



Friends of the Forest

Dedicated to the preservation of the Anacortes Community Forest Lands through education, outreach & stewardship.

Volume 37 • Issue 1 • Winter 2024

Welcome our New Executive Director, Katie Earley!

Dear Members and Supporters,

My name is Katie Earley and I'm delighted to introduce myself as the Friends of the Forest's new Executive Director.

It's been a great first couple of months getting to know our amazing staff, Board, and supporters and learning the ins and outs of Friends' program offerings. I'm so glad I had the opportunity to meet many of you at our Fall fundraiser. What a wonderful event and great way to kick off my tenure celebrating the valuable work of Friends of the Forest with our community.

I feel lucky to have grown up spending summers visiting Anacortes and Guemes Island, enjoying our gorgeous forests and beaches. This time outdoors taught me to value and appreciate our natural environment and not take it for granted. When my family moved to Anacortes permanently in 2014, we started spending a lot of time in the ACFL and marveled at what an incredible gift we have right in our backyards. After loving and supporting Friends of the Forest from afar, I feel honored to have the opportunity to help lead Friends and continue the important stewardship and advocacy work of our ACFL gem.

I bring almost two decades of education and program management experience to this role and look forward to continuing to build on Friends' legacy.

We have a lot to celebrate in 2023. Now that our two full time program staff members dedicated to Community and Youth Forest Education programming have a full year under their belts, Friends of the Forest has been able to expand our offerings.

(Continued on page 8)

Right: Katie and her family at Skagit Bay Estuary



UPCOMING EVENTS

Complete details on the “Upcoming Events” page on our website at www.friendsoftheacfl.org/upcomingactivities. Or simply scan the QR code on the right to get there!

We use a registration system so that we can contact you if the hike needs to be cancelled or rescheduled. Walk-ins are always welcome but we do appreciate if you'd fill out the RSVP located on each event page.



Feb 9
(Friday)
10:00 am
-12:00 pm

Community Science: Wetland Monitoring - Easy - Location will be emailed to registered participants - We meet on the second Friday of each month to monitor the water quality in the wetlands around Little Cranberry Lake and Big Beaver Pond. Wear weather-proof clothes and bring your curiosity!

Feb 10
(Saturday)
9:00 am
-11:00 am

Community Hike: Magnificent Mosses - Easy - Little Cranberry Lake Main Parking Lot - Although many of our showy vascular plants have gone to bed for the season, winter is a spectacular time to appreciate the beauty and diversity of the nonvascular plants of the Pacific Northwest! Join us to celebrate the magnificent mosses of the ACFL (and some lichens, too!), and gain new appreciation for the big jobs that these little plants can do.

Feb 13
(Tuesday)
10:00 am
-1:00 pm

Community Science: Macroinvertebrates - Easy - Location will be emailed to registered participants - We meet every other month to examine the macroinvertebrates in the wetlands around Little Cranberry Lake and Big Beaver Pond. Macroinvertebrates, or the aquatic bugs and larvae that call our wetlands home, are fantastic indicator species that give us clues about the health of our waterways. Wear weather-proof clothes and bring your buggiest enthusiasm!

Feb 20
(Tuesday)
9:00 am
-11:00 am

February Senior Stroll - Easy - A Avenue Trailhead - Join Friends of the Forest on an immersive stroll through the Anacortes Community Forest Lands. Meet at the A Avenue trailhead, where we'll set off to explore the areas around Mitten Pond. We'll keep the pace of this hike slow as the group's curiosity guides our learning, so feel free to bring your own field guides, binoculars/magnifiers, and whatever gear you'll need for walking on trails.

Feb 24
(Saturday)
10:00 am-
12:00 pm

Family Nature Walk: Water Wonders! - Easy - Little Cranberry Lake Main Parking Lot - Rain, rain don't go away! Join Friends of the Forest to get outside and appreciate all that the winter rains do for our backyard forest! We will learn about why we get more rain in the winter, where it goes, and how it makes the best nature art material, mud! Along with our story and snack time, we will create mud art, jump in puddles, talk about our lake critters, and explore all things water in the ACFL!

Are you receiving our bi-monthly e-newsletter? It's chock full of Upcoming Events, interesting stories, volunteer opportunities, and more! E-newsletter recipients are the first to know when registration goes live for our most in-demand kids' programs, and members get first dibs on registration--don't miss out!

Email info@friendsoftheacfl.org if you're not sure you're subscribed and we'll sign you up!

Adult Programs Grew HUGE in 2023!

by Ellie Kravets, Community Programs Coordinator

In 2023, we hosted more community members than ever before on our hikes, including more regular specialty programs like our Senior Strolls and Family Hikes. We investigated slime molds, spotted some local owls, nibbled berries, made art, and continued to engage community members new and old with our backyard forests.

Our citizen science programs expanded to include a new monitoring program for macroinvertebrates (aquatic insects) in the wetlands of the Little Cranberry Lake region. A HUGE thank you to our citizen science volunteers who continue to make these projects possible. Twenty three volunteers spent a whopping 237 hours wading through mud, wind, and rain (or chasing scuds across a sample dish) to provide baseline data on the water quality in the Little Cranberry Lake watershed. Data from our 2023 monitoring season are currently being compiled, to be reported to the city in early spring. Finally, 2023 saw a reimagining of the ACFL Naturalist Club into a year round program that builds community and connection with the natural worlds of Fidalgo Island. After completing their 10-week learning series in spring, Naturalist Club members joined us for tidepooling programs, nature walks, and guest lectures on amphibians, birds, and so much more!

Looking forward into 2024, we are so excited to continue to bring our community more exciting ways to get involved in the ACFL. Want to join the 2024 ACFL Naturalist Club? Registration opens soon! Members receive priority registration (opening January 15) for this popular program; general registration opens February 5. Visit www.friendsoft-heacfl.org/acfl-naturalist-club for more information! Need a lower commitment? Join us for a community hike (see p. 2) or volunteer for one of our wetland monitoring programs! Sign up now at bit.ly/ACFLwetlands. Hope to see you out there!



Ways to Give

Our work depends on a healthy mix of funding sources. All contributions to our group are tax deductible. Please consider the following options for a financial contribution to our organization! You may contact our office at 360-293-3725 to discuss any of these options.

1 Active Membership

Dues are due in January! There are different categories of membership to suit your preference. Any contributions to our group above your membership level are greatly appreciated. See our membership form on the back page.

2 Individual Contributions

We greatly appreciate any contributions to help support our education and outreach program. You are welcome to make this in honor or in memory of a loved one or special person.

3 Endowment Fund

We have an endowment fund established with the Skagit Community Foundation. The purpose of this fund is to create an endowment that will eventually provide interest income to our organization. This is an excellent option for sizable donations.

4 Planned Giving

One of the best ways you can continue supporting the work of the Friends is through a legacy gift. If you are making estate plans, please consider including our organization.

Welcome New Board Members, Aaron and Becky!

Aaron Katz and his artist wife, Kate Dougherty, moved to Anacortes in April 2019 after living in Seattle for more than 40 years. They enjoy hiking, biking, pickleball, eating in the area's great restaurants, listening to music, dancing, and traveling. When they moved into their Anacortes home, Aaron and Kate knew nothing about the ACFL, their new "neighbor." But they quickly gained a great appreciation of this gem during the COVID-19 pandemic, as they explored its trails and lakes.

In 2020, Aaron retired from the University of Washington School of Public Health as Principal Lecturer Emeritus at the University of Washington School of Public Health where he taught graduate level courses in health policy and conducted health policy projects and research on a wide variety of issues. During his 32 years at UW, Aaron held numerous academic leadership positions and has received various awards, including the American Public Health Association's Award for Excellence in 2006 and the Outstanding Teaching Award from the UW School of Public Health in 2004.



Dr. Becky Clifford brings a childhood steeped in outdoor exploration and a passion for preserving nature to her work as a new Friends of the Forest Board Member. Growing up in upstate New York with education-focused parents, she developed a love for sports, skiing, and exploring national parks. In 2004, relocating to Washington State deepened her appreciation for the state's remarkable forests and trails. Upon moving to Anacortes in 2020, she was awestruck by the expansive and extensive forest lands and trails within the Fidalgo Island community. In her role as Assistant Superintendent for the Anacortes School District, she helped strengthen a meaningful partnership between Friends of the Forest and our city's schools, reinforcing her commitment to supporting the community's outdoor experiences. Guided by a love for our trails, she is grateful to contribute to the conservation and enjoyment of our precious forest lands.

Trail Ambassadors: Join Us!

by Ashleigh Ellsworth-Keller, Development and Outreach Coordinator

Please consider joining us as a Volunteer Trail Ambassador for Summer 2024!

Since 2021, Friends of the Forest has partnered with Anacortes Parks and Recreation for the Trail Ambassador Volunteer Program, which situates volunteers at busy trailheads on summer weekends. Borne out of a need for monitoring the forestlands during the pandemic (when visitorship skyrocketed and parking lots were full of out-of-town guests seeking the uniqueness and tranquility of our slice of heaven on Fidalgo Island), Trail Ambassadors continue to be a positive presence in the ACFL, greeting visitors and sharing their love of the forest with others.

“The ACFL is an amazing community resource that provides opportunities for recreation, relaxation, education, and immersion in nature,” says volunteer Mark Gardner. “If you haven't experienced the ACFL or want to broaden your experience, then attend one of the Friends of the ACFL's many programs, and just get a map and go.” He added that the best part of his experience was “helping the ACFL visitors, learning about who enjoys the ACFL and why, and getting to know my fellow Ambassadors.”

Over the course of summer 2023, our cohort of Trail Ambassadors spent almost 250 hours in the ACFL, setting up each weekend at one of four locations: Little Cranberry Lake, Whistle Lake, A Avenue, and Ray Auld Drive. Over their four-hour shifts, they interacted with nearly 1600 visitors from at least 13 other cities and towns in Washington, and visitors from 11 other states. While this is only a snapshot of the many people who frequent the ACFL during the summer months, the data that the Trail Ambassadors collected helps us gain knowledge about what people know about the ACFL and the reason for their visit. In turn, it helps us understand our community; most of the people they interacted with were local community members and many of you!

You don't need any sort of scientific or naturalist background to become a Trail Ambassador; the only requirement is being available for at least 3 weekend days over the summer, a love of the outdoors, and a willingness to smile at strangers! We train Ambassadors to lead easy-to-interpret environmental education modules for all ages; this past summer we focused on trees, beavers, and birds. We provide all the supplies that will hopefully add to the experience of those who stop to visit with an Ambassador when they come to hike, bike, or ride a motorbike.

Trail Ambassadors are equipped with a first aid kit and are given the emergency contact numbers for the Parks department if emergencies arise. But most interactions with visitors are positive; this past summer, we had numerous motorbike users who stopped to say thank you for offering access on designated trails at certain times of the year. One man remarked that the trails in the forestlands were “the best trails I've ridden since I was eight years old!” We're happy that the ACFL remains welcoming to a variety of recreational users and that almost all of them follow the guidelines that have been set.

Probably one of the most popular reasons for becoming a Trail Ambassador is to meet other people who love the forestlands, too! Our volunteers are a mix of long-time residents and newcomers alike. We host one training on a Saturday in May, and then volunteers are paired with 1-2 other people during their shifts, allowing them to mix and mingle and make new friends.

Volunteer Connie Harris says, “As I am new to the area, and new to ACFL, learning about the formation

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School Programs Fall Overview

Build a Plant: Our New 3rd Grade Classroom Visit!

As February begins, so do our Friends of the ACFL winter school programs! This February our Youth Education Coordinator, Hannah will visit all 18 kindergarten and 3rd grade classes in the district to bring the forest into ASD classrooms, and will lead field trips for these classes throughout the spring. But this is not the first time these students will learn about our amazing backyard forest. Let's take a look back at some of our fall programs with ASD classes!

The school year kicked off with 3rd grade classes visiting Heart Lake to learn about plants, their parts, and the many roles plants play in the forest ecosystem. In addition to a plant part game, students spent time getting up close and personal with their "adopted" plant during their field trip. Students looked close to describe and draw each part of their adopted plant while observing the things that made their plant unique and special. During our classroom visits months later, many third grade students could still describe their plants and the traits that made it special!

Kindergarten students hit the A Avenue trails in October to learn about how forest animals use their senses, and practiced using their own senses to explore all the different parts of the forest. In November, kindergarten students became leaf scientists in our Leaf Drawing classroom visit where they focused on comparing leaves and using their observations to make scientific drawings of their special leaf.

New this year was Build a Plant, our third grade fall classroom visit. In this classroom visit, third graders learned about salmonberries, and how salmonberries (with the help of our pollinators) make seeds for new plants to grow. After reviewing pollination, each student became a seed for our interactive, choose-your-own-adventure-style game. Students started by rolling dice to determine what inherited traits were packed up inside their seeds. These traits determined the flower color, berry color, thorn size, and petal details of their own plant. Then, students pretended to "live a year" as their plant and acquired additional traits from their environment, such as holes from hungry insects in the spring, taller stems from gathering lots of sunlight in the summer, yellowing leaves if they faced drought during the fall, and tatters in the leaves from winter storms.

Students recorded all of their plant's traits on their data sheets and then decoded these sheets to make a drawing of their plant. To wrap up the lesson, students compared their salmonberry to a classmate's and looked for similarities and differences in their plants. We wrapped up by reiterating an idea we discussed when we adopted a plant in our fall field trip, that each plant (and student!) is unique and adds something special to the community it is a part of!

This new classroom visit was designed to meet classroom science standards of learning about the inheritance of traits and the variations in traits of living things. Over the year in third grade, the curriculum we offer serves to help students develop empathy towards plant and animal members of the forest. Our "Adopt a Plant" fall field trip, "Build a Plant" and "Microhabitats" classroom visits, and "Become an Animal" spring field trip all connect students with the forest around them.

At Friends of the ACFL, we believe that empathy as well as understanding the important role of each forest member will help build a connection between each student and our forest, and empower the next generation of forest stewards.

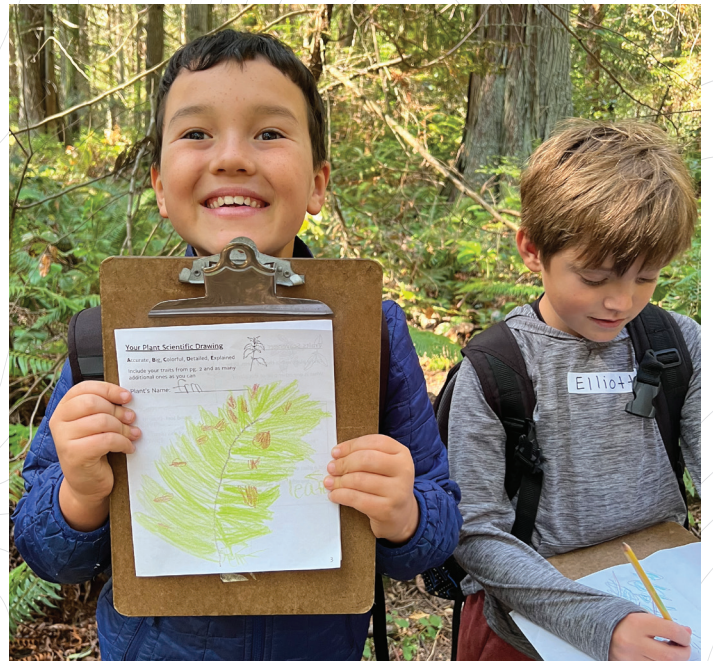
Looking Ahead for Youth Programs, Forest Discovery Summer Camp is around the Corner!

Although it might be dark and rainy right now, summer is right around the corner! Mark your calendars now for our free Forest Discovery Camp. Registration will open March 1st for our 5 sessions of camp in July/August 2024. Our camps run Tuesday-Friday throughout July and August. For children ages 6-7 we offer a 3 hour half-day camp, and for children 8-11 we offer a full day, 7-hour camp. You can find more information about our camp structure, dates, and more on our website under "What We Do" and "Youth Education"!

by Hannah Katz, Youth Program Coordinator



Students in third grade at Island View Elementary in Lara Knowles' class explore the trails around Heart Lake to learn more about their plants!



A Message from our new ED, Katie Earley

(Continued from page 1)

There are even more high-quality opportunities for all ages to explore the forest, including:

- A revitalized, year-round Naturalist Club
- Increased community hike offerings - in 2023 we hosted 34 community hikes with 312 participants
- Expanded Citizen Science programs - including the new Macroinvertebrate Citizen Science project
- Increased Youth programming - additional summer camp sessions, expanded after school programming, and new partnerships with Anacortes Family Center and the Boys and Girls Club
- Increased Trail Ambassador volunteers stationed at the busiest trailheads on weekends throughout the summer

And we're also very excited for what's to come in 2024.

In addition to continuing to build on our current programming, we're looking to create a more interactive physical space for our community. As many of you know, Friends of the Forest has been sharing an office with the Farmer's Market in the Arts Depot building on R Ave. It's a beautiful, historic building but as a one-room shared space, and now four full-time staff, it's become quite cramped! This potential move has offered a great opportunity to re-envision what our physical space has to offer. In addition to a new office with more space for staff, we'd also like to create a small interpretive center. Our mini-interpretive center would serve as a place community members can visit for all things ACFL-related, including:

- Finding maps, hike recommendations, and guided activities
- Information and resources on forest ecology and the history of the ACFL
- Updates on Friends' upcoming community and youth events and programming
- Offer a space to host programs such as our Naturalist Club course, Trail Ambassador training, and additional Youth educational programs.

We're excited about this potential move and will keep you updated as it unfolds. More to come!

Another goal in 2024 is continuing our advocacy efforts and working to keep our members informed as the City of Anacortes updates to the ACFL Forest Management Plan. There have been questions about the process and how key decisions are being made. We plan to host up to 3 community discussion forums on the forest plan update after the first draft is completed to gather input about specific "working areas" still under review. We hope to help provide information on how the forest plan update process works, offer information on the key areas being discussed, and gather and synthesize discussion input and present it to the City to provide more comprehensive feedback.

I'm excited about our 2024 goals, having the chance to get to know our community even better, and to continue the great work of Friends of the Forest. Thanks for your support and I look forward to connecting with you all in the year to come!

Remembering Members we lost in 2023



Gordi Middleton

Gordi Middleton's highest love after family was Nature. Throughout his life he shared this with others by pointing out the beauties he perceived whether it be the details in a glacier, the differences between a Western Red Cedar and an Alaskan Yellow Cedar or enjoyment of paddling on Little Cranberry Lake to see the Ospreys and Sundews. He protected Nature in a lot of little ways by such actions as picking up trash, moving small animals off a path to prevent being stepped on by a hiking boot, snipping invasive plants away from native ones, and teaching others to respect the ways they interact with our woods and waters and shores.

He knew how fortunate he was to live near ACFL and made many financial contributions to support the group's continuation and the land's protection.

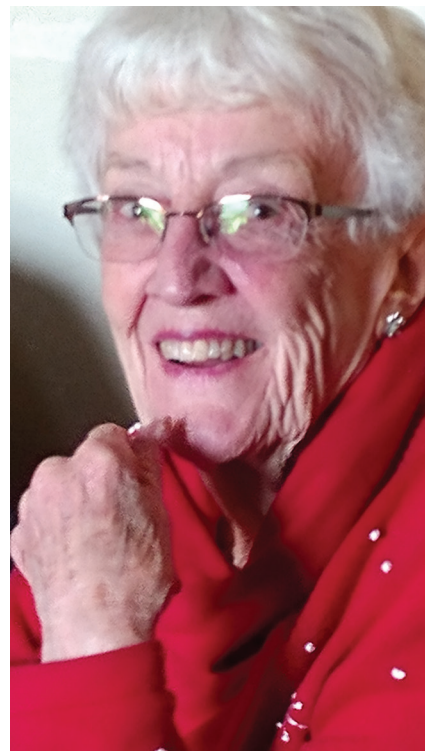
(submitted by his wife, Jude Middleton)

Nancy Husted

Nancy Husted loved the outdoors and her mountains. She especially honored the Anacortes Forest Lands and Yosemite. She was a consummate learner, teacher, quilter and dog lover.

She was raised in Palo Alto California and moved to Washington when she was 17 where she attended Whitman College and graduated from University of Washington with a major in English. She and her deceased husband Harry (Pete) Ashenfelter wrote a book titled *Rowing to Alaska by Wind and Oar*. It is a true story about them tackling the adventurous trip in a small dory via the inside passage from Lopez Island to Ketchikan, Alaska.

She is missed by all who knew and loved her.
(submitted by her daughter, Jami Wallace)



Dreaming of summer (camp)...



Pictured, summer 2023 campers play games and hear a nature story on the shores of Heart Lake.

Friends of the Forest

Friends of the Forest Board Meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month at 6:00pm in the Barrett Financial Conference Room. Meetings are open to the public—please email board@friendsoftheacfl.org for more information on how to join.

How to reach us:

Email

info@friendsoftheacfl.org

Office

611 R. Ave. Anacortes, WA

Office Phone

360-293-3725

Mail

PO Box 2213 Anacortes, WA 98221

Web

www.friendsoftheacfl.org

Forest Advisory Board

Bob Vaux | Parks and Recreation
Asst. Director | 360-299-1918

Board Members

Charlie Collins | President | Jan. 2025

Rob Skelton | Secretary | Jan. 2025

Steve Williams | Vice President | Jan. 2024

Lin Nichols | Treasurer | Jan. 2024

Andy Stewart | President Emeritus | Jan. 2024

Lynne Jordan | Board Member | Jan. 2025

Andrea Petrich | Board Member | Jan. 2024

Aaron Katz | Board Member | Jan. 2025

Dr. Becky Clifford | Board Member | Jan. 2025

board@friendsoftheacfl.org 360-293-3725

*Emails sent to the board are received directly by the Executive Committee & are not seen by staff.

Staff

Katie Earley | Executive Director | katie@friendsoftheacfl.org

Ashleigh Ellsworth-Keller | Outreach and Development
Coordinator | ashleigh@friendsoftheacfl.org

Ellie Kravets | Community Programs Coordinator |
ellie@friendsoftheacfl.org

Hannah Katz | Youth Education Coordinator |
hannah@friendsoftheacfl.org

Save the Date for our Annual Meeting!



Save the
DATE

**FRIENDS OF THE ACFL
2024 ANNUAL MEETING**

**Tuesday, February 27
7:00–8:30 pm
Anacortes Depot Arts Center
611 R Avenue**

**Featuring speaker
Jake Verschuyt, PhD**

Refreshments provided

Welcome Jake Verschuyt, PhD, presenting “Patterns and Drivers of Forest Biodiversity across the Pacific Northwest.”

His talk will ask: *Which forest conditions can maintain or enhance biodiversity? How does that vary by forest type or setting? and How does this apply to the ACFL?*

Jake Verschuyt is a Forest Wildlife Ecologist. He holds a PhD in Ecology and Environmental Science from Montana State University and completed his undergraduate degree in Wildlife Management at Cal Poly Humboldt. Jake has spent the last 20+ years engaging in research investigating biodiversity responses to contemporary forest management practices. The research program he oversees focuses on wildlife, biodiversity, sustainability, and aquatic ecosystems across managed forests of the Pacific Northwest.

Trail Ambassadors (Continued from page 5)

of the forest lands and the role of the ACFL was all new.” She isn’t the only person who has arrived rather recently and joined us as a Trail Ambassador. Third-year volunteer (and new Board Member) Aaron Katz says, “Being a Trail Ambassador is one way to deepen your connection with the forest and the community.”

For those who might be thinking about becoming a Trail Ambassador, returning volunteer and avid mountain biker Dale King wants you to know, “This is such a wonderful program. You meet the best people looking for adventure in our area. If you know the trail system and can give advice on where to hike or ride, please come assist. You will get tons of benefits out of being a part of this program.

Applications will be accepted beginning March 1. Make sure you’re signed up for our e-newsletter (see page 2 for more details on how to do that) to get the most up-to-date information, and check our volunteer page on our website for more. We’d love to have you on board!



Friends of the ACFL
 P.O. Box 2213
 Anacortes, WA 98221

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Friends of the Anacortes Community Forest Lands Membership Form

The Friends of the Forest is a nonprofit, citizens organization dedicated to the preservation of the Anacortes Community Forest Lands through education, outreach and stewardship. **Friends of the Forest is a not for profit 501 c3 organization. Tax ID #501C3 91-1430220**

Please join us! Membership and contributions are tax deductible.

Name _____ Phone _____ Email _____

Address _____

We offer many levels of annual membership dues.

Please choose your level of support for this vital mission in our community.

- Annual Dues: Individual \$25 Family \$40 Partner \$50 Supporter \$100
 Sponsor \$250 Benefactor \$500 Steward \$1000 Major Donor \$5000 or More



<--Save a stamp-renew by scanning this QR code!

Other amount _____

_____ Areas of Interest

_____ Topics for general meetings or newsletter

Please mail renewals to: Friends of the ACFL, PO Box 2213, Anacortes WA 98221 or visit us at 611 R Avenue. Membership expires one year from your last membership contribution.

Thank you to all the friends who have renewed your membership! Keeping your membership current with the Friends of the Forest is one of the best ways to Think Globally and Act Locally. Here on Fidalgo Island, the ACFL needs Friends to ensure its preservation. Our Education program depends on your support. Thank you!