

June 22, 2011

Protecting BLM lands needs community support

By Nancy McCoy

Efforts to protect the Bureau of Land Management properties in the San Juan Islands as a National Conservation Area continue to gain momentum.

Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar recently met with approximately 50 community members, including representatives of regional conservation groups, three tribes, San Juan County council members, city of Anacortes officials and representatives of state and congressional offices.

Salazar requested the meeting to discuss the protection of the

approximately 1,000 acres of BLM lands in the San Juan Islands.

Those attending were overwhelmingly supportive of creating a National Conservation Area for the San Juan County BLM lands.

The designation of a NCA would be a congressional act mandating that BLM conserve these existing federal lands in keeping with the wishes of the community.

Representative Rick Larsen's office will be driving the creation of this legislation, working with the community to ensure broad support.

During the meeting with

Secretary Salazar, key points of discussion were the need for permanent protection of the lands and for the community involvement and support.

He also expressed the need for collaboration with existing BLM partners such as the county, state and tribes as well as better coordination between the various federal agencies managing lands in the islands.

Karen Kelleher, Wenatchee Field Office Manager for the BLM, whose office oversees their land in the San Juan Islands, was tasked to assist with the NCA designa-

tion and coordination between the agencies.

After the meeting, the Seattle Post-Intelligencer quoted Salazar as saying the San Juan Islands efforts "are a template for local conservation around the country."

The Islanders for a National Conservation Area are actively gathering letters of endorsement for a NCA.

Representative Rick Larsen, representing the San Juan Islands in congress, is collecting support for the NCA as he prepares the legislation necessary for the designation.

A letter of support to Congress from you will greatly help ensure success.

Information about the effort and how to send your own endorsement is available at www.sanjuanislandsnca.org or you send an email to info@SanJuanIslandsNCA.org.

— Nancy McCoy is a member of Islanders for National Conservation Area on Lopez Island