



NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

Oregon-Washington
2021: Annual Manager's Report

San Juan Islands

National Monument



Map



Accomplishments

The San Juan Islands National Monument had a successful 2021 season with a variety of accomplishments. This year saw the return of the very popular docent programs on Stuart and Patos islands. On Stuart Island, docents at Turn Point—led by the dynamic Jim and Linda Bergquist of the Turn Point Lighthouse Preservation Society—treated 16,385 visitors to a world class tour of the light station. The Keepers of the Patos Light provided a similar experience to over 10,000 visitors to Patos Island.

An era ended in 2021 with local resident Asha Lela stepping down as the coordinator of the BLM Lopez Volunteer Monitors. Asha was a fierce advocate for the monument designation and has continued to show her dedication as a leader of the passionate volunteer monitoring crew. The BLM looks forward to continuing to work with this important partner group as it enters its next chapter.

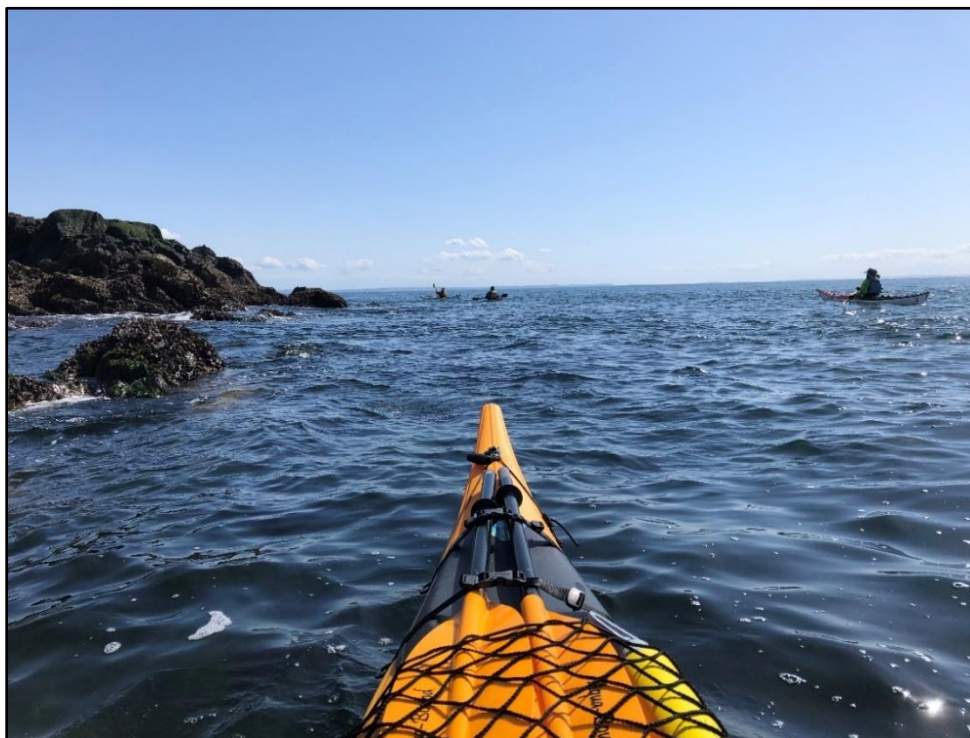


Challenges

As well as accomplishments, the monument had its challenges in 2021. The departure of long time Monument Manager, Marcia deChadenedes, in December of 2020 left the monument with one employee to fill the roles of Outdoor Recreation Planner and Monument Manager. This necessitated an in-depth look at what truly could and could not be accomplished on the monument.

A mostly user-created and inherited network of trails continues to pose challenges, especially during the rainy months. Even during the wet winter months, monument trails on Lopez Island continue to receive substantial use. This, combined with several unsustainable trail layouts, led to substantial erosion during the winter months. After the much-anticipated signing of the record of decision for the San Juan Islands National Monument Resource Management Plan, the BLM will work with partners and the public to address these issues through implementation-level trail planning.

An ever-present challenge for the BLM monument staff is the task of managing 1,000 acres spread across 76 rocks, islands, reefs, and headlands. The logistics of managing the monument can be complex. The monument's invaluable partnerships with the other land managing agencies and its top-notch volunteers make this challenge much less daunting.



Visitors

The San Juan Islands National Monument had 117,902 visits in 2021. Another boating season with the Canadian border and waters closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic meant increased traffic for the outer islands of the monument. In 2020, the outer island campgrounds cooperatively managed with Washington State Parks were closed for a good portion of the boating season, leading to reduced numbers. In 2021, these campgrounds were open and very popular with boaters unable to access Canadian waters. The docent programs described above provided education and interpretation for a steady stream of visitors to these outer islands. Trail and traffic counters on the ferry-served islands showed a similar increase in traffic.



Partnerships

Partnerships are always crucial for a monument with two permanent employees and 2021 was no different. Monument staff continued to play an active role in the Terrestrial Managers Group. Members of the group include the BLM, the National Park Service, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington State Parks, Washington State Department of Natural Resources, San Juan County, and the San Juan County Land Bank. The Terrestrial Managers Group seeks to address terrestrial management issues that extend across agency boundaries in order to take an islands-wide approach to problem solving. Members of the group also pool limited resources to benefit the community and the landscape of the islands as a whole.



Science

In 2021, the monument staff were once again able to work with students and teachers from the Lopez Island School District's 4th grade class as part of the Hands on the Land Program. In the spring, students spent one day a week exploring the monument lands on Lopez Island as an outdoor classroom. They spent a day in Chadwick Marsh discussing the importance of freshwater ecosystems in a landscape dominated by salt water. On another day, students eagerly searched for the rough-skinned newt and its powerful neurotoxin at Chadwick Hill as they learned about the islands' amphibians.

The BLM issued two research permits for the monument in 2021. One permit was for the collection of strawberry plants to facilitate the study of strawberry genetics and distribution in the islands. The second permit was for tree coring on Lummi Island; researchers will use the cores to better understand the island's fire history.

Monument staff also supported contractors for the U.S. Navy as they installed equipment to monitor sound levels from nearby Whidbey Naval Air station.



Climate Impacts

Longtime residents of the San Juans Islands continue to observe trends towards warmer and drier conditions. More severe weather events are also occurring, including an increased frequency of extreme tides. King tides, which are associated with increasingly frequent high energy storm events, have been particularly impactful to shorelines, as evidenced by erosion at the monument's Watmough Bay. Shoreline erosion at San Juan County's Agate Beach County Park threatens to compromise the local road and directly impact access to monument land at Iceberg Point.



Climate Resiliency

Monument staff, along with other members of the Terrestrial Managers Group, participated in several meetings and presentations to discuss the conditions of the islands' forests. Several members of the Terrestrial Managers Group have ongoing studies to determine the best manner to reduce forest biomass in the San Juan Islands, where traditional thinning and prescribed burning techniques pose challenges.

Monument staff supported a San Juan County Land Bank project to protect remnant stands of Garry oak and remove encroaching Douglas fir trees on Henry Island.



Social and Environmental Justice

In 2021, BLM staff entered into discussions with an area non-profit regarding the creation of a Coast Salish Youth Stewardship Corps. The intention is to engage Coast Salish youth from the San Juan Islands and surrounding areas in conservation and restoration projects on a landscape with close ancestral ties to the Coast Salish people. Efforts to finalize an agreement and create the youth corps are ongoing.



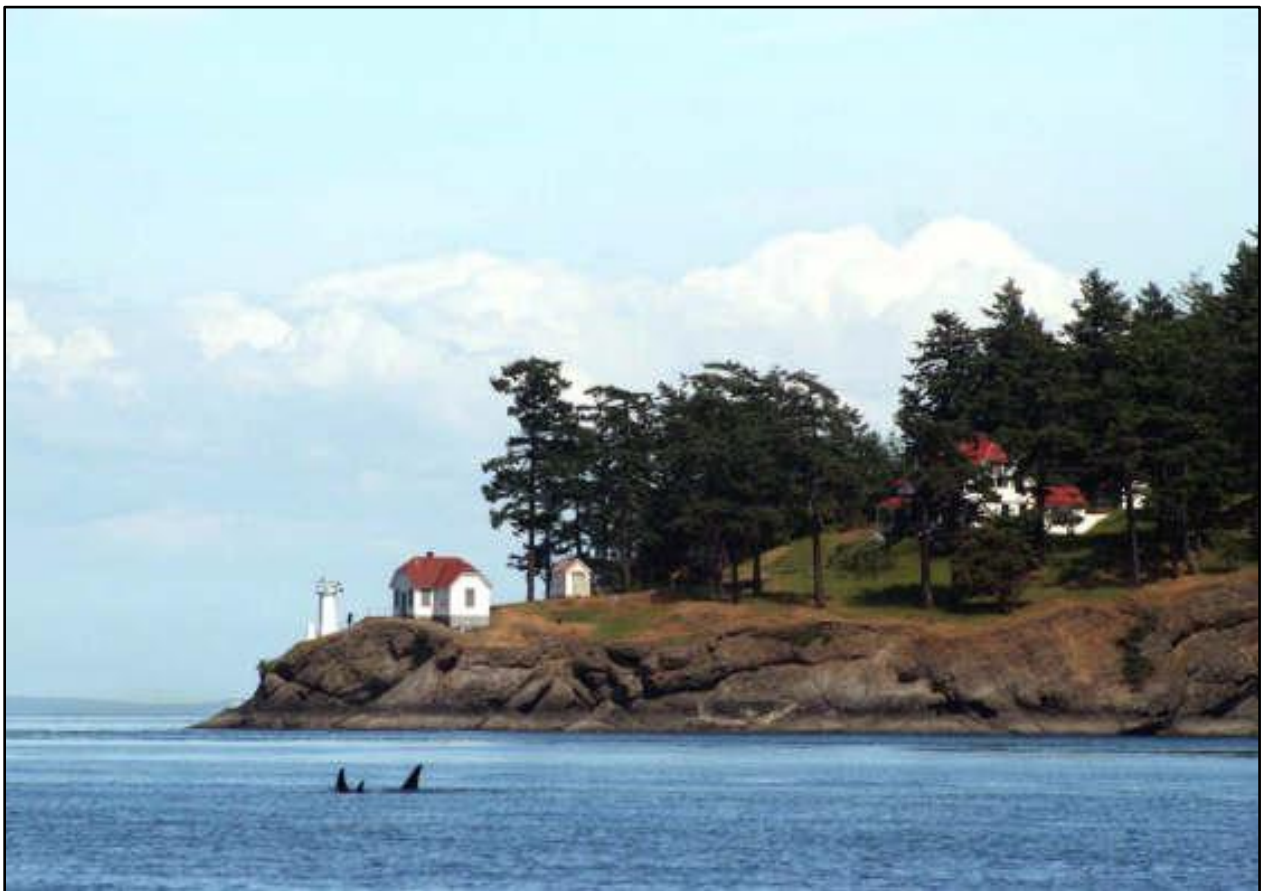
Events

The Great Islands Clean Up was back in full force for 2021. The Great Islands Clean Up is a very well attended, biannual event centered around Earth Day in the spring and National Public Lands Day in the fall. In the spring, volunteers across the islands gather to clean beach debris that has washed ashore during heavy winter storms. The fall event is an opportunity for island residents to celebrate the coming of the quiet winter season while cleaning trash from beaches, trails, and roads that accumulated during the busy tourist season. Monument staff were instrumental in the creation of this important community event and continue to provide crucial planning and logistical support. The fall event on Lopez Island had 59 participants who collected over 700 pounds of trash, much of which was diverted for recycling.



Words from the staff - Tribal Relations

Over the last year, BLM leadership and staff have met virtually with Native American Tribal representatives to discuss the San Juan Islands National Monument Resource Management Plan and current management of the monument. In September of 2021, the BLM Oregon and Washington State Director addressed tribal representatives to reinforce the BLM's commitment to working with the Tribes in future management of the monument. The Tribes seek formation of a Tribal forum that will provide ongoing communication between the monument and the Tribes regarding implementation of the management plan once the BLM signs the record of decision. The BLM is continuing to work with the Tribes to define the organization of the forum.





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