

# ANNUAL REPORT 2009

Dedicated to involving  
our community in  
restoring wild  
salmon populations  
for future generations



**RESTORE**

**EDUCATE**

**MONITOR**

**VOLUNTEER**

**PROTECT**

# SKAGIT FISHERIES ENHANCEMENT GROUP 2009 ANNUAL REPORT

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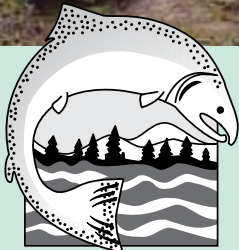
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Sue Madsen, Restoration Ecologist  
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Joe George  
Kyle Koch  
Bengt Miller  
Neil Vargas

## AmeriCorps Interns:

Sarah Davis, Restoration Assistant,  
Washington Conservation Corps  
Katie Moyer, Education Assistant,  
Washington Service Corps



## SKAGIT FISHERIES ENHANCEMENT GROUP

PO Box 2497

407 Main Street, Suite 212  
Mount Vernon, WA 98273

Phone: 360-336-0172

Fax: 360-336-0701

[www.skagitfisheries.org](http://www.skagitfisheries.org)

Tax ID# 94-3165939

Cover photo C. Kitch

The Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group is proud to present its Annual Report for 2009 which includes an increasing diversity of accomplishments related to salmon habitat restoration and stewardship projects in the Skagit, Samish and Island watersheds. It was an exciting year for volunteers to count returning salmon, with over 2 million humpies returning to the Skagit River and much larger coho runs than we have seen in recent years. Volunteers sent many pictures to us from the field of the fish they were counting to share their excitement. There was also the first sport Chinook fishery on the lower Skagit in 16 years for local fishers to enjoy! While we cannot take credit for these increased salmon returns, it is encouraging and satisfying to see so many community members, families and sportsman enjoying their time on the river.

As we leave 2009 and enter into 2010, the Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group (SFEG) celebrates 20 years of engaging our local community in salmon enhancement activities. We are fortunate to have many accomplishments to celebrate over this 20 year period, none of which would be possible without our volunteers, members, private landowners, and incredible partnerships that exist throughout our region. What started as a small group of passionate volunteers in the Skagit Basin has become a staff of 11 highly skilled and educated individuals working in three watersheds (Skagit, Whidbey and San Juan Islands) as well as hundreds of community members contributing thousands of hours annually to restore miles of habitat each year. While we reflect on all that we have done in the past two decades for salmon and healthy watersheds and how much the landscape of salmon restoration has changed, we must recognize that it is you who makes all of this success possible. Without your support, there would be no Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group.

SFEG's habitat restoration program has grown by leaps and bounds since our beginning in 1990, planting nearly 40,000 native plants in riparian areas in 2009. We have developed educational programs that utilize local hatcheries as a learning opportunity to teach visitors and students about the salmon life cycle and wild salmon habitat needs. And we have re-distributed over 91,000 adult salmon carcasses returning to the Marblemount Hatchery to streams in the Upper Skagit Watershed to provide much needed nutrients to our aquatic ecosystem. We have a well established monitoring program that trains volunteers to collect data that is shared with state agencies to track the effectiveness of restoration projects and the number of salmon returning to our watersheds. We have developed a highly successful education program for local middle school students, Junior Stream Stewards, which engaged 350 students this year in learning about their watershed and implementing stewardship projects. And our outreach programs as a whole in 2009 reached over 11,425 individuals of all ages from throughout our region.

Looking ahead into 2010 we are embarking on a new era for the Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group. For the first time we have restoration projects funded in all three of the watersheds in which we work, we are once again increasing our outreach and stewardship efforts in the Samish watershed and we are taking on the leadership of an important upper Skagit knotweed control program with 15 other partners. We have created a new Restoration Ecologist position to lead our habitat restoration program. And while funding for education and outreach programs may remain difficult in the near term, we are very excited and optimistic about our future, in most part because of the support we receive from you our volunteers, members, landowners and project partners. Thank you!

### **Mission Statement:**

*The mission of the Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group is to build partnerships that educate and engage the community in habitat restoration and watershed stewardship in order to enhance salmonid populations.*

# RESTORATION AND EDUCATION HIGHLIGHTS

## ESTUARY AND NEARSHORE

### Thatcher Bay:

Thatcher Bay is located on the southwest side of Blakely Island in the San Juan Islands. A partnership with the University of Washington continued to sample and analyze sediment and wood waste to be removed from the nearshore environment. Approval for disposal of these materials was received, a design was created and permits were filed. Nearly \$310,000 was secured for project implementation which will improve habitat for forage fish important to salmonids on these tidelands owned by the Blakely Island Trust.



### Swan Lake Feasibility Study:

A new partnership was formed with the Swan Lake Watershed Preservation Group. This nonprofit organization is comprised of citizens living around Swan Lake, a 300 acre estuarine marsh located on the western side of Whidbey Island just south of the Navy base. The Group is working to restore fish and tidal access to this valuable habitat which was purchased for conservation values by Island County in 1999. A preliminary feasibility study was funded by the Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB) in December 2009 to determine the likelihood of providing long-term sustained access into and out of Swan Lake for juvenile salmonids, marine fishes, and marine invertebrates.

### South Fork Skagit River:

SFEG partnered with The Nature Conservancy to plant a conservation easement in their ownership. The site was prepped and a volunteer planting event was held, in which 19 volunteers installed 437 trees and shrubs. The project is along 2,000 feet of shoreline on the South Fork of the Skagit River which provides valuable habitat for all species of salmonids, including ESA listed Chinook.

### Junior Stream Stewards:

Seventh graders from Conway and LaConner Schools are some of 350 students in 5 school districts involved in this unique watershed education program in 2009-10. This is the second year Conway students have participated in Junior Stream Stewards learning about Bulson Creek, Fisher Slough and Skagit Estuary habitats through classroom activities, field tours and water quality studies. Their learning in 2008-09 culminated in designing educational signs as a service learning project that were posted along salmon streams in their watersheds. This is the first year LaConner students have



participated in Junior Stream Stewards. They will be doing their service project in partnership with the Swinomish Tribe on a tributary to Fornsby Slough, in the Swinomish Channel Watershed.

## DAY CREEK COMMUNITY WATERSHED

### Morgan Creek Fish Passage:

Culverts were removed which blocked fish passage due to high velocity on a private driveway crossing off the South Skagit Highway near Day Creek. The crossing was replaced with a 40 foot recycled railroad flatcar bridge. This work opens 2.08 miles of habitat. The project was completed through cooperation with a private landowner and grants from the Salmon Recovery Funding Board and WDFW's ALEA program. This work builds upon previous work completed downstream near the mouth of the creek to make 4.3 miles of valuable tributary habitat available to coho, cutthroat, and Chinook.



*Before impassable culverts on Morgan Creek*



*After installation of new bridge on Morgan Creek*

### Day Creek Restoration:

Grants from the Department of Ecology and the Salmon Recovery Funding Board are being used to plan large woody debris and riparian enhancement projects with local landowners for Lower Day Creek. Log donations were secured through a Forest Service partnership and site preparation was performed for 2,500 plants to be installed in early 2010. Approximately one mile of stream and 10 acres of riparian area will benefit through these grants.

### Ross Island Slough Restoration:

Over 19,000 native plants were installed on this floodplain habitat through a partnership with NRCS and Seattle City Light. Additional work removed culverts on an overflow channel which provides fish habitat during high water. Much more work is planned for 2010 continuing the restoration of riparian areas on over 150 acres of land permanently protected around Anderson Creek, Gilligan Creek and Ross Island Slough.



# RESTORATION AND EDUCATION HIGHLIGHTS

## Iron Mountain Ranch Habitat Enhancement:

Work continued on this vast property owned by Seattle City Light which protects and allows for 2 miles of riparian habitat restoration along the Skagit River where key Chinook and steelhead spawning habitat exists. This year work was focused along the eastern end of the property and restoring riparian habitat along O'Toole Creek and the Skagit River. An old fence was removed to allow a new fence to be built to continue cattle grazing on the property but with a larger riparian area. New native plants will be installed once this fence is built

## Outreach and Monitoring:

Outreach and monitoring efforts were undertaken with new grant dollars from the Department of Ecology for the Day Creek Community Watershed. Volunteers were involved in collecting macro-invertebrates to help gauge stream health prior to restoration actions taking place. National Park Service staff wrote a temperature monitoring plan and installed monitoring devices to track water and air temperatures during the summer months. This information will be used as pre-project data for riparian and log jams projects planned for 2010 and beyond.

## FINNEY CREEK WATERSHED

### Habitat Restoration:

SFEG has been working with the Forest Service, Park Service and local Timber landowners for the past 10 years to restore valuable salmon habitat through the installation of log jams in Finney Creek. To date over 170 log jams have been installed and additional grant dollars from the Salmon Recovery Funding Board were secured in December 2009 to continue this productive partnership. Logs are necessary as a near term restoration solution due to the lack of large diameter trees to add structure and complexity to this major tributary of the Skagit River. 30 more log jams are planned for 2010.

### Outreach and Monitoring:

Outreach and monitoring continued in the Finney Creek basin as a way to inform users how to protect valuable salmon habitat. Outreach was conducted through field tours, workshops, and monitoring.



More rigorous monitoring of cross sections and temperature conducted by staff and partners indicates that small successes are being made. Cross sections indicate that the log jams are helping to narrow and deepen the stream channel and allow for new riparian growth to establish on gravel bars. There are also early indications that summer high temperatures are being moderated or decreased after the installation of log jams. Continued monitoring is planned through volunteers and partners.

## MIDDLE SKAGIT WATERSHED

### Elysian Meadows Riparian Restoration:

SFEG is continuing this work with dedicated private property owners who have ensured the permanent protection of 112 acres



of Skagit River floodplain through a conservation easement held by the Skagit Land Trust. Volunteers planted 4.5 acres with native plants and shrubs and SFEG staff removed 2 acres blackberries and treated other invasive species on 5.5 additional acres.

### Junior Stream Stewards:

Seventh graders at Cascade Middle School in Sedro Woolley were some of the 350 students in five school districts participating to complete SFEG's unique watershed education program in 2009. This program is designed to teach kids about the salmon habitat near their schools and homes.



Cascade students learned about and explored the Brickyard Creek and Middle Skagit River habitats through classroom activities, field tours and water quality studies. Their learning culminated in riparian restoration efforts that benefit salmon in these watersheds.

### Hansen Creek Riparian Restoration:



A partnership with Skagit County Parks Department restored 12 acres of riparian habitat along over 1700 feet on lower Hansen Creek as part of a CREP project adjacent to large woody debris restoration. Nearly 6,000 plants were installed by staff and volunteers. A fantastic

Earth Day work party was held in cooperation with many partners including the Upper Skagit Indian Tribe, Skagit County Parks Foundation, Healthy Communities Project, and Starbucks.

### Larsen Memorial Floodplain Restoration:

The Larsen Memorial site is owned by the Forest Service along the south side of the Skagit River floodplain. This past year, SFEG staff worked in cooperation with the Forest Service to rid the site of invasive species such as blackberries and knotweed. Over 900 conifers were planted at the site



and three culverts were removed with associated road fill from three locations in order to better facilitate natural floodplain processes.

# RESTORATION AND EDUCATION HIGHLIGHTS

## UPPER SKAGIT WATERSHED

### Floodplain Restoration:



SFEG is working with the Forest Service to restore floodplain habitat at 5 sites located throughout the Upper Skagit. Sites are located along the east side of Skagit River upstream of Marblemount, at the confluence of the Cascade and Skagit Rivers at the Marblemount Boat Launch, a small site at the confluence of Diobsud Creek and the Skagit, along the Sauk River near its confluence with the Skagit, and at Ovenell Slough on the south side

of the Skagit River across from Jackman Creek. Over 2100 native trees and shrubs were planted by volunteers and staff at these sites in 2009. Work is funded by the Salmon Recovery Funding Board and supported through the Forest Service partnership.

### Nutrient Enhancement:

Volunteers distributed 5,536 salmon carcasses from the Marblemount State Hatchery back to natural streams in the Upper Skagit watershed. Research demonstrates that over 83 wildlife species are known to depend on nutrients from salmon carcasses, including salmon fry.

### Pressentin Park:

SFEG partnered with Skagit County Parks Department to restore new floodplain property added to Pressentin Park. Invasive species including blackberry, reed canary grass, clematis and tansy were treated at the park along 1100 feet of a side channel to the Skagit River utilized by chum salmon. Over 800 plants were installed on the site on approximately 2 acres with assistance from volunteers.



### Howard Miller Steelhead Park:

With a new grant from the US Fish and Wildlife Service, SFEG continued the riparian restoration efforts at Howard Miller Steelhead Park in Rockport. This year, SFEG worked with the Skagit County Parks Foundation to plant along a tributary stream that flows into the Skagit River in the Park. Nearly 1,300 native plants were planted by volunteers covering nearly 4 acres and 1,200 feet of stream.

### Junior Stream Stewards:

Concrete Middle School students learned about and explored the Lorenzan Creek and Upper Skagit River habitats through the Junior Stream Stewards Program. These students also had the special opportunity to visit the Marblemount Hatchery in their watershed and see coho spawners swimming in Clark Creek. A unique partnership with the National Park Service also enabled students to visit North Cascades National Park and learn about the pristine habitat being protected there. Their learning culminated in designing a service learning project to restore riparian area along Lorenzan Creek.



### Community Outreach:

SFEG's outreach efforts are now well established in the up river communities. We continued to assist with increasing outreach capacity at the Marblemount Hatchery by training volunteers to lead hatchery tours during the busy bald eagle season. These tours are meant to give visitors an opportunity to learn about salmon and how healthy salmon populations are vital to Skagit River eagle populations.



## SAMISH WATERSHED

### Outreach:

In 2009 there was a renewed interest in performing outreach in the Samish watershed due to the increased awareness for the water quality problems that exist throughout the watershed including Samish Bay. These water quality problems have received much attention at the state and county level and are impacting local oyster growers. SFEG partnered with the Skagit Conservation Education Alliance to organize watershed tours and assist with community members going on aerial tours of the watershed via small plane.



### Junior Stream Stewards:

Eighth graders from Allen School were some of the 350 students in five school districts who participated in this year's Junior Stream Stewards program. Allen students learned and explored the Samish River, its tributaries and estuary habitats through classroom activities, field tours and water quality studies. Their learning culminated in designing educational signs which were posted near salmon streams in the Samish Watershed.

# RESTORATION AND EDUCATION HIGHLIGHTS

## EFFECTIVENESS MONITORING

### Stream Monitoring:

Two workshops were held to train 33 volunteers to monitor the effectiveness of restoration projects. Once trained, volunteers collected physical data for 13 streams including parameters such as gradient, width, substrate, vegetation, pools, and riffles. 28 streams covering over 17.35 miles were walked each and every week by volunteers and staff to count returning adult salmon and their redds for spawner surveys during the fall and winter. Volunteers also assist in a variety of project specific monitoring for revegetation, juvenile salmon and macroinvertebrates. The data collected provides much needed information to funders and project partners related to the effectiveness of enhancement projects. Nearly 900 volunteer hours were contributed this year.



### Juvenile Fish Monitoring:

SFEG staff and volunteers conducted seining efforts at several locations in 2009 to track juvenile fish use at restoration sites such as McElroy Slough. Data was also collected to document fish use for local sloughs such as Kayton Slough near Conway. Over 13,000 fish were identified through these efforts which consisted of salmonids, marine fish and freshwater species.



*Northern Flicker  
photo by JB Smith*

### Bird Monitoring:

Restoring riparian habitat recovers more than just salmon populations, it also supports other wildlife such as birds. This year for the first time, SFEG partnered with volunteers from the Skagit Audubon Society to attempt to document what species of birds utilize SFEG's restoration and in what numbers. Six sites are currently being monitored and 56 bird species have been documented by volunteers. Ultimately, we hope to learn if the number and diversity of birds change as the riparian area becomes established. Many thanks to the Audubon volunteers for making this new program a success.



## Summary of Accomplishments 2009:

### Habitat Enhancement:

Riparian plantings . . . . . 39,192 plants  
 Riparian maintenance . . . . . 200 acres  
 Isolated habitat reconnected . . . . . 2 miles  
 Nutrient enhancement . . . . . 5,536 carcasses

### Community Outreach:

Community education . . . . . 11,425 people  
 Volunteer involvement . . . . . 6,950 hours

# CONTRIBUTORS

## SALMON ENHANCEMENT PARTNERS:

ALEA Volunteer Cooperative Grants  
 Allen Middle School  
 Beachwatchers  
 Cascade Middle School  
 Concrete Middle School  
 Conway Middle School  
 Dike District #25  
 Emerson High School  
 Fidalgo Fly Fishers  
 Island County Public Works  
 Komo Kulshan Outdoor School  
 LaConner Middle School  
 Landowner Incentive Program  
 Marblemount Hatchery  
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 San Juan County Public Works  
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 Seattle City Light  
 Skagit Audubon Society  
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 Skagit Conservation Education Alliance  
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 Skagit Land Trust  
 Skagit Stream Team  
 Skagit River Bald Eagle Awareness Team  
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 Swan Lake Watershed Preservation Group  
 The Nature Conservancy  
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 WA State Department of Ecology  
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 Western Washington Agricultural Association  
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 US Forest Service  
 WA Dept of Fish and Wildlife  
 WA Dept of Natural Resources  
 Whatcom Land Trust  
 Patrick and Marie White  
 Ben and Sloane Winkes



## FINANCIAL SUMMARY 2009

Income		Expenses	
Public Funds	\$ 614,125	Project & Programs	\$ 587,268
Private Funds	\$ 57,160	Administration (11%)	\$ 72,962
Total Cash Income	\$ 671,285	<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 660,230</b>
In-Kind Donations	\$ 183,532		
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 854,817</b>		



**SKAGIT FISHERIES ENHANCEMENT GROUP**  
P.O. Box 2497  
Mount Vernon, WA 98273

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Restoring  
Wild Salmon for  
Future Generations*

*Help enhance habitat for salmon.*  
RESTORE | ASSIST | MONITOR | EDUCATE | VOLUNTEER