

Winters Creek Fish Passage Barrier Replaced with Bridge

By Kyle Koch



Barrier culverts being removed

Like a raging bull SFEG completed its first instream project of 2009 within four gorgeous, hot and sunny days in early July. The target site was a creek locally known as Winters Creek, a small tributary that flows into Morgan Creek in the Day Creek community. The project involved correcting a fish passage barrier located under a private driveway crossing just south of the South Skagit Highway. The site consisted of two small culverts, one of which was barely visible under sediment and brush, and allowed for just a muddy trickle of water through it. These small culverts were hardly enough to withstand events such as last January's flooding, and they were known to block passage of juvenile and adult Chinook, coho, cutthroat and possibly steelhead.

To correct the fish passage problem, the SFEG field technicians first cleared the pot-hole-ridden driveway of reed canary grass to allow the new bridge to be delivered, which was shipped fresh all the way from Oregon. Before construction Winters Creek was blocked off upstream and downstream of the culvert and de-watered. This allowed technicians to rescue dozens of coho, dozens more pacific giant salamanders and a plethora of macro-invertebrates from the site. Two excavators from Harkness Contracting Inc. removed the failing culverts in order to place the behemoth 40 foot by 13 foot bridge over the stream. The bridge was so big that it needed to be rolled on logs! While digging there was quite a bit of trash found and removed, including over 50 tires. Ironically the tires actually came in handy as they were used to line the new bridge allowing the excavators to cross it without damaging the wood and bolts. The bridge was actually set 4 feet above the existing driveway elevation in order to keep the pesky beavers, which are very active on Winters Creek, from blocking the stream. New sand and rock was delivered from the Day Creek and Clear Lake gravel pits in order to lead the driveway up to the new elevation.



Pacific giant salamander at Winters Creek restoration site

By Friday July 10th the bridge had been installed and the local residents seemed to be tickled pink by the project. After a few hours of cleanup the following Monday yet another successful SFEG instream project had been completed.

This fish passage problem was identified during a comprehensive inventory of the watershed completed in 1999 by Skagit System Cooperative. This inventory identified over 800 fish passage problems, of which 122 sites were ranked as a high priority for correction. The inventory identified the Winters Creek culverts as too small for the stream, creating a velocity barrier for juvenile and adult salmonids.

Correcting this fish passage barrier improves salmonid access to over 2 miles of previously isolated habitat. Based on field surveys, SFEG has determined that habitat upstream of the crossing consists of 799 sq m pool; 6,285 sq m riffle; 8,502 sq m pond/slough; and 658 sq m of cascade habitat. Morgan Creek is known to support



Restoration technician Neil Vargas and resident Bill Sharples atop completed bridge cooperation of local landowners. Funding for the project came through grants from the Salmon Recovery Funding Board and the WDFW's ALEA Volunteer Cooperative Grants.

Chinook salmon as well as coho and cutthroat. SFEG staff observed juvenile Chinook in 2006 confirming the use of the creek for rearing. The project builds on another fish passage project completed by SFEG 2.3 miles downstream at the mouth of Morgan Creek near Ross Island Slough in 2007.

SFEG would like to thank the landowner and long time member of the Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group, Ken Evans, for enabling

this project to happen. Projects like these would not be possible without the generous

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