

Engaging our community in restoring wild salmon for future generations

SKAGIT FISHERIES ENHANCEMENT GROUP 2014 ANNUAL REPORT



SKAGIT FISHERIES
ENHANCEMENT GROUP



Our mission is to educate and engage the community in habitat restoration and watershed stewardship to enhance wild salmon.

Salmon are unique in requiring a string of healthy habitats to complete their complex life cycle. We are fortunate in the greater Skagit Watershed-- from the North Cascades to the Whidbey Island shorelines—to still have high-quality habitat for the survival of all five species of salmon, as well as steelhead, cutthroat and bull trout.

As the crown jewel of Puget Sound, we need to bridge the gaps to ensure that quality habitat is protected, that degraded habitat is restored and that our community is actively involved in the stewardship of our local watersheds for salmon and our ecosystem.

At SFEG we are bridging gaps to create stronger connections between habitats and our communities. We are building bridges to allow salmon access to previously blocked habitat; we are building bridges for safer human access; we are building bridges within our community by bringing together landowners and partners to improve our watershed; and we are building bridges to our future by educating our youth.

At SFEG we believe that strengthening our community's understanding of the interdependence between the health and well-being of human communities and the health and well-being of ocean, estuary and river ecosystems will result in abundant, self-sustaining wild salmon for present and future generations. We thank our members, volunteers, landowners, donors and partners for helping to make this vision a reality. As we work cooperatively to ensure the health of our watersheds for salmon, we also ensure the health of our ecosystem for our human communities.

Alison Studley
Executive Director

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**SKAGIT FISHERIES
ENHANCEMENT GROUP**

2014 SUMMARY OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Riparian plantings

26,390 NATIVE PLANTS

covering 76.5 acres
along 5.2 miles
of waterways

Riparian maintenance

427 ACRES

of native plant
care and invasive
plant removal

Habitat opened

10.6 MILES

of stream miles
opened by removal of
fish passage barriers

Habitat restored

1,100 FEET

of habitat restored
with large
woody debris

Community education

8,969 INDIVIDUALS

Volunteer involvement

8,190 HOURS

Kids educated

2,044 STUDENTS

2014 FINANCIAL SUMMARY

\$ Income

Public funds: \$1,786,525
Private funds: \$238,592
In-kind donations: \$363,440

\$2,388,557

{ \$ } Expenses

Projects and Programs: \$1,825,420
Administration (8%): \$142,574

{ \$1,967,993 }

HABITAT RESTORATION

Restoring habitat is key to enhancing wild salmon. In 2014, SFEG worked in partnership with landowners, Skagit County, tribes, funders and local businesses to restore nearly 11 miles of salmon and steelhead habitat. Four new bridges were built on private and public roads to improve passage for fish to important stream and slough habitat. A side-channel was enhanced by adding logs for habitat diversity and another backwater channel was re-created to provide valuable habitat for juvenile salmon.

STARBIRD CREEK FISH PASSAGE IMPROVEMENT

Starbird Creek flows into Fisher Creek, which is a tributary to the south fork of the Skagit River. Two undersized and failing culverts were replaced with a 50-foot bridge to open over seven miles of habitat. The project was designed by Paul Tappel and constructed by Mocerri Construction with funding from the Family Forest Fish Passage Program.





DAY CREEK SLOUGH RESTORATION

The Day Creek Slough project replaced three undersized culverts with a 60-foot long recycled railcar bridge to improve fish passage and aquatic connectivity at a farm crossing on Lower Day Creek Slough. Additional riparian restoration improved habitat for salmon and other wildlife species on 20 acres of private land along the Slough and Skagit River. Funding was provided by Puget Sound Energy and Salmon Recovery Funding Board.



DAY CREEK SLOUGH SIDE-CHANNEL IMPROVEMENT

Side channels provide essential habitat for young salmon to rest when migrating down the Skagit River. Since 2011, SFEG has installed 37 log structures and planted 31 acres of adjacent riparian habitat to restore spawning and rearing habitat in the Day Creek watershed. In 2014, SFEG worked with a local landowner and DG Buchanan Construction to install six log structures along 600 feet of side-channel habitat.



THOMAS CREEK SIDE-CHANNEL IMPROVEMENT

Local landowners received funds to create important off-channel habitat adjacent to Thomas Creek in the Samish watershed. SFEG assisted the landowners by cabling new log structures into place, coordinating a volunteer planting event, and leading an Earth Corps crew to install plant protectors. Juvenile salmon will use the new 500 feet of backwater habitat and benefit from 1,600 feet of riparian enhancement.

SHORELINE RESTORATION

Scientists and ecologists are gaining a greater understanding how nearshore, shoreline and intertidal habitats are essential to the health of Puget Sound salmon populations. In addition to providing valuable refuge for migrating juvenile salmon, these habitats also provide important spawning habitat for small fish that adult salmon eat, such as surf smelt, sand lance and Pacific herring.



THATCHER BAY

Over 11,600 cubic yards of sawdust and wood chips were removed from the intertidal area of this bay on Blakely Island to restore habitat for forage fish spawning. This wood material had been in place for over 70 years, since an old saw mill was washed out, covering the natural substrate and releasing sulfide at levels toxic to benthic flora and fauna. Funding for this large project came from the Salmon Recovery Funding Board and the Estuary Salmon Restoration Program.

CORNET BAY

Volunteers planted native vegetation along 700 feet of shoreline in Cornet Bay in Deception Pass State Park. The Northwest Straits Foundation partnered with the Park to remove a bulkhead in 2012. Since then, the Foundation has worked with SFEG to establish native vegetation between the Sound and the newly restored shoreline. Volunteers, Washington Conservation Corps crew, and SFEG staff weeded, watered, and monitored over an acre of shoreline vegetation and planted 1,613 new plants in 2014.



RIPARIAN RESTORATION

SFEG's volunteers and staff worked with many partners and 53 landowners to restore over 94 sites by removing non-native invasive plants and planting over 26,390 native trees and shrubs along streams, rivers and shorelines. This riparian vegetation provides shade to keep water cool for salmon, prevents streambank erosion, filters pollutants, and eventually provides logs for stream habitat.



STEWARDSHIP PROGRAMS

Volunteers and students planted native vegetation along the Samish River as part of the Natural Resource Stewardship Program. This program is a partnership between Skagit County Public Works and SFEG that provides funding for small, private landowners to protect and improve salmon habitat and water quality. Since funding began in 2009, SFEG has assisted 29 landowners to restore and protect habitat.

NATIVE PLANT NURSERY

Volunteers potted seedlings at our native plant nursery to grow high quality, large-sized plants for restoration sites. Community volunteers are essential to keeping the 10,000 plants at the nursery healthy. This year volunteers contributed more than 1,035 hours caring for plants through a generous partnership with the Samish Indian Nation.



COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Engaging our community in habitat restoration and watershed stewardship is a cornerstone of our mission. Our goal is to reach out to our community and provide a multitude of interesting and entertaining ways to become involved in ensuring healthy watersheds for future generations. By each person taking one action, we can collectively make a huge difference.

EDGEWATER PARK

Community volunteers continued to improve habitat at this 68-acre Mount Vernon City Park along the Skagit River. Multiple volunteer work parties were held to plant native trees, remove invasive plants, and pick up trash. On Earth Day, 74 volunteers planted 1,762 trees, removed invasive ivy and morning glory, and picked up trash to clean up this tremendous community park. Over the last two years, 5.5 acres have been restored and 3,662 native trees and shrubs have been planted at the Park primarily through Earth Day volunteer events with funds from the FishAmerica Foundation.



SKAGIT RIVER SALMON FESTIVAL

The third annual Skagit River Salmon Festival was held at the Swinomish Tribal Community's Waterfront Park on a beautiful sunny Saturday in September. Over 5,000 people attended the Festival to learn, engage and celebrate the amazing Skagit watershed and its resources.

EDUCATION

Education programs provide a bridge to future generations. Out-of-classroom experiences inspire an appreciation for our watersheds and an enthusiasm to protect our natural resources. Our education programs engaged over 2,000 youths in hands-on learning experiences that encourage future stewardship of salmon resources.

JUNIOR STREAM STEWARDS

Students from five local middle schools participated in our signature environmental education program. This year-long learning opportunity enables students to have in-depth, hands-on experiential learning about watersheds and salmon habitat restoration.

SFEG engages students each month in a different topic related to watershed health and culminates in a service-learning project.

“I learned that salmon are good for more than just my dinner.”

Cascade Middle School 7th grader



KIDS IN CREEKS

This program provides local teachers with an opportunity to receive a custom-designed program that enables students to get outside and make a difference in their communities through completion of a service-learning project. Students from eight schools participated in Kids in Creeks during 2014.

“Today I learned that salmon are squishy on the inside”

Cascade Middle School 7th grader

MONITORING

SFEG trains volunteer citizens to be scientists in our watersheds in order to monitor changes in habitat and fish use for 10 years after restoration projects are implemented. This year, volunteers donated over 1,420 hours collecting valuable data and assessing habitat conditions at sites throughout the Skagit and Island watersheds. Data collected is shared with funders, researchers and public agencies in order to aid in future decision making.

SPAWNER SURVEYS

Walking streams to count returning adult salmon during spawning season is a volunteer activity loved by many. With all five species of salmon returning to the Skagit River watershed, there is no shortage of salmon to count.

This year, 14 volunteers were trained to assist staff to walk eight miles of streams each week and count returning adult salmon, their redds and carcasses.



JUVENILE FISH SAMPLING

Community volunteers assisted staff and researchers with several juvenile fish sampling projects. Fish sampling projects are done in partnership with other entities in order to document juvenile fish use in side-channel and slough habitats where restoration efforts have occurred. Sampling takes place during the spring when young salmon are seeking refuge in slower moving water. During 2014 juvenile salmon sampling took place in several side channels of the South Fork of the Skagit River, as well as at McElroy Slough in Blanchard. Sampling efforts confirmed juvenile salmon use of restored habitat.



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OUR SUPPORTERS

We are grateful to all of you who have helped us to achieve so much over this past year. The amazing work that occurs in our watersheds is thanks to the numerous individual donors, landowners, businesses, schools, grantors, agencies, tribes and our members that contribute to the on-going stewardship of our watersheds for future generations.

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