

Volunteers Have Been Busy as Bees

By Sacha Johnson

In the slow thaw of late winter and on into early spring, our volunteers have been as busy as bumblebees in a butterfly bush. Full of coffee, cookies, and good cheer, 173 volunteers donated 375 hours to get over 1,100 plants into the ground. Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group would like to thank everyone who donated time and energy.

We worked on eight different sites throughout the Skagit watershed this spring. Restoration efforts continued on the DeVries and Verdoes sites in the Nookachamps system. Along the mainstem of the Skagit River, we continued work at Howard Miller Steelhead Park, interplanting previously planted areas, removing Scots broom, and laying down cardboard to inhibit weeds. We also planted at three new sites this season: Ovenell Slough, Jackman Creek, and Cascade River. The Ovenell Slough site is owned by the US Forest Service and borders the main river channel upstream from Concrete. Just on the opposite side of the river, the Jackman Creek site borders Jackman Creek as it flows into the Skagit River. Spring is a busy time at the nursery as well. This year we ordered over 6,000 bareroot plants. These plants need to be either planted or potted up before they leaf out. Our annual spring potting party was held on April 5 at the nursery. Volunteers worked fast to put over 600 bareroot plants into pots. These plants will be cared for at the nursery this year and planted out during next spring's planting season.



In addition to weekend volunteer events and Junior Stream Stewards, we coordinated two service learning projects with 56 students from local schools. The Emerson School student body and Mount Vernon High School marine biology students helped out at two very muddy planting events along the north side of the Verdoes property.



Volunteers from all over the community, including Emerson School, helped us plant and pot over 1,700 native trees and shrubs for riparian restoration.

The Skagit Valley is greening up: buds bursting, flowers blossoming, and leaves nearly doubling in size overnight. At the same time, reed canary grass is advancing upwards on young trees we've worked so hard to plant. As I write, a vole is probably happily munching away on some delicious inner bark of a newly planted tree. But our efforts are not wasted. It is the possibility of survival that makes our actions so important. Most of these trees will survive and grow tall enough to shade out weeds and provide habitat to salmon and hundreds of other critters, possibly for centuries. Volunteers and staff have endured cold, wet mornings with frozen toes and soggy gloves to help restore the integrity of this system. We thank all the planting volunteers for their hard work this season. We also thank all of you who support Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group. Your good intentions and actions will direct the future of salmon in the Skagit watershed. Thanks as well to Calico Cupboard, Mount Vernon Food Pavilion, Sedro-Woolley Food Pavilion, Starbucks, and Krispy Kreme for their generous donations.

Fall planting season starts in late October. If you'd like to help please contact us at 360-336-0172 or ldegrace@skagitfisheries.org.

From the President

By Deene Almvig

Living in Skagit County near the Skagit River is one of the great blessings of my life. This is why I am very excited about the habitat restoration projects SFEG has scheduled for 2008. It is exciting stuff, and I want to share it with you!

To start the spring, we have signed a contract to do restoration on five United States Forest Service (USFS) sites totaling 70+ acres including work at Skiyou Slough near Sedro Woolley; Ovenell Slough south of Concrete; several sites along the Sauk River; a field adjacent to the Cascade River boat launch; and at Diobsud Creek above Marblemount. Additional projects requiring construction within or near streams include:

- A temporary bridge over Skiyou Slough to enable access for restoration equipment
- Installation of large woody debris at the Verdoes Dairy site along the East Fork Nookachamps
- Installation of large woody debris at the Ovenell Slough site
- Removal of an abandoned road and plugged culvert at Hobbit Creek, a tributary to the Sauk River
- Placement of 27 log jams in lower Finney Creek
- Removal of a fish passage barrier on Morgan Creek
- Placement of log jams in Day Creek

These are some of the exciting projects slated for this year which will provide an increase in spawning habitat for salmon and other life forms.

Someday, hopefully not too distant from now, our rivers, streams, estuaries and bays will be capable of supporting the diverse life within and around them, as they once did. For this to happen, we need to recognize the problems and connect them. This is what SFEG is about. From our field staff correcting the physical problems of our watersheds to our office staff developing public awareness, grants, strategies, designs and volunteer opportunities, we are making a difference, and I am very pleased to be a small part of it.



SFEG Board and staff were recently treated to a tour of current and upcoming restoration sites led by Project Manager Perry Welch.

Junior Stream Stewards Help Restore Local Creeks

By Sacha Johnson and Lucy DeGrace

A huge thanks goes out to Concrete and Cascade Middle School Junior Stream Stewards for their efforts to help restore salmon habitat in Brickyard and Lorenzan Creeks!

On March 14, Cascade seventh graders planted 60 shrubs on private property along Brickyard Creek in Sedro Woolley. The students were cheered on by several SFEG Board members and Junior Stream Stewards project funders.



On March 20, Concrete eighth graders worked hard to restore a section of Lorenzan Creek, on city right of way just east of Superior Street. Guided by SFEG with assistance from North Cascades National Park staff, they first assessed the site and designed a planting plan. Then, they spent the day planting over 107 native trees and shrubs, and posted a 'Save Our Salmon' sign designed by Concrete Junior Stream Stewards from last school year.



Throughout the school year, students in Mary Janda's classes at Concrete Middle School and Bill Robinson's classes at Cascade Middle School have been taking part in Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group's Junior Stream Stewards program and studying their local watershed. Brickyard Creek and Lorenzan Creek are both small tributaries to the Skagit River that support small populations of coho salmon. Junior Stream Stewards gives teachers an opportunity to get their students out into the best science classroom around: the great outdoors. Throughout the year, SFEG staff and volunteers lead classroom activities about watersheds, salmon, water quality, riparian plants, and stewardship. "Since the beginning of Junior Stream Stewards, I have learned so much. I have a different perspective on everything. I didn't care very much about the environment before they came to our school. But now that I've seen all that's happening to the environment, I've started getting a lot more interested in helping out. I want to help keep Lorenzan Creek fresh and clean and help out the salmon, so they don't die off", writes Ashlee, a Concrete seventh grader. Ashlee does a good job of expressing what Junior Stream Stewards is all about!

Funding for this program comes from Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife ALEA grant fund, and many local business donors, and students used shovels and gloves donated by ACE Hardware in Anacortes. We are very thankful to all supporters for helping to make this program possible. With this generous community sponsorship, we hope to be able to expand this program to two additional school districts in the 2008-09 school year. For more information about how your school can participate, or how you can contribute to the Junior Stream Stewards program, contact Lucy at 360-336-0172 or ldegrace@skagitfisheries.org.

Welcome Mike McCain!

Mike joined our field crew in March. Please help us welcome him onboard:

Hello everyone, my name is Mike McCain. I am the new Restoration Technician. I live in Burlington, and have lived in Washington State for 2 years now. I originally came from California. I lived in San Diego most of my life, attending local schools and Palomar community college where I earned my AA in Zoology, I then moved to the most northern part of the state and attended Humboldt State University. At Humboldt I studied the diverse subject of Geography and earned a BA in Geography with a minor in Natural Sciences.

I have a variety of field experience, beginning with my exciting summer in Alaska where I was a Student Conservation Association (SCA) intern in Wrangell St. Elias National Park. I then went on to spend 4 months in Yellowstone National Park, where I worked on a Lynx study. After college I had the opportunity to work on Spotted Owl Surveys in the backcountry of Humboldt County, and more recently Marbled Murrelet Surveys in Skagit and Snohomish County's backcountry while working for the Department of Natural Resources. I love working outdoors, seeing animals, breathing the fresh air, and getting dirty!



On a personal note, I have a wife, Meredith and an 8 month old son, Oliver. I enjoy scuba diving, hiking, kayaking, exploring new places and spending time with my family. I look forward to gaining new experiences through Skagit Fisheries!

New funding for Upper Skagit Projects

By Alison Studley

Several years ago the Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group went through an extensive process to identify Focal Areas. Focal Areas are sub-regions within our watershed where we felt we could maximize our benefit to salmon resources through education, outreach and habitat restoration with our limited funds. The Focal Areas we chose were based on input from a variety of resource professionals and include those areas where restoration is needed, salmon populations have great potential, and increased community engagement will be beneficial. Identifying areas in which to concentrate and combine our restoration and education efforts has been a great success. Over the last several years we have been able to secure significant grant resources to implement restoration and outreach programs in our Focal Areas. Combining and coordinating our programs makes our grant applications stronger and improves our success on the ground.

In 2007 we began focusing energy in the Upper Skagit Focal Area. This year by working with our partners we have secured funding to work at 9 sites in this Focal Area. All of these sites are located within the floodplain of the greater Upper Skagit area, including its major tributaries (the Cascade and Sauk Rivers). All of these sites are considered to be a high priority for restoration according to the Skagit Chinook Recovery Plan. They reflect a significant investment of time and resources by SFEG and our partners to identify strategic sites for restoration and protection of habitat in the Upper Skagit.

Over \$300,000 has been secured from the Salmon Recovery Funding Board to enhance over 70 acres of habitat on 5 properties owned by the US Forest Service. These funds will be spent over the next 3 ½ years along with matching funds provided by the US Forest Service primarily in the form of in-kind resources, including the labor of a supervised corrections crew. Restoration actions are mainly focused on riparian enhancement, but also include the placement of logs in old swales where floodwaters are expected to form new channels. The newly placed logs will trap floating logs during floods and aid in the creation of habitat when new channels are formed. SFEG plans to have many volunteer plantings over the next several years at these sites and we're hopeful that the surrounding communities will become more engaged in these volunteer activities over time.



This US Forest Service site along Cascade-Sauk Valley Road will be planted and log jams installed in swales to trap floating logs during floods. This will aid in the creation of habitat where new channels are formed.

Three other sites were recently purchased by The Nature Conservancy through a strategic process to identify the highest priority parcels in need of protection. These parcels provide high quality habitat in their current state, but could greatly benefit from relatively small amounts of restoration to improve habitat for Skagit salmon. The Nature Conservancy secured a Community Salmon Fund Grant through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and is contracting SFEG to involve the community in riparian enhancement and fish passage improvement at the sites. The three sites include one at the confluence of Jackman Creek and the Skagit River, one along the Cascade River and one along the Lower Sauk River.



Nature Conservancy site: the abandoned road, upon which beavers have built an extensive dam, will be removed to restore normal flow to Hobbit Creek in the Lower Sauk system.

We will also continue to work with Skagit County Parks at the Howard Miller Steelhead Park site. Last year, SFEG put significant effort into beginning the restoration of one half mile of Skagit River riparian area immediately to the west of the developed campground. This is an area where thousands of Upper Skagit eagle watchers visit each year. Docents lead eagle viewing tours along this portion of the Skagit River and a brochure is available for self guided tours from the Skagit River Interpretive Center. SFEG's staff and volunteers have worked to remove invasive species that dominated the area (Himalayan blackberry, reed canary grass, clematis and Scotch broom) and replant the riverside area with hundreds of new native plants. We also installed a series of educational signs along the unimproved path for visitors year round to learn more about riparian restoration, salmon and eagles. Visitors can see eagles and chum salmon in their natural habitat from this Skagit River pathway and someday we hope for them to see more of both as the native riparian habitat becomes more functional through restoration efforts.

In Memory of Russ Orrell

By Arn Thoreen

On April 4, 2008 Russ Orrell passed away. Russ had been the Washington Department of Fisheries fish biologist responsible for Snohomish River north to the Canadian border for several decades back when fishing was great! He knew every stream, every fishing hole, every fisherman, and they knew and loved him. He was part of the “the good ol’ days”.

Russ helped form the Skagit Work Group which eventually formed the Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group (SFEG). He was on our first board of directors. For years, the meetings were held at his fisheries office on Blackburn Road. His love of the resource and the people in general will be sorely missed.

A website (www.RussOrrell.com) is available for those wanting further information and photos including one of Russ as a high school football star that made *Life* magazine.

Russ was a wonderful addition to our organization, and will be missed by all board and staff at SFEG.



Russ Orrell (left) with Arn Thoreen during the SFEG board members’ project site tour in 2002.

Sacha Bids SFEG Farewell



In the end of May, I will be leaving my Americorps position with Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group. I am returning upriver to the mossy unincorporated community of Marblemount to work for North Cascades National Park. I have spent the past four summers working in the wilderness, and it's become an addiction I can't seem to kick. I will be working on plant ecology studies monitoring long term change in forest and subalpine ecosystems. My decision to end my term early has nothing to do with SFEG and everything to do with my love for botany and mountains.

I have greatly enjoyed working for Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group. I would like to thank the staff, board members, and volunteers for helping me along the way. Thanks especially to Lucy, who is the most hard-working yet easy-going supervisor an Americorps intern could wish for. In working at Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group and learning a great deal about the fascinating world of fish, I have gained a wider perspective on local natural resources. I have come to better understand the importance of approach in resource management. Being that Skagit Valley communities were founded on resource extraction, I've greatly appreciated Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group approach in working to increase community awareness of local natural resources on their terms. I've learned this is important, so as not to create a gap between those who rely on resources for their living and those who work to protect the natural environment. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to stumble through redds during spawner surveys, to watch Chinook develop from egg to alevin to fry at the hatchery, and to begin to understand the mysteries of the middle school mind. And in the end, thank you for giving me the opportunity to work to restore and to better understand the Skagit River system. I hope to continue volunteering with SFEG, so I'm sure you haven't seen the last of me!



While with SFEG, Sacha (right) earned her "weedwhacking license."

What's Up (or Down) With Salmon Numbers

By Kevik Rensink

The Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group (SFEG) conducted adult salmon spawner surveys during the fall and winter of 2007-2008 at 32 previously completed habitat restoration project site on 21 different streams. Thirty one dedicated individuals composed of volunteers, landowners and partners were able to walk more than 19 linear miles of spawning ground every week. WDFW uses annual spawner survey data to assist with creating annual escapement goals.

This year SFEG surveyors documented a total of 7,591 salmonids and 2,265 redds. A summary by species is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Spawning Survey Results of 2007-08

Species	Live fish	Carcasses	Redds	Average carcass length
Chinook	32	18	8	0.72 meters
Chum	50	17	36	0.75 meters
Coho	1791	467	782	0.62 meters
Pink	5675	1870	1401	0.52 meters
Kokanee	0	0	0	N/A
Steelhead	4	0	27	N/A
Cutthroat	39	4	11	0.37 meters
Rainbow	0	0	0	N/A

It is difficult to compare year to year totals as we don't walk the same streams each and every year. The data we collect is better used to establish trends over longer periods of time. Detailed spawning history for every stream we have walked since 1998 is available on our web site. However, when comparing data to last year, the season totals show that although the number of Chinook redds were down, the live total was up. We recorded one of our smallest chum returns, a good bounce back in the coho return, another impressive pink return, a healthy number of steelhead redds, and almost twice as many cutthroat trout were observed this year than last year. More Chinook returned (17) to Hansen Creek than any other stream. This is high for a stream which is not known in its recent history as a big Chinook producer (averaging less than five per year). After last year's record-breaking chum return WDFW was expecting more of an average return this year. Instead SFEG observed fewer chum salmon (50) than they had recorded in the last eight years. We added four new coho survey sites this year; Anderson Creek (a tributary to the Skagit River along the South Skagit Highway), and three tributaries to the Samish River (Ennis Creek in the Upper Samish, Parsons Creek in the Middle Samish, and Diettrick Creek, which flows into Lake Samish). The biggest positive surprise occurred in Ennis Creek where 907 live coho and 361 redds were recorded. In 2007 Whatcom County and SFEG replaced a failing culvert with a bridge and reconnected Ennis Creek to where it historically flowed into the Samish River. The coho were able to move up through the new channel, under the new bridge to spawn, making a very successful project amongst an overall exciting coho return.

Of the 32 restoration sites surveyed this season, 21 are SFEG fish passage project streams. This season 4,556 Chinook, chum, coho, steelhead, and cutthroat had access to over 19 miles of spawnable habitat upstream of previous fish barriers.

Acknowledgements: I would once again like to thank everyone involved in making these spawning surveys possible this year. Thank you Lucy DeGrace for creating another great volunteer base which included **volunteers** Worth Allen, Kurt Buchanan, Ned Currence, Brett Goodpastor, Randy Jamison, Jim Johnson, Christine Kitch and David Farrow, David and Mary McDonald, Steve Manthe, Patrick and Carol O’Hearn, Mike Oster, Kenny Rohweder; **landowners** Tom Berry, Ken Goodpastor, David Gribble, Anthony Hamerski, Susan and Benjamin Janicki, Floyd Kennedy, and Mike Wood; **SFEG Interns** Sacha Johnson and Kyle Koch; **Restoration Technicians** Danny Cain, Joe George, and Dwayne Massey; **Project Manager** Perry Welch; **Sauk-Suiattle Tribe’s** Toby Bill, Eugene Edwards, Michael Wolten, and Scott Morris; **Upper Skagit Tribe’s** Doug Couvelier and Todd Woodard; and **Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife’s** Brett Barkdull and Natasha Geiger. We greatly appreciate all the hard work and effort that everyone puts into this very important part of salmon recovery. Thanks, and we hope to see you all again next year.



Volunteer and SFEG Board member Ned Currence cuts the tail off an Ennis Creek coho carcass. This marks it so that volunteers don’t count the same carcass again in future weeks. (Photo courtesy of Kari Neumeyer, Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission.)