

ANNUAL REPORT 2011



Photo courtesy of Jessica Newley



*Dedicated to involving
our community in
restoring wild salmon
populations for future
generations*



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ENHANCEMENT GROUP**

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MESSAGE *from the* EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group is proud to present our 2011 accomplishments. We once again had another great year of working with incredible individuals and partners to continue to advance our mission of increasing local salmon populations in the Skagit, Samish and Island community watersheds. Since 1990 we have remained dedicated to this mission, working to engage volunteers, landowners, project partners and community members throughout our region to implement high quality habitat restoration work for salmon. Over the years our education programs have greatly expanded in an attempt to engage more and more young people who will be the future leaders and stewards of this beautiful landscape we call home. While increasing local salmon populations is most definitely the focus of our restoration and education efforts, we strongly believe that what we are doing for salmon is good for all living things in our watersheds. Planting native trees and shrubs along salmon streams to restore riparian areas improves habitat for many species of birds, amphibians and wildlife. Native vegetation along waterways helps filter pollutants before they enter our streams keeping them cleaner and healthier for everyone. Teaching students that salmon need clean, clear, cold, and consistent water in streams helps inform families how they can take actions to reduce their impact to local streams. And volunteers counting returning salmon fosters stewardship and caring for our watersheds. While ultimately SFEG's goal is to have more salmon in our watersheds, we also hope that through our restoration and education programs we can make the place we live a better home for forests, birds, wildlife, families, and future generations to thrive.

The Board, staff and volunteers at SFEG are striving to leave the Skagit Valley and our surrounding region better than it was when we started. Our restoration and education programs are attempting to do this one person, one project, one landowner, one child at a time. We believe that positive change can happen in our watersheds, one action at a time. By assisting, educating, and empowering individuals to take these actions, collectively it will lead to better habitat, cleaner waterways, and healthier ecosystems for all living things now and the future.

Thank you for doing the conservation work you do with SFEG. You (our volunteers, members, and landowners) are the reason our restoration and education accomplishments continue to grow each year. You are the ones who are devoted to this place, this amazing Skagit Valley and surrounding Island communities and want to work and volunteer to see that it is preserved and enhanced for future generations. We thank you for sharing this devotion through SFEG's work and greatly look forward to your ongoing support.



Mission Statement:

The mission of the Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group is to build partnerships that educate and engage the community in habitat restoration and watershed stewardship in order to enhance salmonid populations.

HABITAT RESTORATION AND STEWARDSHIP PROJECTS

Day Creek

SFEG has been working with private landowners in the Day Creek Community to identify and implement salmon restoration projects since 2005. Our current efforts focus on restoring riparian vegetation along Lower Day Creek, and placing large woody debris structures in the stream to reduce temperatures and improve fish habitat. In 2011 SFEG installed 31 engineered log jams along 5,500 feet of stream. Log structures were placed using a helicopter and assembled by a local contractor, SFEG staff and volunteers. SFEG is monitoring the effectiveness of this project by conducting stream cross-sections before and after construction. Temperature logging devices have been installed at four locations to support an analysis of the project's affects on water temperatures, as high temperatures are identified as a limiting factor for salmon in Day Creek. In addition to log jams, in 2011 SFEG staff and volunteers revegetated 14.8 riparian acres along lower Day Creek. Funding for this phase of Day Creek restoration comes from WA Dept of Ecology and SRFB grants.



Upper Skagit Knotweed Program

The Upper Skagit Knotweed Control Project is focused on the implementation of a strategic approach to controlling the invasive plant species knotweed (*Polygonum* spp.) in the Upper Skagit watershed. This program was developed by The Nature Conservancy in 2001 and is focused on a top-down strategic approach to controlling the invasive plant species knotweed in the Upper Skagit watershed. 2011 was SFEG's second year leading this unique program. Knotweed is detrimental to freshwater ecosystems and natural riparian processes, which negatively impacts high priority salmon habitat. Since 2001 the effort has identified 1,900 patches of knotweed, achieved over 50% control of knotweed in the Upper Skagit and is recognized as a model for invasive species work in Washington State. The project area starts at the confluence of the Skagit and Sauk Rivers, and includes the mainstem Skagit, Sauk, Suiattle and Cascade Rivers, their tributaries and surrounding landscapes.

In 2011, SFEG staff assisted by a WCC crew thoroughly surveyed within the 100-year floodplain along 53.8 mainstem river miles along the Skagit and Sauk rivers, and 34.2 miles of tributaries. SFEG surveyed 21 more tributary miles in 2011 than in 2010. The overall results of these additional tributary surveys were positive with no new knotweed patches found in designated clean tributaries. SFEG and WCC also received on-the-ground assistance from U.S. Forest Service, Seattle City Light, North Cascades National Park, and the Sauk-Suiattle Tribe. Funding for the knotweed control program came from the WA Dept of Agriculture and Ecotrust through a NOAA Community Restoration Fund partnership. In all, we estimate that 19,282 acres in the Upper Skagit floodplain are protected from knotweed infestation as a result of these efforts.



Skagit Floodplain Riparian Project

The Skagit Floodplain Riparian projects represent a major effort to restore vegetation communities and floodplain function in the Skagit River floodplain. The floodplains of the Skagit provide important freshwater habitat for all Chinook salmon fry, but more expressly for those



SUMMARY OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Habitat Enhancement:	Riparian plantings	16,412 plants
		74 acres along 5 miles of waterways
	Riparian maintenance	244 acres
	Riparian fencing installed	1 mile
	Instream habitat improved	1 mile
	Isolated habitat reconnected	0.67 miles
	Floodplain protected from knotweed infestation	19,282 acres
Community Outreach:	Community education	4,890 individuals
	Volunteer involvement	7,711 hours
	Kids educated	1,632 students

life history strategies that depend on freshwater habitat for extended rearing such as parr migrants and yearlings. Adult Chinook spawn in the mainstem of the Skagit River and restoration and protection in the Upper Skagit Floodplain is a high priority for Chinook salmon recovery. SFEG is working with four partner landowners who own conservation properties in the floodplain, including the U.S. Forest Service, Seattle City Light, Skagit County, and the Skagit Land Trust. The project has involved planting and maintaining riparian vegetation on 14 worksites along the Skagit and Sauk Rivers. SFEG has been assisted in these



efforts by numerous volunteers as well as contract crews from Whatcom County Department of Corrections and the Washington Conservation Corps. Accomplishments at these sites in 2011 include installation of 2,500 feet of livestock exclusion fencing at the Skagit Mainstem site, and planting of 12,360 plants along 3.6 miles of the Skagit River.

Seattle City Light Stewardship Program

In 2010 SFEG began implementation of the Seattle City Light Stewardship Program. The purpose of this program is to conduct quarterly visits to properties purchased through City Light's ESA and Wildlife Land funds and to effectively detect any stewardship issues. SFEG is excited by this unique partnership to be the local steward for such large quantities of valuable floodplain habitat. 17 properties were visited quarterly for stewardship assessments and 4 new properties were added in 2011. Stewardship actions were recommended at several properties for 2012. Funding has been secured to perform recommended actions at 5 properties. The most common issue noted at the properties was the presence of invasive plant species and garbage dumping.



Skagit County Natural Resource Stewardship Program

SFEG is working with the Skagit County Department of Public Works to implement riparian restoration on private lands in the Samish and Skagit basins through the Natural Resource Stewardship Program (NRSP). The project is funded through the WA Department of Ecology and provides an opportunity for private landowners to obtain small grants (up to \$35,000) to restore riparian vegetation and improve water quality on their property. To date SFEG has implemented plans on eight properties, and has prepared or is in the process of preparing plans for six other sites. In 2011 we constructed 2,615 feet of livestock exclusion fencing, and planted 1.2 acres of riparian area along 640 feet of stream. We are looking forward to working with new participating landowners in 2012 as this program really appears to be gaining momentum.



Davis Slough Hydrologic Connectivity

In partnership with the Skagit County Department of Public Works and Seattle City Light, SFEG is working to develop a project that will reestablish unrestricted fish passage to and from Davis Slough and restore natural hydrologic flow paths across Seattle City Light's Iron Mountain Ranch Property. KPFF Consulting Engineers were contracted with SRFB grant funds to develop conceptual bridge design plans and cost estimates for replacing the existing 36-inch culvert with a 60-foot bridge. GeoEngineers were retained to evaluate hydrology



and the current and historic flow paths along a 2.5 mile long stretch of the South Skagit Highway adjacent to Seattle City Light's 272-acre Iron Mountain Ranch property and Davis Slough. Construction of the bridge and re-establishment of hydrologic connectivity will improve access and habitat conditions in approximately two-miles of high quality off-channel rearing habitat.

Hansen Creek

Habitat conditions have been degraded in Hansen Creek just east of Sedro Woolley from agricultural and residential development and associated dike construction and dredging activities that were undertaken to protect adjacent landowners from flooding. In 2009 SFEG worked with a private landowner to obtain funding from WDFW's Landowner Incentive Program to restore Hansen Creek. Simultaneously, Skagit County has been working on a long-term restoration plan to improve habitat conditions and address flooding concerns on Hansen Creek. SFEG worked with Skagit County, the Skagit River System Cooperative (SRSC) and others to develop a planting plan for the Creekside Farms Property that would accommodate long-term restoration plans and begin to re-establish floodplain riparian forest throughout the site. In April 2011 volunteers helped SFEG staff plant 2,431 plants on 5 acres. Blackberries and reed canary grass also needed to be maintained at the site by the WCC crew. Vegetation was monitored by volunteers. In July the site was acquired by the Swinomish Tribe to support ongoing restoration and protection efforts in the Hansen Creek watershed.

Swan Lake Feasibility Study - Whidbey Island

SFEG has been working with Island County Public Works and the Swan Lake Watershed Preservation Group to complete a preliminary feasibility assessment of the potential for restoring fish access to Swan Lake. Swan Lake is a high functional saltmarsh wetland complex on the west side of Whidbey Island near Oak Harbor. Coastal Geologic Services (CGS) was retained to complete an analysis of historical maps and aerial photos plus information on the geomorphology of the site. CGS concluded that the area was formerly a saltmarsh that was likely seasonally connected to the marine environment. SFEG and CGS received additional funding from Island County in 2011 to collect data on lake levels and bathymetry, lakebed sediments and stream flows. These data were used to prepare a successful SRFB application to support completion of an engineering feasibility assessment and identify specific restoration alternatives. Work on the feasibility assessment will be completed in 2012.



Thatcher Bay Nearshore Restoration Project - Blakely Island

Since the 1940's wood chips from an old lumber mill have completely buried intertidal substrates suitable for forage fish spawning at Thatcher Bay on Blakely Island. This wood waste is releasing sulfide, a natural byproduct of wood decomposition, at levels that are toxic to benthic flora and fauna. The proposed restoration of the area will include removing 12,000 cubic yards of wood waste and refilling the excavated area with sediments common to the surrounding areas. In 2011 90% designs were completed and the permitting process continued in hopes of 2012 construction. Funds have been secured from DNR, SRFB and are likely from ESRP for construction.



Native Plant Nursery

Volunteers led by SFEG's WCC Interns continued to operate a native plant nursery to grow bare root plants to a larger size prior to installing them at restoration sites where competition with invasive species is very high. Over 525 hours were contributed by 70 volunteers in 2011 to care for 8,000 potted plants. Nearly 4,700 potted plants, shrubs and trees from the nursery were planted at 14 project sites in 2011. Volunteers potted plants, performed summer watering and worked with students from Cascades Job Corps and Bellingham Technical College to conduct regular nursery maintenance via weekly work parties.



EDUCATION PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Educating kids and community members is a cornerstone of SFEG's mission in order to ensure future stewardship of our watersheds. Here are some highlights from our education and outreach efforts in 2011.

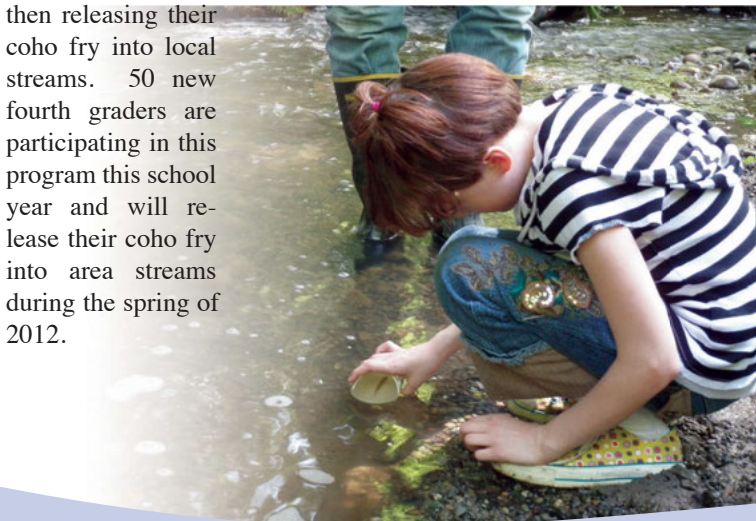
Junior Stream Stewards

Junior Stream Stewards takes middle school students out of the classroom and into the field to learn all about watersheds and salmon. SFEG staff and volunteers visit each month for classroom and field activities, including a service project in the spring. During the 2010-11 school year we engaged 415 students at five schools throughout Skagit County (Conway, Edison, Allen, Sedro Woolley and Concrete). In the 2011-12 school year the number grew to 585 middle school students, with the inclusion of the entire 7th grade at Cascade Middle School. Funds from Skagit County's Clean Samish Initiative as well as WDFW's ALEA have augmented private donations and allowed this expansion of this popular program.



Salmon in the Classroom

SFEG coordinated the raising of 200 salmon eggs for fourth grade students in Mount Vernon during 2011. 75 students at Madison and Lincoln Elementary Schools learned about salmon by raising them from egg to fry in large chilled aquariums. Students toured the Marblemount Hatchery in preparation for raising salmon in their classrooms and then releasing their coho fry into local streams. 50 new fourth graders are participating in this program this school year and will release their coho fry into area streams during the spring of 2012.



Kids in Creeks

Throughout the school year, teachers request service-learning projects for their students. The Kids in Creeks program includes a classroom presentation by SFEG staff and a service project at one of many restoration sites in Skagit County. In 2011 SFEG staff and volunteers worked with 167 K-12 students from Emerson Alternative High school, Immaculate Conception Regional School, and Mount Vernon High School, teaching them to plant native riparian plants to improve habitat for salmon and many other animals.



Samish Watershed Outreach

SFEG is one of many partners participating in Skagit County's Clean Samish Initiative, an effort to raise awareness for water quality issues in the Samish Watershed and offer assistance to landowners wanting to implement corrective measures on their property. In addition to working with two Samish watershed schools for Junior Stream Stewards, SFEG participated in the Samish Bay Bivalve Bash, and held two volunteer planting parties at the headwaters of the Samish River, on Whatcom Land Trust property. SFEG hosted a very successful Samish River Family Festival in October at Donovan Park. Many partner organizations helped present this fun event to educate the public about the water quality issues facing the Samish Watershed. About 150 community members attended, learning from educational games and displays, and viewed Chinook salmon in Friday Creek. In 2012, SFEG is excited to partner with the Samish Indian Nation with new grant funds received from the Department of Ecology. Specifically, we are collaborating on efforts to control knotweed and revegetate priority riparian areas where knotweed treatment occurs. The Tribe's effort to systematically survey and control knotweed began in 2010 and SFEG's new grant funds are already being used to plan revegetation efforts for three properties where significant knotweed treatment has taken place.

Upper Skagit Outreach

Grant funds from ALEA this year provided for a Hatchery Outreach program, which entailed training volunteers to lead tours of the Marblemount Hatchery during the winter eagle season. This year twelve volunteers were trained to lead tours of the Marblemount Hatchery. During the 2010-11 season, over 1,000 people visited the hatchery in 2 months. This year we expect similar numbers of visitors.



MONITORING PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

SFEG's monitoring programs are designed to gather data that help determine the effectiveness of restoration actions. Volunteers are an essential component of our programs as long term funding for monitoring is extremely limited. In all, over 2,100 volunteer hours were documented assisting with monitoring programs in 2011.

Vegetation Monitoring

With funding from the Mountaineers Foundation, SFEG hosted a workshop on monitoring vegetation at restoration sites for volunteers. SFEG was assisted by an intern dedicated to monitoring vegetation whom coordinated and worked with 14 volunteers at selected planting sites. SFEG monitored 19 sites and 201 plots (more than 20 acres) for 2011. The monitoring data are being used to confirm the effectiveness of riparian plantings, and, where survival targets are not being met, to identify the number of replacement plants needed and guide species selection and planting techniques that will improve our success rate in the future.



Spawner Survey Monitoring

SFEG volunteers and staff continued to collect salmonid spawning data for 21 project reaches and four WDFW index streams. SFEG's data are provided to fisheries co-managers (WDFW and the Tribes) and combined with data from the rest of the state to develop an escapement count for Tribes, commercial fishermen and sports fishermen. In 2011, SFEG's spawner survey program was supported by funding from the Burning Founda-



tion. A monitoring workshop was held in early October to train volunteers. 27 volunteers surveyed 15.6 miles of habitat in 25 separate streams each week during spawning season. As of December 2011, we had counted 377 coho, 51 Chinook, 5,447 Pink, 10 chum and 447 kokanee.

In-Stream Monitoring

SFEG's instream monitoring program was supported by funding from the Burning Foundation in 2011. Two interns were engaged to work with volunteers. A workshop was held to train volunteers how to conduct in-stream monitoring. In-stream monitoring was conducted at 10 locations where SFEG had previously conducted restoration projects, or where projects are planned in the near future. Instream monitoring is conducted to track physical changes in stream conditions where restoration has occurred in order to determine the effectiveness of habitat restoration actions for salmon.



McElroy Slough Monitoring

SFEG is currently conducting long-term monitoring of fish use, vegetation and channel conditions at McElroy Slough in Blanchard where a restoration project occurred in 2006. In 2011 fish sampling was led by Bruce Brown of the Skagit River System Cooperative under contract to SFEG. Assisted by SFEG staff and volunteers, fish use was sampled at two week intervals upstream and downstream of new tidegates installed in 2006 designed to better allow for fish passage and tidal flow. A dedicated team of 9 volunteers assisted with the monitoring effort. Juvenile Chinook (which do not spawn in the Colony Creek system) and starry flounder were caught upstream of the tidegates, providing evidence that the tidegates are allowing at least some upstream passage to rearing habitat.

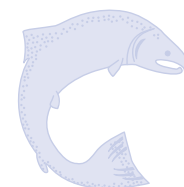


Red Cabin Creek Fish Rescue

SFEG worked with the Washington Department of Transportation to rescue fish stranded when flow goes subsurface within the Highway 20 Right of Way. Volunteers helped SFEG staff relocate 1,491 fish from Red Cabin Creek during 11 low flow periods in the winter and spring of 2011. Replacement of the bridge commenced in June of 2011, and SFEG staff assisted DOT workers removing fish prior to road construction. Volunteers also assisted with spawner surveys on a half mile stretch.



CONTRIBUTORS



DONORS

A Class Act
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 Anthony's Restaurants
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 Mount Vernon Safeway
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 North Cascade Networks, LLC
 North Cascades Institute
 North Sound Brewery
 Northwest Datum and Design



FINANCIAL SUMMARY 2011

Income		Expenses	
Public Funds	\$ 1,096,631	Project & Programs	\$ 1,019,410
Private Funds	\$ 60,711	Administration (10%)	\$ 119,265
Total Cash Income	\$ 1,157,342	Total	\$ 1,138,675
In-Kind Donations	\$ 353,273		
Total	\$ 1,510,615		

Northwest Fly Fishing Adventures
 Ann Novak
 Ocean Beauty Seafoods
 Patrick and Carol O'Hearn
 Michael Olis
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 Orion River Rafting
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 Paccar
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 Woods Logging Supply
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 Xtra Special Cakes
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 Cascade Job Corps
 Cascade Middle School
 Concrete Middle School
 Conway Elementary School
 Ecotrust
 Edison Elementary School
 Emerson High School
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 Island County Public Works
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 Lincoln Elementary School
 Madison Elementary School
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 Skagit Land Trust
 Skagit Stream Team
 Skagit Bald Eagle Awareness Team
 Skagit River System Cooperative
 Skagit Valley College
 Skagit Watershed Council
 Swan Lake Watershed Preservation Group
 Swinomish Indian Tribe
 The Nature Conservancy

Town of Concrete
 Upper Skagit Indian Tribe
 US Fish and Wildlife Service
 US Forest Service
 Washington Conservation Corps
 Washington Service Corps
 WA Salmon Recovery Funding Board
 WA State Department of Agriculture
 WA State Department of Ecology
 WA State Department of Fish & Wildlife
 WA State Department of Natural Resources
 WA State Department of Transportation
 WA State Parks Department
 Western Washington Agricultural Association
 Wetlands Reserve Program
 Whatcom Land Trust
 Whatcom County

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