



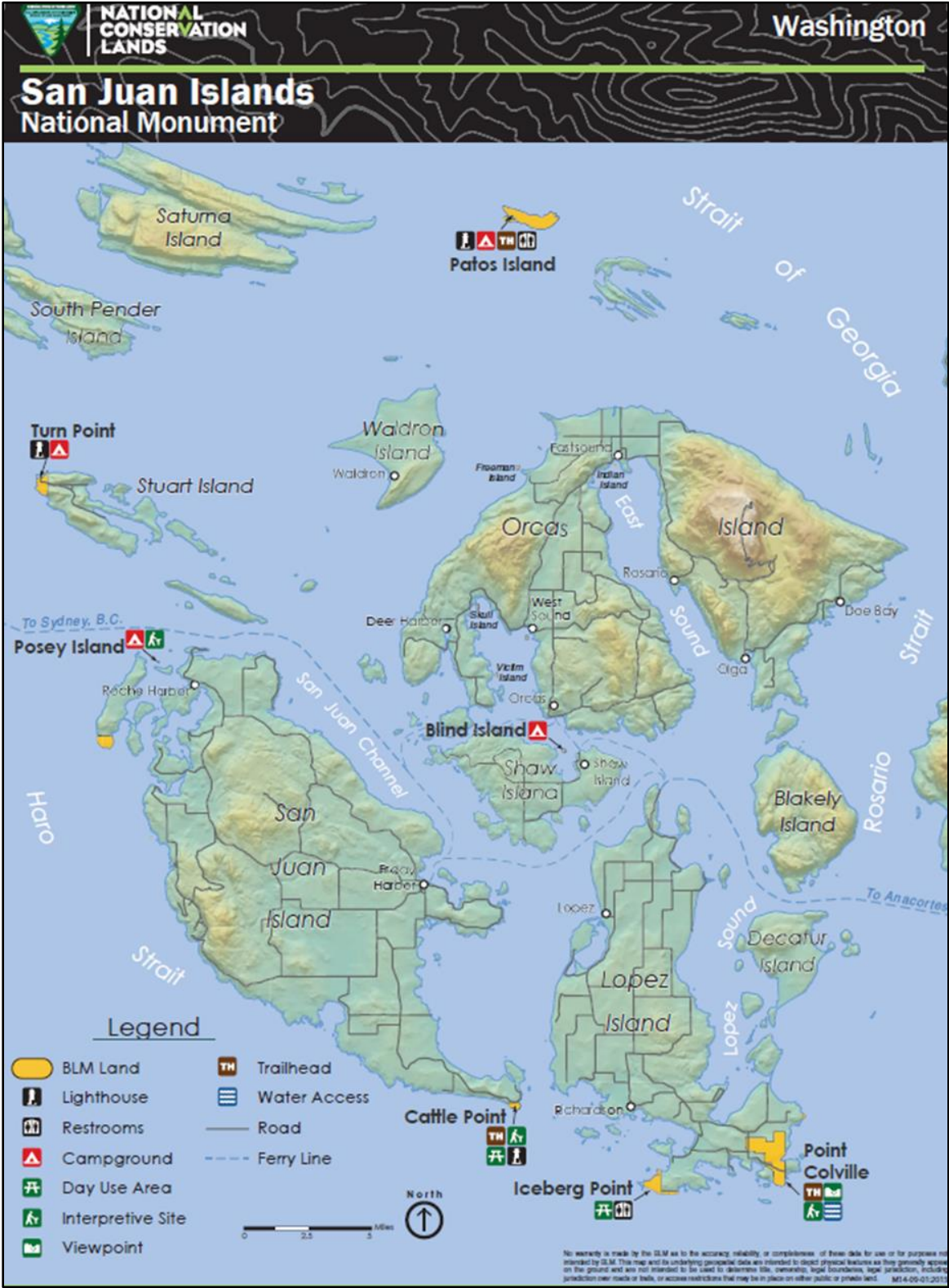
NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

Oregon-Washington
2023: Annual Manager's Report

San Juan Islands National Monument



Map



Accomplishments

In January of 2023, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) celebrated the signing of the San Juan Islands National Monument (Monument) Resource Management Plan. In March, community members, volunteer stewards and champions, representatives of partner groups, and BLM staff including the BLM Oregon/Washington (OR/WA) State Director gathered to mark the occasion. Having this document signed gives us our framework for moving forward with the next phase of Monument management. In 2023, Monument staff started collecting baseline data for invasive weeds in preparation for restoration work and BLM engineering staff completed full condition assessments for historic structures and visitor facilities.

The BLM also continues to support our partners' local outreach events such as the San Juan County Fair and to work collaboratively toward common goals. With the hiring of Owen Ellis into the Outdoor Recreation Planner position, the Monument is now fully staffed. Monument staff has begun work with our Coast Salish Tribal partners to take meaningful steps toward a Tribal Forum. We are excited to begin this work, which will engage a third-party facilitator to help create a working Tribal Forum Charter.



Challenges

Staffing the Monument is a challenge due to multiple socio-economic pressures, including the area's extremely high cost of living. San Juan County's median home price is over \$850,000. The islands are only accessible via ferry and living on a small island can feel isolating for many. Despite these challenges, the BLM was able to fill the Outdoor Recreation Planner position and is now fully staffed.

Visitor-use issues related to wildlife viewing at Cattle Point on San Juan Island as well as crowding at popular Monument destinations on Lopez Island continue to be a concern for the community. Existing trailheads and parking lots are often over capacity during busy visitation times. Across the board, this is a challenge for land managers in San Juan County and finding a collaborative, community supported way forward is one of the area's major challenges. This is representative of a larger debate of how to manage tourism sustainably in the small island communities of the Puget Sound. San Juan County is working on a plan (Destination Management Plan) to address these issues and there are many questions about how the Monument fits into these efforts.



Visitors

Monument staff continue to improve the quality of visitor use data collection. New infrared use counters as well as vehicle counters that react to changes in magnetic fields have been installed and were checked more often than in previous years. In 2023, Cattle Point on San Juan Island remained the Monument's most visited site with 190,000 estimated individual visits that staff calculate equal over 31,000 recreation visitor days (RVD), which are a unit of measure equal to 12 visitor hours. Visitor counts at Watmough Bay tallied to 36,000 visits and over 11,000 RVD. In summer, demand for parking at this location far exceeds supply. The current parking lot supports approximately 8 vehicles. Using the RVD numbers and assuming four visitors per vehicle, there are an average of eight vehicles in the parking lot for 12 hours each day.



Partnerships and Volunteers

The Monument successfully stewards its lands through a collaborative effort. In many ways, the Monument Advisory Committee (MAC) is the cornerstone of this collaboration. Since the beginning of the management plan development nearly a decade ago, the MAC has engaged community members in providing actionable recommendations to the BLM that are critical to implementing the vision of the Monument's proclamation. The BLM, with just two local staff members, relies on a network of over 60 partners to help manage the Monument. This includes groups like the Turn Point Lighthouse Preservation Society and Keepers of the Patos Light, who both help restore historic sites. Local youth contribute through the Lopez Island Conservation Corps, and the state gets involved with Washington State Parks co-managing recreational areas and providing critical logistical support to both staff and volunteers. This teamwork ensures the Monument's cultural, ecological, and recreational resources are preserved for future generations.



Science

The San Juan Islands National Monument Resource Management Plan outlines a science-based approach to protecting the Monument's unique ecosystems. This plan incorporates input from researchers, tribes, and the public to guide critical work like habitat restoration and monitoring the impact of recreation on wildlife. Work done this year included field visits by BLM cultural and ecological specialists and the funding of agreements for plant inventories. With a focus on collaboration, 2023 paves the way for future scientific endeavors that will ensure the continued health of the Monument.



Climate Impacts

The Monument exists in an area of multiple complex systems that impact overall climate. Expected temperature increases of both air and water not only will impact current species but are expected to cause more significant rainfall events. Changes in precipitation patterns are expected, with possibly less overall rain but more intense downpours. This could stress freshwater resources, increase erosion on exposed shorelines and bluffs, and increase fire risk. These are all considerations the BLM and its partners must consider in future restoration and infrastructure planning for the Monument. The Monument has already seen an increase in shoreline erosion impacting the county infrastructure that supports visitor access at Iceberg Point.



Climate Resiliency

Climate resilience is the ability of individuals, communities, and systems to withstand, adapt to, and recover from the impacts of climate change. Increasing climate resilience requires building the capacity to cope with the effects of climate change, such as more extreme weather events and rising sea levels. The Presidential Proclamation that created the Monument charged the BLM with protecting its natural ecosystems. In the face of rapid changes in temperature, sea level rise, and increased storm intensity, the BLM must carefully consider how to support resilient ecosystems in the Monument and reduce impacts from visitation and management. Partnerships with other land managers and landowners will be critical to addressing these challenges at the ecosystem level.

Condition assessments of historic assets and recreation infrastructure, along with baseline ecological inventories, were started in 2023 to support long term planning needs. The goal of increasing climate resilience synergize well with the Monument's goals of ecosystem restoration and social and environmental justice.



Social and Environmental Justice

In 2023, BLM staff continued a discussion initiated in 2021 with an area non-profit regarding the creation of a Coast Salish Youth Stewardship Corps. The intent is to engage Coast Salish youth from the San Juan Islands and surrounding areas in co stewardship projects and ultimately learn from thousands of years of traditional ecological knowledge. The Monument also partnered with the American Hiking Society to support its first Women's Volunteer Vacation. Monument staff also interacted with the Northwest Youth Corps LGBTQ+ affinity conservation crews.

The BLM is continuing quarterly meeting with the Tribal Coordination Group, which is made up of the BLM and our Coast Salish Tribal partners. This group helps us keep the Tribes informed of BLM activities and solicit feedback on management direction.



Events

In 2023, the BLM was able to increase its presence at outreach events on the islands, including farmers markets, canoe landings, the county fair, and other special events, due to our very dedicated seasonal Park Ranger. By far, our biggest and most meaningful event was gathering the community of past and present Monument stewards to celebrate the completion and adoption of the San Juan Islands Resource Management Plan. Attending the annual light station birthday party on Patos Island with Keepers of the Patos Light is also always a highlight and we are proud to partner with Keepers and Washington State Parks to host this annual event.



Words from the staff

A Heartfelt Thank You to the San Juan Islands National Monument Volunteers

Dear Valued Volunteers,

As another year draws to a close, we, at the San Juan Islands National Monument want to express our deepest gratitude for your unwavering dedication and service. Your contributions are truly invaluable in protecting and preserving this magnificent archipelago for generations to come.

Throughout the year, you have donned many hats, each one vital to the ongoing success of the Monument. Whether you led insightful hikes, meticulously monitored the landscape and its use, or patiently answered visitor questions at Patos and Turn Point, your passion for the Monument was evident in all you do.

Your hard work has a profound impact. From maintaining historic buildings to fostering deeper understanding of the islands' unique ecosystems, you play a crucial role in ensuring a remarkable visitor experience. The knowledge and enthusiasm you share leave a lasting impression on all who encounter you.

Beyond the tangible contributions, the spirit of volunteerism you've shown is the engine that keeps us all moving forward. Your commitment to conservation and education sets a remarkable example, encouraging a sense of shared responsibility toward the natural world that becomes ingrained as a part of the cultural fabric, a way of life on the islands.

Thanks to your efforts, the San Juan Islands National Monument continues to thrive as a literal beacon of grass roots conservation.

We look forward to partnering with you again in the coming years. Together, we will continue to safeguard the resource we love for all to enjoy.

With deepest appreciation,

The San Juan Islands National Monument Staff,

Brie Chartier, Monument Manager
Owen Ellis, Monument Outdoor Recreation Planner
Rebecca Ouvry, 2023 Seasonal Park Ranger



NATIONAL CONSERVATION LANDS

San Juan Islands

National Monument

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