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SVC on cusp of offering its first bachelor's degree

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MOUNT VERNON — Skagit Valley College may offer its first bachelor's degree in 2013, the college board announced earlier this week.

The college's board of trustees voted last month to seek state approval for the new bachelor's degree of Applied Science in Environmental Conservation. The rest of the process is expected to take about a year.

The bachelor's degree would prepare students for work as wildlife biologists and conservation scientists, among other highdemand jobs, said Laura Cailloux, the dean of workforce education at the college.

The degree would be geared toward graduates of the college's two-year Environmental Conservation program and people with jobs and limited choices for schooling.

"They can't just uproot themselves and go to a four-year institution," said Claus Svendsen, the chair of the Department of Environmental Conservation at the college.

To offer the degree, the college must be accredited as a fouryear institution, and therefore is required to go through an accreditation process, along with an application process that includes a rigorous examination by multiple state boards.

There is a chance that the application process for the degree program could be delayed or even stopped, Cailloux said, "but we're optimistic."

If all goes well, the college would offer the program in fall of 2013, with a capacity for 20 students.

Classes would include everything from landscape ecology, nearshore ecology and management, salmon ecology and forest ecology to natural resource policy analysis and environmental chemistry, as well as courses in data management and communications.

The program is a good fit between the school and the environment around it, with the Skagit Valley's access to mountains, rivers and the marine environment, she said. "These students are out in the field a lot," she said.

Svendsen estimated tuition would be roughly two-thirds of the cost of a typical four-year college.

About 53 percent of the Environmental Conservation program alumni said they would likely enroll, according to a recent survey cited by Cailloux.

Svendsen believes there will be great demand in the future for graduates of the program.

"Looking at the needs, trying to look at the tea leaves, there's going to be a great need for people who know how to fix the environment," he said.

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