

From the President

By Bruce Freet



Bruce stands beside Day Creek on the Board Tour

The Board of Directors has been striving for several years to make the Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group more strategic, competitive, and diversified with its salmon habitat restoration projects. The staff completed its first Strategic Plan, and felt that it was so successful that they have created another ... the 2009 – 2012 Strategic Plan. As a part of this process, the staff is currently using a set of 15 criteria to revise its Focal Areas, ranking Skagit and Samish River tributaries by their potential value to salmon recovery.

Now, we are positioned to make a major step toward becoming one of the best fisheries enhancement groups in Washington. First, the building where our administrative office is located (407 Main Street, Mount Vernon) has been condemned for flood control, so we are taking this opportunity to co-locate our office, shop, and nursery. It will be the first time in our 19 year history that all of our operations are together. This will greatly **improve our staff communications and coordination**. If you are aware of any rental properties that would enable us to achieve this goal, please notify us. Second, we are re-organizing the restoration staff in order to capitalize upon the skills sets of our young, relatively new Restoration Technicians and to **be more scientific with a new Restoration Ecologist position**. Our goal with the Restoration Technicians is to develop their skills so that they can become project leads on certain restoration projects. At the same time, the new Restoration Ecologist will strengthen us as an organization to effectively restore more complex salmon nursery habitats such as side channels along the mainstem Skagit River or the estuaries in Skagit Bay and the adjacent San Juan Islands.

The timing for change is usually crucial, and our situation is no different! Combining our office, shop, and nursery coupled with strengthening our restoration abilities will enable the Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group to be more competitive for future salmon habitat restoration funds. And, a new federal funding source is in Congress. If passed and signed into law, the **Pacific Salmon Stronghold Conservation Act of 2009** (Senate Bill, S. 817, and House Bill, H.R. 2055) will establish a federal program to support the protection and restoration of a network of the healthiest remaining wild Pacific salmon ecosystems in the United States --- “Salmon Strongholds”. These salmon strongholds will provide core centers of salmon abundance, productivity, and genetic diversity. This Act reflects a basic principle of conservation biology: protect the best, first! Portions of the Skagit River watershed will surely qualify as salmon strongholds, and we want to be in a position to do the protection and restoration work.

The Pacific Salmon Stronghold Conservation Act of 2009 will:

- support public-private incentive-based efforts to maintain strong “seed” stocks;
- leverage private funding for cooperative conservation efforts;
- streamline the restoration process for incentive-based programs;
- enhance coordination among federal, state, and local governments, tribes, and non-profit organizations; and
- save billions of dollars in future restoration, stock rebuilding, and emergency funding, by making strategic investments in the highest value conservation actions.