



SKAGIT FISHERIES  
ENHANCEMENT  
GROUP

2 0 1 9

# ANNUAL REPORT

*Engaging our Community  
in Restoring Salmon*



# SKAGIT VALLEY MATTERS

The Skagit Valley is an incredible place. We are surrounded by sweeping vistas of snow peaked mountains, scenic waterways that wind their way through our communities, easy access to a wealth of amazing recreation opportunities, lush forest lands, and productive family farms. It is a spectacular place. There is no place like it on earth. Our fish, wildlife, and communities know it. Thousands of migrating birds utilize the healthy habitats of the Skagit Valley, the diversity of salmon is like no other in the continental United States, and people come from all over the world to experience the magnificence and beauty of what our landscapes have to offer.

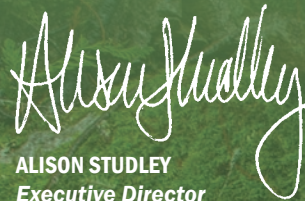
Ensuring that these scenic landscapes and healthy habitats continue to exist for future generations of people and wildlife is imperative. Whether you enjoy the delicious food grown in the rich Skagit Valley soil, the ability to access world class recreation opportunities out your back door, the prospect of catching an elusive steelhead trout, or the ability to catch a glimpse of a magnificent orca whale breaching in the Sound we must protect, preserve, and restore the Skagit to ensure these opportunities continue to exist.

The cornerstone of the Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group is assisting local landowners with making improvements to their land which in turn ensures the health of the Skagit Valley and all those that benefit from its values. The Skagit

Fisheries Enhancement Group helps landowners with navigating the complex world of designing habitat restoration projects, acquiring permits, securing funding, and ultimately implementing the projects in a cost effective manner. We engage communities

with helping agencies with limited resources to restore public lands. And we provide free education programs to students helping to teach them to be future leaders and stewards of our amazing Skagit Valley.

Each of these projects large or small is ensuring that the Skagit Valley remains a world class place for salmon, birds, orcas, and our human communities. Thank you for all you do to keep our Skagit Valley a remarkable place to live, work, and play. With your help and support, the Skagit will continue to be a magical place for future generations.

  
**ALISON STUDLEY**  
Executive Director



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

**Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group**  
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Mount Vernon, WA 98273

Phone: 360-336-0172  
[www.skagitfisheries.org](http://www.skagitfisheries.org)

**SFEG is an independent nonprofit 501 c(3) organization. All donations are tax deductible to the extent that the law allows.**  
Tax ID# 94-3165939

PHOTO CREDITS: SFEG STAFF,  
DREW FLESHMAN, AND AARON LOGUE





# SUMMARY OF 2019 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## RIPARIAN PLANTINGS

**16,659**

NATIVE PLANTS

*Planted covering  
nearly 14 acres along  
local streams*

## RIPARIAN MAINTENANCE

**203**

ACRES

*of native plant care  
and invasive plant  
removal*

## KNOTWEED TREATMENT

**2,586**

ACRES

*of floodplain  
surveyed along  
36 miles of river*

## HABITAT OPENED

**4**

MILES

*of stream opened  
by removing fish  
passage barriers*

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH

**6,254**

INDIVIDUALS

*reached through  
community engagement  
programs*

## VOLUNTEER INVOLVEMENT

**8,757**

HOURS

*donated by  
community  
volunteers*

## KIDS EDUCATED

**1,880**

STUDENTS

*engaged in  
environmental science  
education programs*



## 2019 FINANCIAL SUMMARY

### INCOME

PUBLIC FUNDS: \$1,578,022

PRIVATE FUNDS: \$113,753

IN-KIND DONATIONS: \$343,572

**\$2,035,347**

### EXPENSES

PROJECTS & PROGRAMS: \$1,508,304

ADMINISTRATION (10%): \$168,212

**\$1,676,516**





# RESTORING SALMON AND ORCAS

## ORCA RECOVERY PROJECTS

Increasing the abundance of Chinook salmon for Orcas to eat is key to the recovery of this iconic species. One of the highest priority goals to increase numbers of Chinook salmon in Puget Sound is to reconnect floodplain habitat along the rivers in the Skagit watershed. Currently SFEG has partnerships for three habitat restoration projects funded in part by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Killer Whale Research and Conservation Grant Program. These three restoration projects are specifically being implemented to increase Chinook salmon in the Skagit River and provide more prey for Orca whales. In Marblemount, we continue to work with Skagit County Parks to restore and enhance historic side channel habitat in Pressentin Park while also increasing amenities for recreation and other wildlife. A project at Cedar Grove will remove a culvert crossing and restore salmon access to Ovenell Slough to provide valuable habitat for young Chinook salmon. And in the Skagit River Delta we are working to reconnect the lower part of Britt Slough to the Skagit River on WDFW land in order to increase habitat for Chinook salmon. These projects will result in significant habitat gains for Chinook salmon and will ultimately provide more food for Orcas and help ensure their survival.



*Volunteers assist SFEG staff to document the number of young salmon using side channels being restored and reconnected along the Skagit River. Increasing access to this type of habitat is critical to increasing the abundance of Chinook in Puget Sound.*

## JUVENILE SALMON SURVEYS

As SFEG implements more floodplain reconnection projects to restore critical habitat for juvenile Chinook salmon and more food for Orcas, we have also identified the need to document the success of these projects. Community volunteers and student interns are assisting SFEG staff in learning more about juvenile Chinook salmon use where floodplain restoration projects are occurring. Led by SFEG staff, seining nets are used to sample what species of juvenile salmon are using off channel water bodies before and after floodplain restoration projects are implemented. SFEG is also inviting communities to watch seining demonstrations to illustrate to the public how many juvenile salmon are benefiting from these reconnection projects. Showing people what lives beneath the surface of the water can be an eye opening experience even for those that understand rivers and salmon.

## NATIVE PLANT RESTORATION

Planting native trees along waterways is vital to ensuring healthy habitat for salmon as well as many other wildlife species including Orca whales. Planting trees improves salmon habitat and water quality by shading streams to keep water temperature cool; limiting bank erosion to keep water clear; and filtering out pollutants to ensure healthy habitat downstream for our vibrant shellfish industries as well as our Orca whales sensitive to toxins. In 2019 SFEG worked with numerous private and public landowners, volunteers, students, and partners to plant 16,659 native trees and shrubs along waterways. Volunteers and interns grew many of these native plants in our own native plant nursery through a partnership with the Samish Indian Nation. And student interns were trained as citizen scientists to collect valuable data related to vegetation survival and growth in order to track the success of newly planted vegetation at habitat restoration sites.



*Planting native trees is one of the easiest and best ways to improve habitat along our local waterways. Trees help keep water cool, filter pollutants, and provide valuable habitat for many species of birds and wildlife.*



# IMPROVING FISH PASSAGE

## FISH PASSAGE IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

Identifying and removing barriers to fish passage is essential for salmon and steelhead recovery. SFEG continued its successful strategy of working cooperatively with private landowners to identify and remove fish passage barriers. Two projects funded with grants from the Family Forest Fish Passage Program were completed and opened over 4 miles of habitat for salmon, steelhead and sea-run cutthroat trout.

On **Swede Creek**, a tributary to the Samish River, SFEG worked with landowners Pat and Marta Gould, Chinook Engineering, and contractor

PNW-Civil to replace an undersized culvert crossing with a 65-foot bridge. With the barrier removed, access is improved to 2.45 miles of high quality spawning and rearing habitat for coho and steelhead.

On **Carpenter Creek**, a tributary to the lower Skagit River, SFEG worked with landowner Matt Swayne, Chinook Engineering, and Harkness Contracting to replace an undersized culvert crossing with a 30-foot bridge. Removal of this fish passage barrier improves fish access to 1.61 miles of habitat upstream for coho, steelhead and searun cutthroat trout.



*One of the most fun volunteer tasks is being trained to become a spawner survey volunteer. These hearty volunteers walk creeks every week to document salmon returning to restoration sites.*



BEFORE

*Undersized culverts impede fish passage for coho salmon and steelhead on Swede Creek.*



BEFORE

*Undersized culverts impede fish passage for coho salmon, steelhead and sea-run cutthroat trout on Carpenter Creek.*



AFTER

*A new 65-foot bridge replaces the undersized culverts on Swede Creek allowing fish to migrate upstream and access high quality habitat.*



AFTER

*A new 30-foot bridge replaces the undersized culverts on Carpenter Creek allowing fish to migrate upstream and access high quality habitat.*

## SALMON SPAWNING SURVEYS

The Spawner Survey Program trains volunteers to survey creeks where restoration projects have occurred to track the number and species of salmon returning to spawn. SFEG is especially interested in documenting salmon use upstream of where fish passage improvement projects have occurred. Volunteers are trained to identify salmon species and their redds (nests) and then walk their chosen creek each and every week throughout the fall and winter spawning season. Volunteers get a chance to know a stream intimately in all types of weather and are very excited to share news of salmon returning to their sites. Data collected is shared with fisheries co-managers at Washington State and local Tribes. In 2019, 32 volunteers surveyed 18 streams documenting salmon use at each site.





## EDUCATING OUR COMMUNITY



*Students from Concrete Middle School watch coho salmon returning to the cold, clear water of Clark Creek.*

### SALMON SIGHTINGS

Salmon Sighting events enable our community to have the awe-inspiring experience of observing wild salmon spawning in local creeks. In the Skagit, it is difficult to identify reliable, safe locations where the public can view salmon. Salmon Sighting events are held at a few locations each year where community members can come observe live salmon spawning in creeks led by docents who can ensure that salmon are not disturbed and can answer questions about salmon biology, life history, and habitat needs. Salmon Sighting events have become a wonderful hands on learning experience for community members.

### JUNIOR STREAM STEWARDS

This STEM based education program engages middle school students in a school-year long study of local watersheds. Students are learning through hands-on experiences each month about salmon, how healthy watershed habitat is key to the health of many other wildlife species they know and love, and their own role in being stewards of healthy habitat for the future. Field trips take students out of the classroom applying what they have learned to real world situations. Teachers can then weave these monthly topics into their science units throughout the year for additional inquiry based learning opportunities. In 2019, 500 students from four schools in Skagit County completed this program.



*LaConner students remove invasive English ivy from Pioneer Park in order to allow native trees to flourish.*



*Student from Bayview Elementary School releases young coho salmon into Hansen Creek. Students learn about the amazing life cycle of salmon and the chain of healthy habitats needed for their survival as part of the Salmon in the Classroom program.*

### SALMON IN THE CLASSROOM

This program uses STEM based curriculum to teach elementary school students the fascinating life cycle of salmon and their habitat needs by raising coho salmon in their school. Coho salmon eggs are received from Washington State's Marblemount Hatchery and raised in large fish tanks at local schools. Students observe the eggs hatch, feed their young fry, and care for salmon until they grow large enough to be released in a local stream. In 2019, over 400 students from eight schools released nearly 1,200 young coho salmon into Trumpeter and Hansen Creeks. Students have high expectations of seeing adult salmon return to spawn in a future fall as long as their watersheds are cared for.



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## OUR SUPPORTERS

We are very grateful to our community who cares so immensely for our natural environment. Our donors, partners and supporters understand that having healthy waterways for salmon also means having clean water and healthy communities for all of us. We are thankful for your investment of time, energy and funding to support our work. Please show your appreciation for those entities that support our work by patronizing those businesses that contribute to our success. A complete list of this year's generous donors, businesses, schools, grantors, partners, landowners, tribes, and members is available in the online version of our 2019 Annual Report at [SkagitFisheries.org](http://SkagitFisheries.org).

## IMPORTANT SUPPORT FOR SFEG COMES FROM:



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**SKAGIT FISHERIES  
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