

Junior Stream Stewards Explore Their Watersheds

By Lucy DeGrace

This school year, nearly 350 middle school students at four local schools are participating in SFEG's Junior Stream Stewards program, learning about the salmon streams near their schools and homes. Through classroom activities these students have learned what a watershed is and in which one their school is located, which salmon live in those streams, and what kind of habitat they need to thrive. Two schools even got treated to expert salmon dissections by SFEG board member and salmon guru Kurt Buchanan. Armed with their new knowledge of watersheds and salmon, students ventured out on field trips to explore the local watershed and assess stream conditions and suitability for salmon.

At Conway School, Mrs. Talman's 7-th graders started their tour at Lake Sixteen, northeast of the school, where the north fork of Bulson Creek begins. Observations were made and water samples were taken to measure water temperature, pH, dissolved oxygen, and turbidity. The next stop was at a lower section of Bulson Creek, where we made the same measurements, and noted a marked change in habitat. At our last stop at the outlet of Fisher Slough, we were met by Jenny Baker, Restoration Manager for The Nature Conservancy (TNC). Jenny explained the restoration effort underway by TNC to restore habitat for salmon and other animals in the Skagit Delta.



Conway students measure the water temperature of Lake Sixteen, above the anadromous zone of Bulson Creek.

For the Cascade Middle School tour, Mr. Robinson's 7th-graders first stopped along the middle section of Brickyard Creek where we were met by Carri Crisp, of the Sedro Woolley Wastewater Treatment facility, and volunteer Patrick O'Hearn. Pat and Carri volunteer with the Stream Team, a program of the Skagit Conservation District that monitors water quality in Skagit County streams. They demonstrated this method for the students as we discussed the quality of

salmon habitat in Brickyard Creek. We visited one more site on Brickyard, and we finished our tour with a stop at the outlet of Hart Slough into the Skagit River.



Volunteer Pat O'Hearn shows Cascade Middle School students the tools that Stream Team volunteers use to measure chemical water quality.



Mrs. Janda's 8-th graders at Concrete stopped at 3 sites along Lorenzan Creek, which flows within walking distance of the school. We also toured the Marblemount Hatchery, where the students watched hatchery staff demonstrate how they collect eggs and milt from coho salmon. The highlight of the tour was seeing coho spawners swimming in Clark Creek, near the hatchery.

Concrete 8-th graders hold eggs recently taken from a hatchery coho.

Mrs. Russell's 8-th graders from Allen school toured the Samish watershed. Starting at a restoration site on Ennis Creek near the headwaters of the Samish River, the group observed salmon habitat and learned about the restoration in partnership with Whatcom Land Trust and Whatcom County. We continued on to Friday Creek at Pomona Grange Park, where students toured the Samish Hatchery and walked the trail along Friday Creek, where Stream Team volunteer Lyn Bishop demonstrated her water quality sampling methods. The second half of this tour took students to the lower Samish watershed, stopping at Edison Slough and the outlet of the river into Samish Bay. Of all the watershed tours, the tour of the Samish exhibited the most noticeable differences along the way in terms of land use and salmon habitat. Standing on the levee on the lower Samish, the group discussed the importance of balancing the needs to salmon with the needs of farmers, and the need to keep both farms and fisheries sustainable.



Allen 8-th graders made observations from a levee at the lower Samish River during their watershed tour.

After the holiday break, SFEG staff will be back in the classroom teaching the students about native plants and riparian zones, chemical and biological water quality, and working with the students to design and implement their service learning projects. These projects usually take the form of planting native plants or posting educational signs along their study streams. Keep an eye out for activities like these along Lorenzan, Bulson, and Brickyard Creeks and the Samish River and its tributaries.

Thank You Junior Stream Stewards Funders!

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