

Environment & Climate

2024 Impact Report

Protecting this place and turning the tide for the
Islands and the Salish Sea with members like you!

ED Update

A Year of Bold Action and Gratitude



As we reflect on 2024, I'm filled with gratitude for what we've accomplished together. This year, Friends of the San

Juans celebrated 45 years of protecting the islands and the Salish Sea—a milestone made possible by our incredible community of supporters.

With members like you, we envision a future where the San Juan Islands and the Salish Sea thrive as a sanctuary of biodiversity and sustainability, fostered by a community deeply connected to and actively protecting this special place.

We are dedicated to the important work of supporting island communities for generations to come, protecting the Salish Sea and shorelines, and defending our precious ecosystems.

I have great hope for our work ahead and am inspired by our accomplishments this past year. In 2024 Friends of the San Juans showed up every day, rain or shine to:

- ***Protect Our Future*** by expanding our Immersive Salish Sea Education Program by 89%, bringing underwater virtual reality experiences to students across the islands!
- ***Protect Our Island Communities*** from increasing climate threats. And now, we are partnering with the Samish Indian Nation as part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Climate Resilience Challenge. This transformative project will create a shoreline protection blueprint for the future of the San Juans and its communities.
- ***Protect Shoreline Ecosystems*** by advancing restoration projects on public and private property on Shaw, Orcas, Lopez, and Blakely. In 2025, we will surpass one mile of beach restored!

- **Protect The Salish Sea** by advancing science and advocacy to secure vital protections for Southern Resident killer whales and their habitat through improved policy and settlement agreements. For example, ensuring additional vessel traffic and associated increased risks to Southern Residents will be avoided through backhaul requirements.

Our work is powered by our dedicated membership, which spans the bioregion and beyond, including 10% of San Juan County residents. If you haven't yet made your year-end gift, now's the time so you can [take advantage of our year-end match!](#)

Together, we are protecting this place and the future of these islands and waters we love. If you would like to dive deeper with me into 2024's highlights, please read my full year-end member update, [here](#).

Eva Schulte

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Island Communities + Resources

Safeguarding our farms and forestlands takes advocacy and community action.



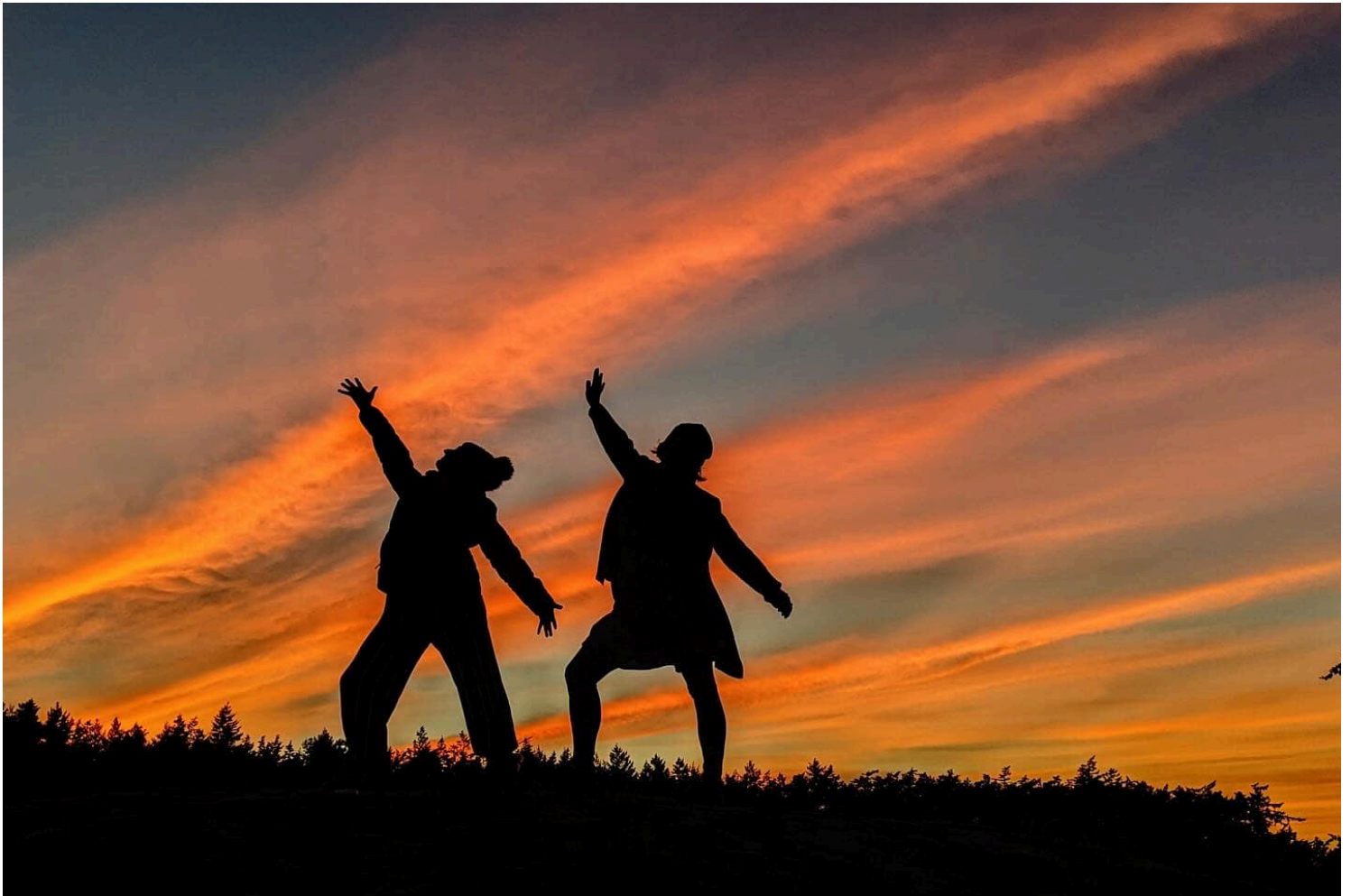
At the heart of our work is how we show up to protect communities and shared island resources. With 31% of San Juan County residents and hundreds of regional partners across the Salish Sea engaged in our work, Friends of the San Juans is empowered by a community that actively supports protecting this special place.



Indigenous Voices First

Friends' Board and Staff deepened relationships with Tribes and sovereign First Nations with over 700 hours of learning and listening with Indigenous leadership and Tribal Engagement leaders.

We curated screenings across the islands of the Indigenous civil rights movie, FISH WAR, and were honored to have Tribal dignitaries present. With 600 people attending these events, we celebrated Native American Heritage Month and increased the communities understanding of the enduring connection between the waters we protect and those who rely on them.



Communities to the Forefront

We stand with community members most affected by environmental challenges and climate change, recognizing

the deep interconnectedness of their futures with the health of our ecosystem.

We are dedicated to fostering inclusion and equity, ensuring that every voice in the islands is heard and represented in environmental advocacy.

We are collaborating with the Family Resource Centers on Orcas, San Juan, and Lopez Islands to enhance community input on the county's Comprehensive Plan—a long-term framework that guides land use, housing, transportation, and environmental protection in the islands.

In 2024, Friends joined regional partners to successfully defend [the Climate Commitment Act](#), protecting investments in wildfire management, safer transportation, reliable ferries, and sustainable farming. This win ensures a healthier, more resilient future for nature and for people across the San Juan Islands and Washington State.

Additionally, we are collaborating with the Madrona Institute to introduce Compass for San Juan County, a localized adaptation of the world-renowned [Climate Fresk Game](#).

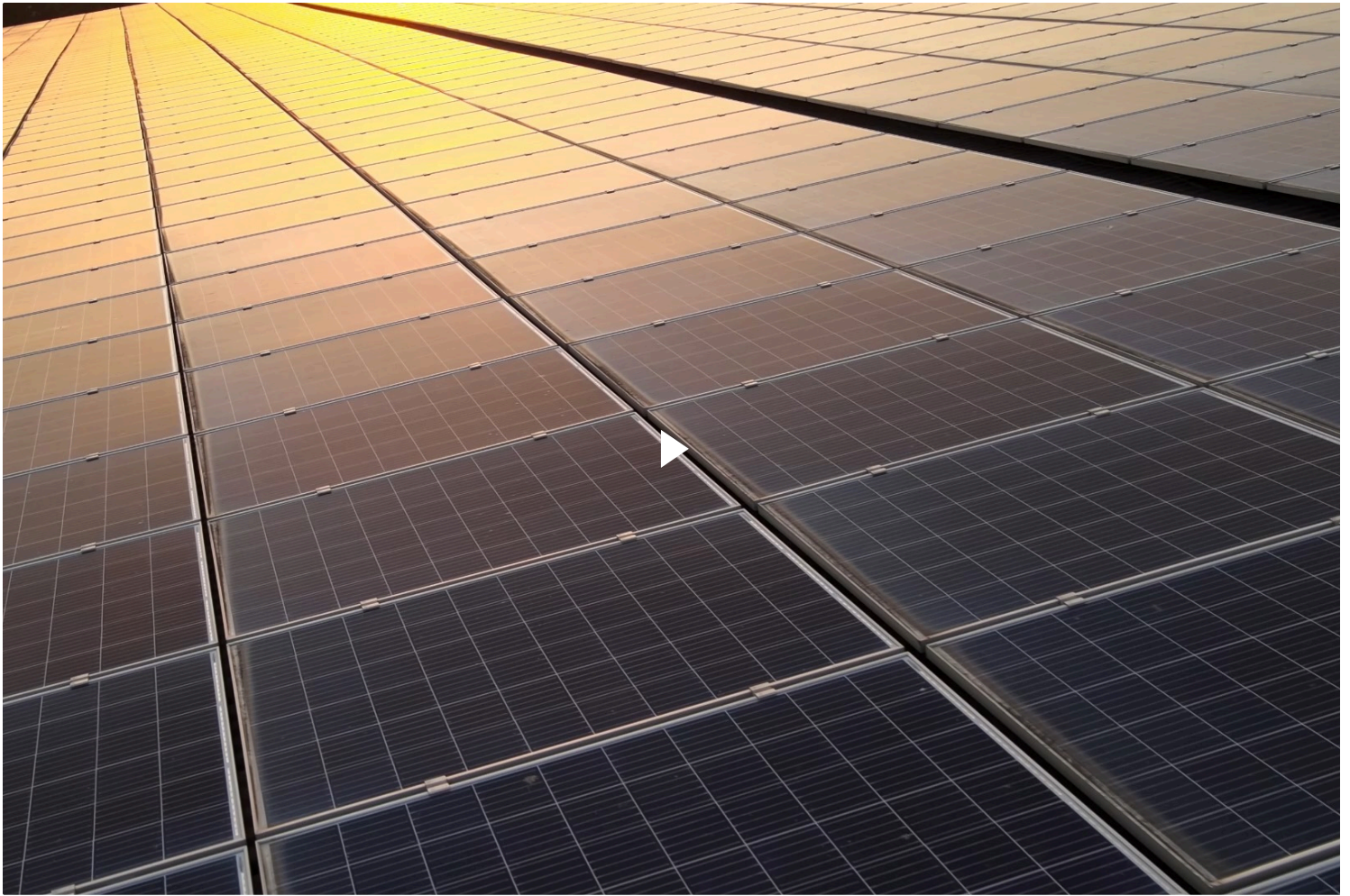
Together, we are working to amplify voices that are often excluded from planning and policy decisions.



Empowering Action

We launched our [Protector Platform](#) to equip county leaders and the community with insights on how they can help safeguard the islands, Salish Sea, and the future.

Passionate about protecting the Salish Sea? Join us! Whether you have skills to share or simply want to lend your voice, there's a place for you to engage and contribute. [Explore volunteer opportunities here.](#)



Thoughtful Land Use

1. We advocated for land use code updates that promote solar energy production while also protecting agricultural resource lands with OPALCO and San Juan County. The Planning Commission and county Council advanced [Friends' requests to update the county code](#) on this important topic. Friends is committed to proactively working with OPALCO on clean energy siting solutions in the new year to help our community ramp up renewable energy production and protect this special place and its island resources and communities.
2. We helped scores of islanders navigate and engage meaningful code compliance, permit, and planning processes.
3. We protected rural lands from unnecessary subdivisions by participating in the legislative process.



A Legacy of Land Protection: Advocating for the Land Bank Since Its Inception

This year marked a major win for clean water, healthy forests, and affordable housing in San Juan County. Congratulations to everyone who helped renew the Land Bank through Proposition 1!

Friends played a key role in establishing the San Juan County Conservation Land Bank in 1990, leading a coalition to create this fund that has raised over \$125 million and protected more than 20,000 acres of natural areas, shorelines, forests, and farmland.

This renewal ensures the Land Bank can continue preserving iconic places like Turtleback Mountain, Mount Grant, and Watmough Bay for public enjoyment and

resource protection. We're proud to have helped safeguard the islands we all cherish.

The Salish Sea

Keeping our seas healthy takes vigilance and proactive action.



1 Settlement agreement with Phillips 66 Ferndale Refinery



In the spring and summer, we entered important talks with Phillips 66 Ferndale Refinery about their project to produce Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF). Their original plan involved up to 61 new round trips of oil tankers or barges each year to transport Synthetic Blend Component (SBC) from California, circumnavigating the San Juan Islands en route to the refinery. (SBC is a product that is blended with jet fuel to produce SAF.) Phillips 66 approached Friends to discuss their project. Through multiple in-person and online meetings and problem-solving, we successfully negotiated a key change to their plan that better safeguards Southern Resident killer whales. Instead of increasing vessel traffic, Phillips 66 agreed to backhaul, using existing vessel traffic that travels unloaded in one direction (and will now instead be loaded in both directions). The backhaul requirement will avoid additional vessel traffic and the associated increased risks and impacts to Southern Residents, their critical habitat, and the Salish Sea ecosystem. This settlement agreement highlights our ongoing commitment to protect the Salish Sea and its endangered species.



Advocating for Safer Oil Spill Response Plans

In October 2024, Friends of the San Juans co-hosted Dr. Riki Ott's presentation, ["Oil Spill Response: An Opportunity for Change."](#)

Friends is calling on members to help protect the Salish Sea by urging state and federal decision-makers to ban discontinued chemical dispersants still approved for oil spill responses in Washington waters. These discontinued dispersants are proven to be harmful to humans and wildlife.

The advocacy emphasizes the need to modernize oil spill response plans, prioritize human safety, and establish citizen oversight for greater transparency and

accountability. Members are encouraged to take action by contacting state and federal decision-makers.

Now is the time to take action!

Send emails to state and federal decision makers asking them to ban the use of discontinued dispersants and update oil spill response plans with measures to protect human health and provide for citizen advisory councils.

Take this 3-minute action today!



It's simple math: more ships mean a higher risk of something going wrong.

Our islands and the Salish Sea urgently need stronger oil spill prevention measures.

To address the catastrophic potential of oil spills and protect critical habitats, Friends of the San Juans is advocating for an additional Emergency Response Towing Vessel (ERTV) in the Salish Sea. This need is even more urgent with the completion of the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion project's increase in oil tanker traffic which has increased the risks of accidents and oil spills.

While the ERTV stationed at Neah Bay has been a vital oil spill prevention asset, its location is too distant to respond quickly to emergencies in Haro Strait and Boundary Pass, one of the highest-risk areas for vessel traffic.

Friends advocacy in the islands and in Washington DC has garnered the attention of Governor Inslee on this important topic.

See a filmed discussion with Governor Jay Inslee on the need for an ERTV, which the Governor expressed support for. [Watch the video here.](#)

With proactive steps and support from members like you, we can strengthen oil spill prevention to safeguard the Salish Sea!

Sign Up for Action Alerts



Friends' galvanized over 1,200 public voices to advocate for financial responsibility rules for oil facilities in Washington State.

A major oil spill in our region would be devastating. So much is at risk—environmental, economic, and cultural resources, the endangered Southern Resident killer whales, and more.

Financial responsibility requirements are needed to ensure that refineries, pipelines, and bulk oil handling facilities won't go bankrupt before covering all of their oil spills' response and damage costs.

In early 2024, Friends of the San Juans launched a powerful campaign to rally regional voices and demand that oil

companies pay for the costs of their potential oil spills and the devastation they could cause in our region. Through comprehensive analysis, issue identification, and strategic outreach, Friends inspired over 200 individual comments. Additional support came from Washington Conservation Action (WCA) and the Stand Up to Oil (SUTO) campaign, which submitted 466 comment forms, and Friends of the Earth, which contributed a petition signed by 600 Washington State members.

The final rule established financial responsibility requirements, though not the amounts that would ensure that the full costs of a worst-case oil spill are addressed.

Transferring oil to and/or from vessels over the water is one of the ways that oil spills can occur.

Friends created [an interactive tool](#) to make data accessible for the public to learn about facilities' oil transfer operations. It is our hope that this tool will make state-collected data more accessible and support ongoing community engagement and advocacy for stronger environmental protections in rulemakings and other regulatory updates.



No other community organization keeps a closer watch on marine vessel traffic in the Salish Sea than Friends of the San Juans.

Vessel Traffic Projections

Salish Sea, 2024



Friends of the San Juans completed our latest analysis of vessel traffic projections in the Salish Sea, building on data collected since 2015.

Here's what we found:

- **Projected Growth:** 23 new projects could increase vessel transits by at least 2,005 annually, an 18% rise compared to 2023 levels.
- **Key Contributors:** Over 60% of this increase stems from two Canadian projects:
- **The completed Trans Mountain pipeline expansion project:** Adds 696 oil tanker transits annually, plus unexpected oil tanker transits to WA State refineries and

anchorage areas that were not included in the permit review process.

- **Roberts Bank Terminal 2:** Would add 520 container ship transits annually.

What's at stake?

Environmental Impacts: Rising traffic intensifies impacts to endangered Southern Resident killer whales due to increased underwater noise and increases the risk of ship strikes and habitat loss.

Oil Spill Concerns: Increased tanker traffic heightens the risk of catastrophic spills in the Salish Sea.

[View the latest report and infographic on Salish Sea Vessel Traffic Projections](#)

Shoreline Ecosystems

Restoring our ecosystems takes science, education, policy, and law.



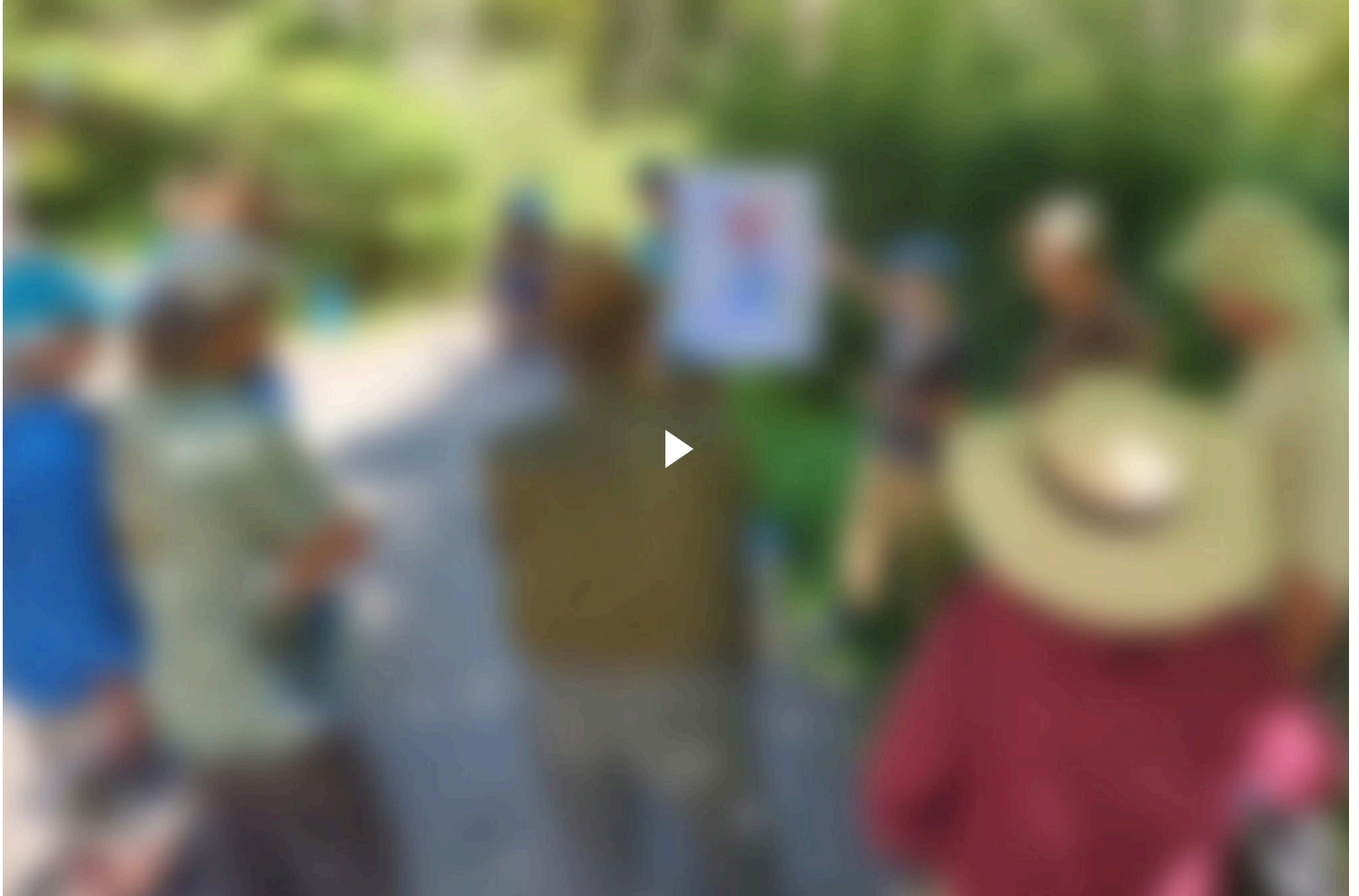
Personalized Shoreline Guidance

Natural beaches are essential for healthy marine ecosystems. Unlike armored or developed shorelines, they allow for natural erosion and sediment movement, which are critical for maintaining habitat for forage fish, juvenile salmon, and other marine species. They also support eelgrass beds and invertebrates, which form the base of the marine food web, and help filter water, store carbon, and protect against rising sea levels.

In 2024, Friends conducted 26 on-site consultations, offering tailored technical assistance to shoreline property owners on enhancing their properties while protecting marine ecosystems. From replacing hard armor with nature-based solutions to planting native vegetation for erosion control, these visits showed how simple actions can

improve habitat for vital species while preserving the beauty and function of local beaches.

More than half of these property owners are continuing to work with Friends on shoreline planting and/or drainage improvement plans for their properties.



Property Owner Outreach and Community Education

This year, we connected with 139 shoreline residents through three workshops and two neighborhood beach walks, building awareness about how simple, proactive choices can protect the health of the Salish Sea.

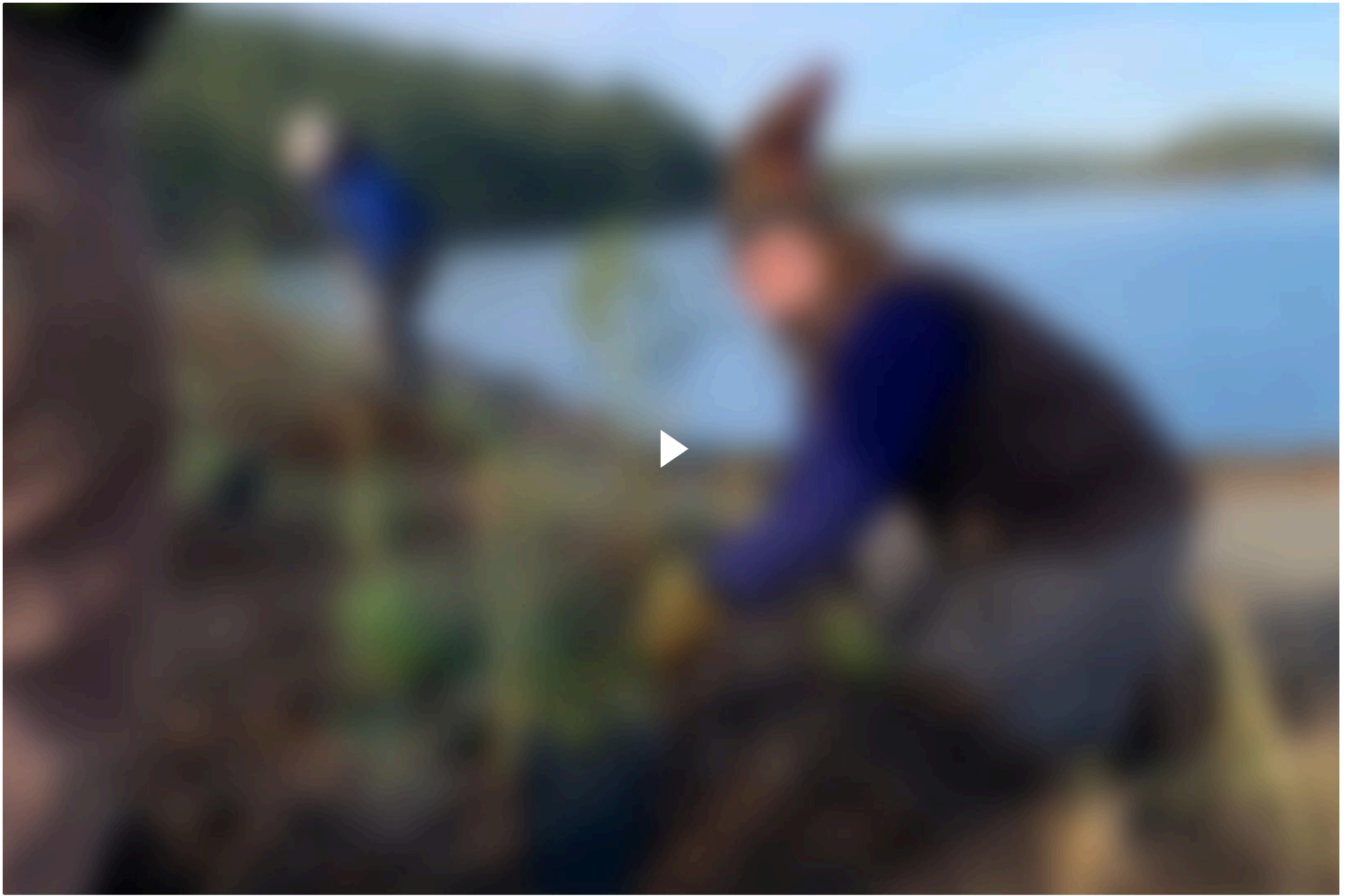
Participants learned about the impacts of shoreline modifications like bulkheads, the value of natural beach processes, and practical steps to protect habitat for forage fish, salmon, and other marine wildlife. These events are

key to fostering a culture of stewardship and supporting property owners in making decisions that benefit their beaches and our shared environment.



Eelgrass Meadow Monitoring

Friends re-surveyed the deep edge of eelgrass meadows across 140 miles of coastline in San Juan County. By comparing the results with 2003 surveys, we'll gain critical insights into twenty-year trends, helping to guide future restoration and conservation strategies for this foundational marine habitat. Eelgrass survey data from 20 embayments collected in 2023 was also analyzed this year, documenting significant declines in this critical habitat. Preliminary results of this collaborative research were [published in a paper here](#).



Beach Restoration in Action

We planted 1,000 dune grass plugs and 75 native shrubs at a recently restored beach, stabilizing the shoreline and enhancing vital habitat for coastal wildlife. These native plantings play a critical role in preventing erosion, improving water quality, and supporting biodiversity



Building Momentum for Restoration Projects

In 2024, four waterfront property owners have committed to developing exciting new beach and eelgrass habitat restoration efforts, including removing two bulkheads and two old creosote structures. These changes will bring beaches back to life, helping natural shoreline processes thrive and improving critical eelgrass and marine wildlife habitats. Three additional projects are currently in the permitting and implementation planning stages, with construction set for 2025 and 2026. Together, we're making meaningful progress toward healthier beaches, eelgrass habitats, and a stronger Salish Sea.

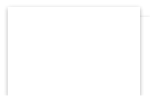
Science Map Reveal!

After 23 years of dedicated science and data collection, Friends of the San Juans is thrilled to unveil a groundbreaking interactive mapping tool! This tool combines decades of shoreline research led by Friends, visualizing critical marine habitats like eelgrass beds, forage fish spawning sites, and shoreline armoring across the San Juan Islands.

This comprehensive map identifies critical habitats and stressors that influence salmon recovery plans across the county. It's a game-changer for local policy, ensuring that our science drives action.

Friends of the
San Juans

Interactive Shoreline Ecosystem Habitat Map



20 km



Friends of the San Juans Interactive Shoreline Ecosystem Habitat Map

The Future

The Salish Sea is like nowhere else on earth.



The Salish Sea is an extraordinary ecosystem, but its future depends on bold, proactive action.

Friends of the San Juans is leading efforts to inspire youth, engage communities, and tackle urgent threats like invasive species and plastics pollution—safeguarding this unique place for generations to come.

Here are some highlights from 2024:

1. **Youth Education:** We expanded our [Immersive Salish Sea Education Program](#) outreach by 89% as compared to 2023 and launched an open-source learning website with our curriculum and virtual reality videos.
2. **Youth Voices in Action:** 10 eco-club students journeyed to Olympia, passionately voiced their concerns, and engaged directly with state legislators to protect our environment.

3. **Plastics Debris Removal:** Volunteers who joined our community beach clean-up and youth in our education programs removed an estimated 5,500 nurdles and other marine debris from the ecosystem.
4. **Building a Community of Conservationists:** 50 new community scientists joined our team of community science volunteers. We armed them with the training to monitor shorelines for invasive European Green Crabs.



Join Us!

Protect this place with us in the following ways...

[Sign up for Action Alerts](#)

[Volunteer](#)

[Start or renew your membership](#)

[Join us at an upcoming event](#)



Donate

Nearly half of our funding comes directly from supporters like you. Your gift helps drive the critical work of protecting our island communities, shoreline ecosystems, and the Salish Sea.

Protect This Place

2023 FINANCIALS

Friends *of the*
San Juans

INCOME

Membership + Donor Contributions (43%) \$ 561,595

Grant Income (57%) \$750,557

Investments, Events (0%) \$5,238

TOTAL \$1,317,390

EXPENSES

Programs (88%) \$1,424,450

Administration (10%) \$167,115

Fundraising (2%) \$23,260

TOTAL \$1,614,825

CURRENT + FIXED ASSETS

Operating Fund \$475,169

Reserve Fund \$520,069

Endowment \$788,891

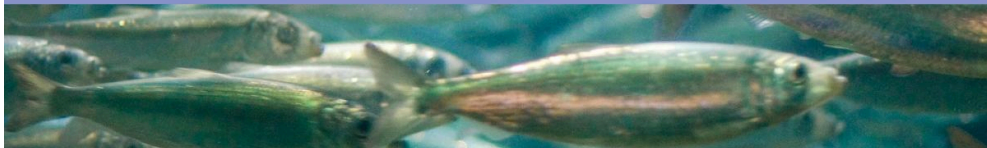
TOTAL \$1,784,129

LIABILITIES + EQUITY

Liabilities \$55,012

Equity \$1,729,117

TOTAL \$1,784,129



About the author



**Elise Cope, Communications + Outreach
Director at Friends**

A passionate advocate for people and the planet, Elise blends digital storytelling with a love for environmental and social justice. Based in Friday Harbor, she enjoys connecting with other artists.