



Trillium Corp history on south Whidbey.

In 1988 Georgia Pacific, a timber company which acquired most of its millions of acres at no cost thanks to the generosity of American taxpayers in the 1800s, divested itself of a small part of its holdings. It sold off some 17,000 acres in 5 northwest Washington counties to a young upstart real estate development company called [Trillium Corp](#). Some 2500 - 3000 of those acres were on south Whidbey Island, in 28 separate parcels ranging in size from 20 to 780 acres.

Trillium had never been involved in forestry before, and it was probably rather heavily in debt for this new purchase. It set out to log every stick from every acre just as quickly as possible. Since there was no need for any public notice, the first that residents knew of any of this was the disappearance of all the trees from 30 acres just outside of Langley on Coles Road. People were puzzled and somewhat upset because it had happened so fast. The whole operation took no more than a week.

And then other parcels were skun. People were angry, dismayed, and feeling somewhat helpless to do anything about it all. Steve and I started asking questions and actually getting some answers. We discovered the existence and function of the [Department of Natural Resources](#), the state agency which issues Forest Practice permits. We discovered just how powerless this agency was - and continues to be - to protect critical areas such as wetlands, steep slopes, and prime wildlife habitat. We were given a map of all the former Georgia Pacific holdings and discovered that they were a perfect fit for the Trillium holdings. We also discovered that Trillium was systematically applying to log it all, just as quickly as possible.

Steve did some quick calculations, and came to the conclusion that if Trillium had its way, south Whidbey would lose 10% of its forested land in one fell swoop. DNR expressed no interest in this matter. The Island County Commissioners wrung their hands publicly while announcing that they had no authority over logging, no matter how egregious.

One of the Trillium parcels, 40 acres, just happened to be located 660 ft from our own back door. It was an area we knew well and had named Big Muddy to commemorate the really bad road through wetlands that led to it. We documented the extensive wetlands and a really nice stream. We presented this information to Bobbye Miller of [Island County Planning Dept](#), who passed it on to Bob Zeigler of Dept of Fish and Wildlife. They took a field trip to the site and agreed with our assessment of the wetlands and stream. They submitted a report recommending that the stream be protected. Bobbye was hounded out of Island County not much after that and

Bob Zeigler was transferred to a desk job in Olympia. Its good to know that our public servants are allowed to perform their jobs unmolested.

When Trillium began work at Big Muddy we called out the troops. We announced that we would blockade the logging. It was our hope to pressure Island County, DNR, and Fish & Wildlife to intervene to protect the stream and wetlands.

Logging proceeded at a furious pace. In late June we carried out the blockade. A large crowd of people walked down Big Muddy road about 1/2 mile to the logging site and simply occupied the ground at the entrance to the property. I remember Jerene Kerkvliet borrowing the flag Jack Kirschke had brought, and Lynn Willeford clambering onto a deck of logs to prevent their being loaded. Lots of people just standing around, talking to each other and the log truck driver who could not move his truck. Both my parents were part of the group, as was one mother with toddler in carrier. We were there for some hours, and work came to a stop. There was no animosity from the loggers - more like bemusement. Eventually, Sheriff's deputy Ron Edwards came to the scene and asked us to disperse. We had a long, long discussion on the subject among ourselves, and eventually agreed to leave. The only way to do that was to walk back up that road. Since Steve and I were the organizers, we felt an obligation to be the last ones out. My mother, who was a member of "Ladies of the Beach," a group which walks 5 miles of shoreline each week, insisted on staying with me. My dad, of course, stayed with her. The entire group straggled its way slowly up the road, with my parents and me at the end, followed by Ron Edwards in the sheriff's car, followed by the log truck. My mother never walked slower in her life. It must have taken her 45 minutes to walk that half mile. Since she was a senior citizen, there was nothing deputy Edwards could do but cruise that car in ultra-low.

The blockade put the issue on the public map. Suddenly there were meetings, hearings, discussions, news articles, negotiations. Congressman Jack Metcalf promised his support, but pointed out that this was not a federal issue, so he had little leverage. A huge meeting was held at the Bayview School building, at which Save the Trees, which had originally fought to protect the 255 acres of Classic U from DNR's logging, was resurrected. A waste basket was passed around and people filled it with \$500.00 to move forward with a lawsuit to stop the whole mess.

Trillium upped the ante by applying to log the 780 acres at Bush Point. They insisted at all times that they were following the letter of the law and had every right to do what they were doing.

The County Commissioners called a meeting. The room was packed as never before. People were standing in the halls and outside. Ms Jean Gorton, Trillium VP was there to answer questions and tell us all to go to hell. She did an excellent job of doing just that. The commissioners begged her to leave critical area alone, out of the goodness of her heart and as a gesture of good neighborliness. Gorton came back after the noon recess to tell us that she had just had word from Trillium headquarters that someone had vandalized the office by dumping a bucket of sawdust on the floor and that a window had been broken. She said that she had come prepared to make concessions, but that in such an atmosphere of violence and intimidation, no quarter would be given. And she stomped out.

A delegation of us, consisting of Neal Colburn, Pat Goff, at least one other person I cannot now remember, and myself went to visit Commissioner of Public Lands Brian Boyle. He would not put a stop to the 780 acre operation, but held out to us the promise that if two of the 3 county commissioners asked for it, he would issue a stop work order.

We rushed back to Island County and asked the commissioners. Only Dwaine Colby of Camano would commit to asking Boyle for the stop work order. Dick Caldwell of south Whidbey and Gordon Koetje said it was out of their hands and they would not interfere with Trillium's right to skin 780 acres in a single parcel.

Trillium then announced that it would negotiate with the people of south Whidbey, but that Trillium would decide who could be at the table. Steve and I were, of course, specifically excluded from the negotiations. Shirlee Read and Neal Colburn, among others, were at that table. Trillium offered negligible concessions, and the Whidbey negotiators accepted what they were offered. Shirlee reported regularly on the wrangling, and how they had to fight for wetlands, buffers, and even individual trees. At the time we were working under the aegis of a group known as Citizens for Sensible Development, which met every second week, mostly at the home of Marshall and Dorothy Saran. As CSD we demanded "ID Team" walks. An Interdisciplinary Team consists of specialists from the various state and even federal agencies whose expertise is likely to be useful in evaluating a particular property. People participate only with permission of the landowner, and Jean Gorton was loath to give us permission. There was rather a tense meeting in a parking lot while all this was sorted out, but eventually permission was granted. I attended one of the ID Team walks and Steve the second. The name of the game with these walks is for the landowner or representative, in this case Jean Gorton and Gordy Iverson, Trillium's forester, to focus on items and locations which demonstrate their point of view and try to prevent team members from noticing other information. Thus it was that we were led as far from the wetland system as possible. Island County planner Chi Do turned out to be far more observant than expected, and pointed out a number of steep slopes, wetlands, and other critical areas. One point of contention was Alan Bixby's pond, down on the low ground along Smuggler's Cove Road, west of the site. It was our contention that runoff from that large a clearcut of a hilly ridged area would result in major ponding below, and that Bixby's pond was the logical recipient of that overflow. DNR's hydrogeologist, Noel Wolff assured us that no such thing would happen, and explained to us in highly technical language that there would be no change to the hydrology.

Eventually, in spite of all we could do, DNR granted Trillium a Forest Practices permit to log the entire 780 acres. The first 400 acres were cut, and rumors abounded to the effect that Jean Gorton had been seen on the clearcut site, which now had a spectacular view to the Olympics, and described the intended location of the golf course, the condos, the houses, etc. We never did find any evidence of this dream. Then cutting of the north unit commenced. The north unit included about 40 acres which Trillium promised not to cut in order to protect wetlands and their buffers. This was the area for which Shirlee reported having fought tree by tree.

Shirlee and her husband Clyde made it a practice to hike on the site regularly to monitor the logging. We got a very angry call from Shirlee in December of 1988 to the effect that they were logging the very buffer for which she had fought. We called DNR and demanded a stop

work order. We went to the press. We went to everybody we could think of. DNR did not take the matter seriously, and Trillium continued to log the buffer and other trees which had been marked for preservation. Perhaps we lacked imagination.

Maybe it was sheer frustration. We organized another blockade. This one happened on December 13, 1988. It had been raining for weeks, of course, being winter and all, and the logging roads were a thick viscous quicksand like material, neither soil nor water but having components of both. The log trucks were running on whatever the substrate was, but of course churning up this mud with every pass. The only entrance to the entire 780 acres was a very narrow dirt road off of Bounty Loop, off Mutiny Bay Road. It was not our planned intention to do so, but when people started arriving for the blockade, they naturally parked their cars on the dirt road, effectively blocking the logging trucks. Steve led the group out there while I did some work on the outside, such as PR. I arrived well after the action had been in progress for some time. Again the flag was present. The demonstrators had become somewhat emboldened by their previous experience and Myrna Twomey led a climb up onto the log deck, both for a better view and to get out of the mud. When I arrived, I parked behind the many other cars already on site, and found myself being followed by several of Island County's finest. I heard them call to me to hold up, which of course caused me to walk all the faster, and away from the demonstration site. 780 acres is a lot of land and I led the two Sheriff's deputies all over that land before we finally arrived at the demonstration site. Sad to say, the press, in their city shoes and nice clothes, refused even to emerge from their cars.

Once at the demo, the sheriff's deputies of course ordered us to leave or be arrested. Steve called a major meeting of those in attendance to discuss the matter, and a good while later presented the group's decision to the cops - we agreed to leave. About half of the people began walking back up the gumbo-like road while the other half took off cross-country to avoid being sucked into the muck. Deputy Russ Lindner, in his civilian clothes and nice loafers, became quite upset. He really believed that they were trying to avoid him and return to the site. Nope, they were just avoiding the mud. One of the loggers came along in his very large 4 wheel drive truck and offered deputy Lindner a ride. He accepted. The truck was not able to go any faster than the many people walking up the road, so we all watched as the driver stopped at the intersection near the parked cars and Deputy Lindner performed a very graceful jump down from the truck - right into the deepest gumbo. It put us in mind of wet hens.

The demonstration generated a whole lot of very bad publicity for Trillium, including a letter from Commissioner of Public Lands Brian Boyle to his old tennis partner David Syre, president and CEO of Trillium, to the effect that his company's violation of agreements and wholesale destruction was jeopardizing a whole structure of negotiated agreements which had been more than 10 years in the making. Boyle said some very uncomplimentary things about Trillium in that letter, and basically directed them to stop it right now. We gleefully published the letter.

Since CSD wanted nothing to do with something as radical as a demonstration or blockade, we had to come up with a different name. For lack of anything better, we called ourselves Island Earth First! That got quite a bit of attention, some of it negative, a lot of it bemused.

Violations at the Bush Point site stopped, but logging on other parcels continued. The entire community was demoralized and depressed. Steve and I decided we had to do something. We decided that a positive action to restore the damage on the 40 acres at Big Muddy would be just the thing. We called together a whole lot of people and organized, over a period of months, an “early Earth Day” tree planting.

In the thick of the planning was Michael Seraphinoff. We recruited a bunch of team leaders - Denny Keogh was one. Ayala Talpei was another. Judy with the long Polish last name was the local spotter on Bounty Loop. We identified recently logged sites where alder seedlings were coming in by the zillions and the owners were only too happy to have us remove a thousand or two. Ultimately we ended up with somewhere around 45 people and 4500 seedlings. Elliott Menashe negotiated with Trillium for permission to plant on their land. Trillium denied permission. Michael Seraphinoff delighted in the idea of being arrested for the act of planting a tree to restore land trashed by Trillium. The press became interested. Trillium backed off. Eventually we gained permission to plant what we wanted, if Elliott would take personal responsibility for the result. We planted what worked - alder. Elliott did bring a lovely faux-silver platter with lovely hors d’oeuvres which turned out to be bundles of bigleaf maple seedlings. Each bundle contained 10 seedlings. We knew that Trillium had planted the site with Douglas fir. They hired a crew of immigrants who did not speak the language and had no experience in the field, so we found trees planted in standing water, on rocks, perfectly on center no matter how inappropriate. Elliott, who has a degree in forestry, was quite disparaging. Steve, who has planted many thousands of trees, was equally disparaging. We all agreed that such a failure was a good thing in this instance, since the site was largely wetlands and Douglas fir, no matter how well planted, would fail with all this water anyway.

A good time was had by all. Mark Wahl with his 2 year old daughter, Hannah, planted. Cleveland Hall figured out a way to carry lots of seedlings in a 5 gallon bucket. My mother, trying to climb over some of the ubiquitous slash, was seen teetering on a small log, losing her balance, and landing flat on her back in the mud. My dad was having a blast.

All in all, we had a great day, a whole lot of trees were planted, and people started to feel some hope again. Joanie and Sarah, who wrote nature based stories, created a bit of a healing/closing ceremony (which of course made Steve and me very uncomfortable, but sat well with just about everyone else). That was the biggest thing to come out of the planting - a rekindling of hope.

We had all agreed during the planting planning that Island Earth First! had had its day and we needed a new name. We bandied about all sorts of words and acronyms, and Michael Seraphinoff came up with Whidbey Environmental Action Network. It seemed to describe us well. Since no one came up with anything better, it stuck. It is still sticking as I write, in 2004.

In spite of the planting and admonitions from Brian Boyle, Trillium continued to cut. In an effort to understand these people, Steve and I had gone to Bellingham the previous summer and spent several days in their public library. We tried very hard to be discreet about our inquiry, but were having trouble finding information. Once the librarians discovered our mission, they

piled our table with folders, microfiches, old newspapers, and all sorts of other information. It didn't take long, with all that, to build up a dossier on Trillium, the corporation and David Syre, the founder. We discovered that he is blind in one eye and is extremely competitive, both in sports and in business. There was some conjecture of a connection between these two. We discovered that Syre likes nothing better than to put people in untenable situations and then to twist the knife. We found one example after another of abuse and manipulation.

Here is a very partial list:

Kodiak, Alaska - bought inholdings on the island, knowing that the minimum parcel size for development was 5 acres, expecting to build hunting lodges on 1 acre parcels right in the middle of a wildlife refuge. The burrough of Kodiak refused his request for rezones - much to his shock and dismay.

Homer, Alaska - tried to pull a back-door deal with the city council for a 99 year lease on the Homer Spit, a somewhat scruffy working area for local folks with their boats and fishing nets. At the last minute, people got wind of the idea and formed the Spit Users' Association, which asked what Trillium had in mind. They were told that redevelopment plans would be available only after the lease was signed. The Spit users prevailed on the council not to sign the lease.

A river whose name I've forgotten, Alaska - Trillium bought a relatively small parcel at the mouth of the river, a very popular native fishing area, and fenced people out. They were taking advantage of the fact that silt moving down river from the glaciers was adding land at its mouth, increasing the amount of land they owned. The intent of fencing people out of one of the best fishing spots in the area was to blackmail an agency or municipality into paying extortionate sums to reopen the fishing area.

Semiahmoo Spit, Washington - Washington State Parks was in the process of buying the spit when Trillium offered the landowner double the price. The state is barred by law from paying more than the assessed value, so Trillium got the spit. It then offered the property to the state - at 4 times the original price. Instead of a state park, we now have Semiahmoo resort.

Bellis Fair Mall - Syre (even before there was a Trillium) manipulated the City of Bellingham, which turned down early versions of Bellis Fair as being in the wrong location and drawing too many shoppers from downtown, into permitting the thing after all. The manipulation involved donating small parcels to build a hospital, a school, etc. It took him ten years, but now there is a mall where once there was farm land.

City of Bellingham - Trillium has a history of bribing/recruiting city officials, including a former mayor Ken Hertz, former Parks & Rec director (check that) Jean Gorton, and a former engineer. In Gorton's case, she went away for a month or two before signing on with Trillium. In Hertz's case it was all too bold. His term as mayor ended on Friday and he reported for work at Trillium on Monday. There are many who wonder just when Hertz was really recruited and how many of his decisions as mayor may have been influenced by such a relationship.

Briza - a development along Chuckanut Drive just south of Bellingham on very steep slopes with spectacular views. The shoreline below was public property but Trillium/ Syre fenced it off for the exclusive use of Briza residents. Citizens screamed, since the shore trail was a favorite. Syre eventually made a big deal of "allowing" the public to use its own land.

There are many more examples, but what comes through is a clear picture of dealings so sharp as to be over the edge. And this is the company which had invaded our quiet community.

With its history of boldness, it is not surprising that Trillium had a tendency to overextend itself. It bought vast holdings in Alaska, some of which panned out and some, as noted above, which backfired badly. As a result, the company was often financially embarrassed and found it expedient to pay some of its creditors, often employees, with land instead of money.

Thus it was that two of Trillium's foresters, doing business as BLF, Inc, in 1992 became owners of a 20 acre parcel on Cultus Bay Road, right across from our friends Matt and Vicky Hassrick. Since I was by that time monitoring all Forest Practice Applications, I saw the application to log that property and duly notified Matt and Vicky. Vicky inspected the property and determined that there were major wetlands present. Matt Nash, resource planner for Island County, visited the site and concurred. He ordered the applicants to delineate the wetland and to protect a 100 ft buffer around it from logging. BLF's principal forester, Tim Raschko, duly delineated the wetland (more or less) but failed to delineate the 100 ft buffer. The flagging used to mark the wetland was clearly marked "timber harvest boundary." Vicky followed up with certified letters to Island County, DNR, and BLF pointing out that it was clearly foreseeable under the circumstances that a violation of Island County's wetland ordinance would occur. Her letters were ignored, so she sent more. Logging began and, sure enough, the first thing that feller buncher did was cut right up to the wetland - right up to the "timber harvest boundary" flagging. At that point the whole neighborhood was up in arms. Vicky called Island County and they sent planner Tim Wollett to see what it was all about. While we stood and argued, the feller-buncher continued its cutting within the boundary. Wollett refused to stop them, claiming he lacked authority. It took the better part of a day - a long time for a feller-buncher to be operating, before we finally stopped the thing. Eventually the buffer was flagged and the logging continued.

After the fact, planning director Larry Kwarsick issued an enforcement order and a \$500.00 fine. To the amazement of all, BLF appealed the fine, claiming they had done everything by the book and that Island County had been unclear and confusing in its regulations. They almost got away with it too. Vicky moved to intervene, as did WEAN. To quote from the Hearing Examiner's decision: "BLF, Inc, the property owner, inappropriately marked portions of the edge of a wetland as a timber harvest boundary and allowed timber harvesting within the 100' buffer of the wetland. This was in violation of the wetland section of the Island County Zoning Ordinance. . . Concerned members of the public took significant reasonable steps prior to the commencement of harvest operations . . . During the month of August there were a number of communications between citizens in the area, BLF, and the County. A careful review of these communications, County Ordinances, and a proper flagging of the wetland and its boundary could have avoided the subsequent violation . . . The record establishes that the violations resulted from negligence of the property owner, and especially negligence of Mr Raschko, who undertook to delineate the wetland and insure that the Wetland Ordinance was properly followed. As a purported expert it would have been part of his duties to review the Wetland Ordinance and to flag an appropriate boundary. This was not done."

This is pretty strong language coming from a Hearings Examiner. While we didn't get the increased fines we wanted, or the moratorium, we did get some language indicating that at least one quasi-judicial body thought that BLF, Inc and Raschko in particular, were pretty incompetent.

Trillium continued its expansion, eventually buying 625,000 hectares on the southern Chilean island of Tierra del Fuego and another 125,000 hectares on the Argentinian side of the same island. It was Trillium's intention to log out the vast forests of old growth Alerce on the island for pulp wood. It proposed to spend \$60 million on an export dock to load the chipped old growth onto ships for Japan. This caused a major debate in Chile and Argentina about the environmental sustainability of the whole venture. Trillium assured all who would listen that they were environmentally sensitive, and to prove it, they hired Rand Jack, a highly respected forester in Bellingham to oversee operations. - well, sort of. Rand Jack insisted that any operation he oversaw would be the real article, ecologically sensitive sustainable forestry. Trillium gushed that that was exactly what they wanted - but he would have to plan for a minimum of 40 miles of new road a year, and meet certain harvest targets. Rand Jack quit in disgust. Tim Raschko, the man who was declared negligent and incompetent by Island County's Hearings Examiner, was made head forester of the operation.

About this time we received a call from our friends at [Northwest Ecosystem Alliance](#) asking that we communicate with someone in Washington, DC who had received an inquiry from Buenos Aires about Trillium. It seems that Trillium was proposing a partnership with Argentina's leading university and the locals wanted to know what kind of reputation this company had back home. We had a ball. We slapped our files on the fax machine, including the entire Hearing Examiner's decision. Two days later headlines in Argentina's leading newspaper announced "Trillium forester declared negligent, incompetent by US judge." Raschko beat a hasty retreat and the university deal fell through. Trillium was definitely having a hard time escaping its rapacious reputation.

Over the years, Trillium has had less and less of a presence on Whidbey as it has sold off or otherwise divested itself of its holdings here. It still owns a fair amount of land, and its former employees are still proposing obnoxious development schemes on the properties they've accepted in lieu of cash.

Just last year 3 former Trillium employees proposed to annex the 40 acres on Coles Road into Langley and develop it with 120 houses. WEAN worked with the 3 separate citizen groups which formed to fight that plan and it was defeated. Mayor Lloyd Furman was obviously very much in favor of the annexation, to the extent that he refused to allow members of the public to speak. At the council meeting at which the first decision was to be made, upwards of 200 people tried to crowd into a council room which had 20 chairs. There were at least 50 people standing around the walls and sitting on the floor. The rest were peering in at the doors, crowded in the hallway, and congregated on the sidewalk. Various ones of us asked that the meeting be moved to a larger venue. Furman refused. We asked to be allowed to speak. Furman refused. Neal Colburn, campaigning for the mayorship, allowed as how we were, in fact, the public which had elected both him and Furman, and we should be allowed to speak. He then made a motion to postpone the decision and to hold the next meeting in a larger venue. The next meeting was held

at the Methodist Church and upwards of 200 people attended. Furman had been very clear that no individual, no matter how many people he or she represented, would be allowed to speak for more than 2 minutes. So we all got together and scripted what needed to be said into 2 minute bites. I took the first bite, leading off with a quick list of the reasons why this was a bad idea. From there, each person took one of those reasons and expanded on it. Fred Geisler got the unappetizing bite of “these people are from Trillium and represent that corporate culture.” He was quite reasonable in his presentation, not throwing any mud, just presenting history. The 3 project proponents snapped shut their laptops, grabbed their briefcases and stomped out of the meeting. The crowd cheered.

We had long heard stories and rumors of Trillium’s financial woes and imminent bankruptcy. One indication of this was the handing over of the 780 acres at Bush Point to two California developers in settlement of a lawsuit several years ago. That has resulted in the breakup of that land into 78 x 10 acre parcels. The developers claim that they have no intention to develop those parcels, but they have been granted a permit to log what’s left and to build one house.

Earlier this year (2004) we were able to see the long term result of our communications with Buenos Aires. Goldman Sachs, the investment house, ended up with the 625,000 hectares Trillium had bought on Tierra del Fuego. Rather than try to log or develop the land, Goldman Sachs has turned it over to its foundation for presentation to the government and people of Chile as a National Park.

This is by no means the end of the Trillium story on Whidbey, but it is a good stopping point. We’re delighted that such a large tract has finally come under protected status. Now we need to work to secure the same status for lands abused by Trillium here at home.