it’s something that is important. As I’m writing this column, my wallet is in my front left pocket and it will be high up on the bedroom dresser when I’m asleep, out of reach from my darling dog Rosie so she can’t rip it up and hide it under the sofa.

## County rent assistance website launched

Skagit County residents have a convenient option to get pre-approved for help with rent and utility bills. Monday the County launched a new online portal where renters can complete a simple eligibility survey and get matched with a rental assistance provider, or complete an application for assistance.

Access the portal at [www.skagitcounty.net/renthelp](http://www.skagitcounty.net/renthelp).

The Skagit County Rental Assistance Program provides financial assistance to income-eligible Skagit County renters, and their landlords, who may be struggling to afford rent and utilities due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Skagit County Rental Assistance Program is made possible by an \$8.9 million grant provided by the Washington State Department of Commerce and funded by the Treasury Rent Assistance Program (T-RAP). The program is intended to prevent evictions during the ongoing COVID-19 health crisis by paying past due and current/future rent and utilities for people needing relief.

“We know that many Skagit County residents have been impacted by COVID-19, and some are having trouble staying current on rent,” said George Kosovich, Skagit County Public health analyst. “Help is available, and we are hopeful that the new online portal will make it easier for residents and landlords to connect up with rental assistance providers.”

Households must meet all four of the following screening criteria to be eligible for rental assistance:

- Someone in the household has been unemployed for at least 90 days, or experienced a reduction in income, incurred significant costs, or experienced financial hardship during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Must be currently experiencing housing instability or risk of housing instability, which may include unpaid rental fees or anticipation of inability to pay future rent.

- Household income is at, or below, 80% of Area Median Income.

- Household resides in Skagit County.

Rental assistance providers available after completing the eligibility survey are for residents, including young adults and farmworkers, including:

- FORWARD Online Application

- Housing Authority of Skagit County

- Volunteers of America Western Washington

- Community Action of Skagit County

- Catholic Community Services Farmworker program

- Northwest Youth Services

Three organizations will offer outreach and extra assistance to complete the online assistance application:

- Skagit Legal Aid


- Community to Community Development

- Parent to Parent

Information and to check eligibility and apply for assistance: [skagitcounty.net/renthelp](http://skagitcounty.net/renthelp) or 360-416-1500.

Source: Skagit County government

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