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Skagit Valley College approved for first-ever Bachelor of Applied Science degree

MOUNT VERNON, Wash. — Students will be able to earn a Bachelor of Applied Science in Environmental Conservation degree in Mount Vernon when Skagit Valley College (SVC) offers its first-ever four-year program in September. The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges approved the degree in Olympia on March 27th.

"Skagit, Island, and San Juan counties provide an incredible natural learning environment," said SVC President Dr. Thomas Keegan. "By offering a Bachelor of Applied Science in Environmental Conservation, Skagit Valley College will prepare highly skilled ecology professionals who will have a solid understanding of the unique environmental issues facing our region."

The BAS in Environmental Conservation degree will serve graduates of SVC's two-year Environmental Conservation program and incumbent workers who are place-bound. The program is designed as a hybrid program, incorporating on-campus learning, lab, and fieldwork, as well as online components. It offers a blend that works well with students who have their two-year degree and who want to complete their four-year degree locally.

SVC's new BAS degree addresses strong community interest in preserving the environment. It is guided by two of the College's strategic priorities: environmental stewardship, which seeks to promote sound and sustainable environmental stewardship throughout the curriculum, college and community activities, and institutional practices; and aligning educational programs with regional and state economic development strategies.

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Supporting a highly skilled workforce to conserve habitat and implement necessary restoration efforts will create a healthy environment and a healthy economic region while preserving natural resource management activities.

Since no other baccalaureate in ecology and natural resources is offered in Skagit, Island, and San Juan counties, SVC's BAS degree increases access and opportunities for place-bound working adults. Now, students will have an opportunity to achieve academically at a higher level than had been possible before.

"I am excited about what the Skagit Valley College BAS in Environmental Conservation will provide for students," said Shawna Blue who earned an Associate in Technical Arts degree in Environmental Conservation at SVC. "As a homeowner in eastern Skagit County and the mother of two grade school children, I understand that traveling to Bellingham or Seattle for educational advancement is not always a feasible option. The creation and approval of this program will allow me to continue my education and receive a Bachelor's Degree in Environmental Conservation."

Skagit Valley College has established strong partnerships with government, community, regional tribes, grassroots organizations, non-governmental agencies, and businesses that look to Skagit's environmental conservation students for internships and employment.

"Over the past decade or more, we have hired several graduates from the Skagit Valley College program," said Pat Stevenson, Environmental Manager, Stillaguamish Tribe. "It is obvious the training they get currently prepares them well for placement into natural resource positions at a Tribe, other government agency or non-profit. I can only see positive benefits to potential natural resource employers from expanding what is already a great two-year program to a four-year program."

SVC's BAS in Environmental Conservation will prepare students for a variety of high paying jobs that are expected to experience significant growth in the coming years due to substantial

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investment in environmental restoration projects in the Puget Sound region. In Skagit, Whatcom, and Snohomish counties, greater than 60 vacancies per year are projected for the next 10 years and nearly 500 statewide, according to Workforce Explorer.

Dr. Claus Svendsen has been the primary developer of SVC's Environmental Conservation program from Skagit's associate's degree to its new BAS degree. SVC has offered an Associate in Technical Arts degree and Associate in Applied Science Transfer — Environmental Conservation training since 1992. "I am excited about the curriculum for our new BAS degree," said Dr. Svendsen. "The upper division courses will provide our students with rigorous skills in ecology and natural resource management, as well as leadership skills. The interdisciplinary curriculum ranges from forest ecology to conservation biology over landscape ecology, biometry to natural resources policy analyses. SVC's new degree will fulfill a tremendous need for many local students — past and present — in the Environmental Conservation program."

For information about SVC's Bachelor of Applied Science in Environmental Conservation, contact Dr. Claus Svendsen, Department Chair, (360) 416-7816, online, www.skagit.edu/environmental or by email, claus.svendsen@skagit.edu

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