

Local Students Dive into Their Watersheds

By Lucy DeGrace

This year SFEG is engaging 15 classes at five school districts in watershed studies through the Junior Stream Stewards program. Nearly 350 7th and 8th graders at Concrete, Cascade, Conway, La Conner, and Allen schools have been touring their watersheds, participating in salmon dissections, and testing stream water quality this fall. We're pleased to see Junior Stream Stewards grow a little each year.



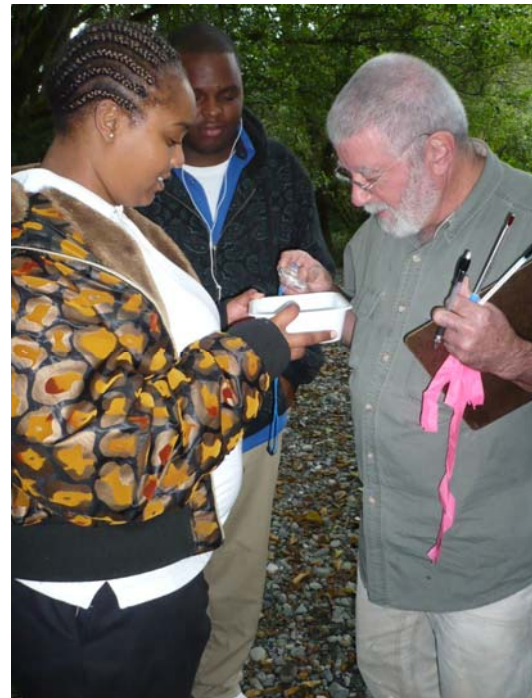
This year, retired WDFW fish biologist and SFEG board member Kurt Buchanan, and WDFW habitat biologist Bob Warinner visited classes and dissected coho salmon from the Marblemount Hatchery. While we heard a lot of “Eeeeww, gross” we also heard a lot of “Wow! That’s cool!” Using all senses to explore one’s watershed and everything in it helps to build a real understanding and appreciation for the natural world. Most of these students now understand salmon a little better than they did a few months ago.

On watershed tours, students performed simple water quality tests and visual habitat assessments based on what they’ve learned so far about salmon habitat requirements. In the words of one student “I never would have known all this if I hadn’t been on this field trip!” Upon seeing salmon streams, several students remarked that they had previously thought of these water bodies as mere ditches. The main goal of Junior Stream Stewards is to foster a sense of stewardship for our watershed. Getting students out of the classroom is a key component of Junior Stream Stewards, as many of these epiphanies are just not likely in a classroom setting. The first step is awareness, and these students will all build upon this new knowledge by completing restoration projects in the spring.

In addition to working with Middle School students through Junior Stream Stewards, SFEG staff, volunteers, and interns have worked with several other school groups this fall. Danny Rambo’s Cascades Job Corps students learned about salmon habitat restoration through a field trip to nearby Hansen Creek.



Here they collected macroinvertebrates and performed water quality tests. David Dow's Burlington Alternative High School students are using Hansen Creek as an outdoor classroom this fall, and on one of their first visits documented coho fry in the creek. Brennan Van Loo's Mount Vernon Christian High School science classes helped plant native trees along the Skagit River and then toured the Marblemount Hatchery. And Celia Unsell's Skagit River Schoolhouse home school group learned about salmon habitat with a field trip to Lorenzan Creek.



We'd like to thank volunteers Kurt Buchanan, Bob Warinner, Jim Johnson, Carol and Dean Schwartz, and Lyn Bishop for assisting with classroom and field lessons, as well as Jenny Baker from The Nature Conservancy, and staff from North Cascades National Park and The Swinomish Tribe for assistance on field lessons. We look forward to diving back in after the holidays and planning our restoration projects.

Thank You Junior Stream Stewards Funders!

Junior Stream Stewards is made possible this year thanks to several generous funders. In addition to the wonderful school staff and teachers, we have to thank the funders, without which the program would not happen. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account provided funds for materials, and the donors listed here have contributed over \$15,000 toward the implementation of the Junior Stream Stewards for this school year.

- 🐟 Fidalgo Fly Fishers
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- 🐟 And several private individuals