

**Why I do the conservation work I do
by Alison Studley, Executive Director, Skagit
Fisheries Enhancement Group
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For me my devotion to the Skagit is linked to a particular place. This place, at the confluence of the Nookachamps and the Skagit River, on a hill above the floodplain is where I grew up and I'm sure gained my first appreciation, love and devotion for the outdoors.

Farmland surrounds this place above the Nookachamps. In fact, a local dairy farmer ran his heifers on my parents' 50 acres. Our fields were hayed during the summer, and the farmer tried not to get too mad at us kids for making forts out of their hay bales stacked to the rafters in our barn. While my family's livelihood wasn't dependent on farming the land, my parents instilled an amazingly strong connection to the earth and what it has to offer from a very early age. We raised a variety of animals over the years (horses, sheep, llamas, ducks, geese... even a steer or two). And my parents always had a huge garden with every kind of vegetable, berry and flower you can name. There was marsh grass, mud, fruit trees and a murky pond which on a good year (*if we were lucky*) would freeze over. There were owls in our barn, eagles nearby and the wonderful winter sound of the trumpeter swans flying over the house at dusk on their way back to Barney Lake after feasting in the farm fields below. Still, perhaps the crown jewel of our property was the woods. Where my brother and I played continually, making more forts, exploring, going on adventures and thinking we were miles away from anyone, when in reality we were likely always within shouting distance. My own kids now get to discover the wonders of these woods and are even beginning to rebuild forts in some of the same places where they once stood.



Being on a hill above the floodplain of the Nookachamps, when the floods came we were always one of the first to have waterfront property. I believe the view from this place is one of the few views in the lower Skagit Valley where the vista hasn't changed over the decades, in fact there are actually fewer houses now in this rare, undiked area of the lower Skagit.

Unlike many Skagitonians, my parents are not from here, which may be why they invested so much of our family's free time exploring this place. When I wasn't stomping around the farm, our family was generally backpacking in the North Cascades. Many of these adventures were spent walking along rivers, crossing creeks and fishing in the lakes. *I'm sure inspiring my yet unrealized, devotion to water.* My dad would teach me all about plant and animal life, never from books, but by encouraging my own curiosity to learn through our experiences on hiking trails and in the natural world we were traveling through.

At some point, our family vacations shifted...we started floating rivers as a family and taking

long wilderness rafting trips. And eventually my family was fortunate enough to let river rafting take us to unique places around the world.

I found that floating a river is an incredible way to become acquainted and fall in love with a place. Whether it's the wilderness or the people or their history you seek to connect, the river takes you silently right through the heart of it all. The river introduces you to its mountains and valleys, its flora and fauna, its people and culture simply by taking you on its slow and steady journey downstream to the sea. *This must have been the start of my enchantment with rivers.*

I honestly don't think I understood the impact of this early introduction to nature, water, the forest, the mountains and of even the mighty Skagit River had on me until many years later. I had NO idea what I wanted to be when I grew up. My one goal for College was....anywhere but here. And I accomplished that.

When taking my first Environmental Studies course at UC Santa Barbara I discovered I wanted to pursue a career in conservation. This class uncovered for me my deep devotion for the natural world and gave it a purpose. I realized that these places I grew up exploring were actually at risk of being lost. I had taken for granted that these places existed not realizing that it took many people caring for them to ensure their survival. I began to comprehend that the future of everyone and everything on our planet was interconnected and dependent on a healthy functioning environment and I wanted to be a part of ensuring this existed in our future.

When I returned to Washington for graduate school, I made the realization that the Skagit was the place I wanted to care for. Hiking on these trails, camping in these woods, I felt a connection and devotion to this place and understood that I wanted to be a part of ensuring the survival and function of the Skagit for future generations. For me, I had to leave the Skagit to discover that it was a part of me. For me I had to leave, to recognize that caring for this place was what I needed to do.

This place is part of me. There is something about here: the land, the forest, the mountains, the islands, the water, the wildlife, the farms, the fish... and the river that silent connects it all; holding it all together. There is something about here that draws me back. Where else could I be protecting and restoring a place that is more special, and has more to offer, than right here.

I'm proud to be doing something that I believe is good for all living things. I'm proud that when my kids are asked what mommy does, their answer is "she saves the fishies". Sure we use salmon as a surrogate, however really we are trying to make this a better place for salmon, for forests, for birds, for people, for future generations.

We are trying to leave this place better than we found it. One person, one project, one landowner, one child at a time. Change can happen, one action at a time. I believe this is that we are doing at the Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group. Assisting, educating, empowering individuals to take one action at a time that ultimately collectively leads to better habitat, cleaner waterways, and healthier ecosystems for all living things now and the future.

We are all empowered to make a difference, we are the only ones who can. The ones who feel devoted to this place, this amazing Skagit Valley and want to work to see that it is

preserved and enhanced for future generations.

So why do the conservation work I do?...

- In hopes that I can introduce people to the wonders of the Skagit as my parents did and give them the tools to take actions to preserve it for future generations.
- I do it for my sons, Ervin and Zakary, so they can continue to have meaningful experiences in the natural world here and beyond.
- But if you ask my mom and dad...they will say the reason I do this work is because of The Lorax, by Dr. Seuss which they read to me early and often.

So, I'll leave you with these words of wisdom from The Lorax, which hopefully continues to inspire generations of conservationists to come:

“Unless. Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. Its not. ... Plant a new truffula tree, treat it with care, give it clean water and feed it clean air. Grow a forest. Protect it from axes that hack and then one day the Lorax and all of his friends (including the salmon) may come back.”