

the REEDD



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SKAGIT FISHERIES ENHANCEMENT GROUP

Dedicated to Restoring Salmon for Future Generations

Shifting Baselines

By MYRRIAH CROWLEY - *Habitat Restoration Associate*

Shifting baselines is a phenomenon that describes an acceptance of environmental conditions and species abundance as reflecting historical conditions. It is also referred to as a syndrome. This, too, is fitting because at times folks' acceptance of environmental conditions is a symptom of the times we live in; cultures shift, memories fade and your grandpa's stories of when he was a kid watching salmon in the river sound like big fish stories - and maybe they truly are.

This last fall and winter I had the great pleasure of walking over a dozen different streams and collecting data for our Spawner Survey Program. This program began over 2 decades ago and in that time Skagit Fisheries has monitored several dozen creeks in the Samish and Skagit Watersheds. We count and collect data on spawning adult salmon, carcasses, and redds, and with this data we are able to reflect on past, present, and future restoration projects as well as environmental conditions. This data also provides valuable information to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife on Samish and Skagit Watershed Pacific salmon escapement and returns. All this is to say, we have been watching the fish for a while.

This spawner survey season, volunteers saw the most fish recorded in the last 20 years on Gribble Creek and the last 7 years on East Fork Walker Creek. Both of these streams are tributaries of Nookachamps Creek which has been involved in restoration efforts set as priority by the Skagit Chinook Recovery Plan. East Fork Walker Creek saw a total of 404 live coho, compared to last year when 288 were counted, and the year before that 104. SFEG began monitoring this creek in 2016 after completing a fish barrier removal project and since we started monitoring the coho population has steadily increased. This is a great example of the benefits of our restoration work!

This upward momentum in the coho population on East Fork Walker Creek

proves promising for the future on the creek, and who doesn't love seeing the maroon coho gracefully swim their way upstream? This is why I think it's important for us to remember the immense number of salmon that once ran in this area, and throughout the Skagit Watershed. I've heard many older folks say, "you could walk across the backs of all the salmon in the river". This is an example of the shifting baselines syndrome that we are experiencing. While we might

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■ Spawner survey volunteer inspecting a carcass.



the REDD

REDD: A female salmon uses her tail to dig a nest in the gravel. After she deposits her eggs the male fertilizes them. The female then covers the fertilized eggs and the resulting nest is called a redd.

MISSION

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

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Volunteer Spotlight

with Volunteer of the Year Charlotte Pitt

Tell us a bit about yourself!

My name is Charlotte and I have lived in Mount Vernon since December 2021. I graduated with a BS in Environmental Horticulture from UC Davis, and have been involved in habitat restoration since 2016. My interest in habitat restoration grew from a love of native plants and wanting to help restore the environment. Basically, I am a big plant nerd and love getting my hands dirty! Outside of plants I also love hiking, animals, and vegan cooking.

How did you get involved in volunteering with Skagit Fisheries?

I first volunteered with Skagit Fisheries in early 2022 when I attended the planting and nursery potting events. Being new to the area I was looking to get involved in habitat restoration, work with native plants, learn new plants and skills, and meet other folks passionate about the environment. A few google searches later and I came across SFEG.

What is your favorite kind of event to volunteer at?

My favorite kind of volunteering events are planting events, as I really enjoy putting plants in the ground and building future habitat. I also enjoy seeing different restoration sites throughout Skagit County and working hard alongside like-minded individuals looking to restore the environment!

How has volunteering impacted you?

Volunteering with SFEG has had a huge positive impact on me, as I have learned so much about salmon, habitat restoration techniques, plant identification, and the ecology of Skagit County. I have also made valuable personal and professional connections with many of the wonderful volunteers and staff at SFEG. Additionally, my time volunteering led me to my current job as an Environmental Technician with the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community Department of Environmental Protection, where I work on restoring the culturally important first food camas.

Anything else you'd like to add?

I greatly enjoy volunteering with SFEG, and especially appreciate all the different experiences I've been able to have from planting and potting to vegetation monitoring and even fish rescue!



Shifting Baselines

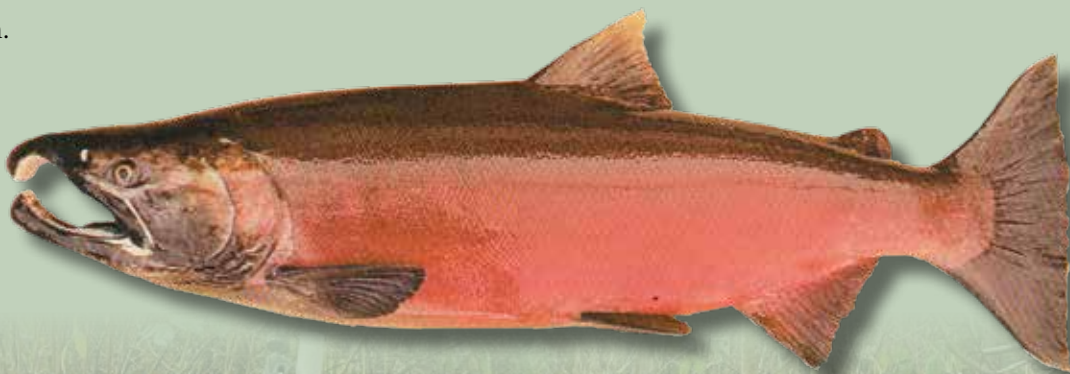
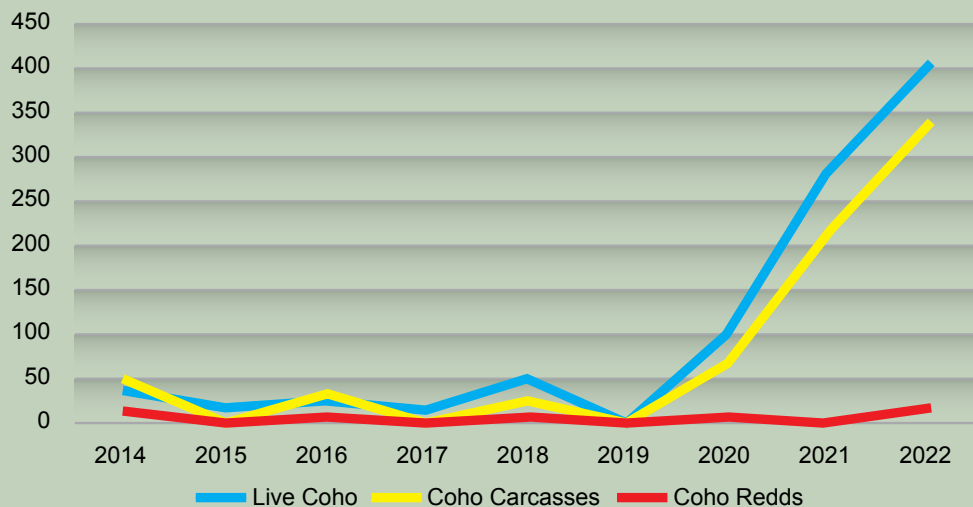
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not all be able to remember it, just two short centuries ago there were no culverts in our waterways and salmon populations were plentiful. I think this is an encouraging notion to not only get excited about the benefits of our communities' hard work and restoration projects in salmon habitat, but also to aim higher, to keep pushing the norms of our urban communities to revitalize healthy salmon streams and keep in mind the epic salmon runs of the past.

Salmon are a lifeline for so many people of the beautiful and rich Skagit Valley and throughout the Salish Sea. They are an integral part of the ecological community, as well, since as many as 137 species depend on salmon. Let us continue to do the important work we do with salmon, however it is we can make a difference, and keep an eye on shifting baselines so that we know what the true potential of salmon are in our rivers and streams.

Cheers to many more years of working with salmon!

EF Walker Creek Yearly Coho Count



■ Spawner survey volunteers at EF Walker

The Roots of Relationships

An Interview with Wayne Watne and Kurt Buchanan

By HOLLY HENDERSON - Communications and Development Coordinator

In this line of work, we spend a lot of time thinking about the future. What lies in store for our community, our watershed, and our planet if we don't act now and plan for tomorrow? We think in this way because we have to, because the future depends on how we use our time and act in the present, especially in terms of how we treat the environment. In the same vein that this way of thinking is necessary, so is being present and appreciating why we individually do the work that we do.

On April 1st, I attended my first Skagit Fisheries-hosted planting event at Debay's Slough, planting native plants with about a dozen other folks in almost every type of weather April could throw at us. It seemed very on par with all of the other

Aprils that I have lived through as a native of Washington State. Wayne Watne a fisheries biologist and one of Skagit

"It's not about how many trees you plant, it's about the relationships you make while you plant them."

Fisheries' newest elected board members, arrived later than most of the group, as he said he took the opportunity to have breakfast with an old friend that has been ill for almost two decades.

"He's a very dear friend of mine, so of course I want to spend as much time with him as possible", he said, apologizing for his tardiness. Wayne asked if Kurt Buchanan, a former SFEG board member, was there. He noted that Kurt is the reason why planting events are meaningful to him, and told me about Kurt's role in this realization.

A photograph of two men, Wayne Watne and Kurt Buchanan, standing in a forest. Wayne, on the left, has a long white beard and is wearing a baseball cap and glasses. Kurt, on the right, is wearing a baseball cap, glasses, and a blue and green jacket. They are both smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is filled with young trees and foliage.

■ Wayne and Kurt with trees they planted in Alger.

"He was the one that made me realize the real purpose of these planting parties for me. It's not about how many trees you plant, it's about the relationships you make while you plant them", he noted. Over the course of the planting event, Wayne, Kurt, and I had spawned a plan to visit a past planting site on Silver Creek outside of Alger.

I met Kurt and Wayne out at the Alger Community Center, right next to the planting site, and Kurt mentioned how horrible the weather was when they planted the site in comparison to the bright spring sun that we were graced with as we walked to the creek. He recalled how cold the rain was the day Wayne brought his dad out, and how the entire site was covered in blackberries. The area is now scattered with ten to fifteen-year-old trees, from alders to grand firs, some of which were planted that day about twelve years ago. Wayne said he saw Kurt talking with his dad while planting and noted that he noticed that Kurt usually worked alone.

"I told him I really appreciated him talking with my old man", he said. "It really is more than putting numbers in the ground. This conversation with Kurt was huge, because you can go out and plant all the trees in the world, but why do it alone?"

"It's a social thing", agreed Kurt, adding that he had another side to Wayne's story.

"I was never a social person at these planting events, until around that time. I would always work by myself, I had really no interest in socializing... I just wanted to be out there by myself, and I did that for years, and years, and years... and years. When I worked with your dad, something was changing in my head, we were working together, I was keeping an eye on him".

Wayne's dad, at this point, had late-stage dementia, and Wayne brought him along because he knew his dad loved being outdoors, spending time with others, and food (chili was provided after the planting, and this was naturally a huge plus for the volunteers.) He said that not only was this event a wake-up call for him in terms of the value of planting, but that it was the last truly meaningful thing he had a chance to do with his father.

"I never realized the social benefits of these events; all the time I was working for Fish and Wildlife I worked outside alone, so that's what I did at these events, but of course something changed," Kurt said, gesturing to himself. Wayne agreed, additionally noting the changes in the site that had occurred since this event. Next to the Community Center there are now interpretative signs, a memorial to a community member, and these trees that have stood the test of time since this planting event.

"Now we have the beginnings of a riparian forest, which is of course the idea that we have been pushing for, well, how many years now?" Kurt reflected.

I feel very fortunate to have gained this perspective on planting from these two at my first planting event with Skagit Fisheries. Realizing that we are a part of something bigger than an environmentally-gear'd cause, and that we are a community, has been an amazing experience that I have been lucky enough to go through before even hitting my four month mark as an employee of this organization. These events are truly something that everyone can benefit from, whether planting for you is a social event, or just a way to get outside on a Saturday. Giving back in this way is never a one-sided relationship, as when we give our time, there is always something to gain, whether it is a new perspective or simply getting to spend time with friends and coworkers.

Taking time to look back on what this site was, and how planting events have changed folks like Kurt make digging holes in frozen ground and getting hailed on worth it, and then some. I really do want to encourage folks that have not made it out to an event yet to come out, whatever your reason may be, as you may gain something you never would have considered you'd gain, and you are helping restore crucial habitat at the same time. I feel optimistic about the future of our area when I consider the effort folks have already put in in the past, and I look forward to creating more meaningful relationships and restoring land for salmon for future generations with my community.

SPAWNER Survey Report



Scan the QR code to check
out our 2022-2023
Spawner Survey Report.



A photograph of Kenzie Kesling, an AmeriCorps Education Associate, wearing a grey baseball cap and safety glasses, leaning over a table outdoors. She is surrounded by several children, some wearing safety glasses, who are observing her as she works with a yellow liquid in a clear container. The background shows dense green foliage.

An interview with Education Associate Kenzie Kesling **Americorps Insights**

Tell us about yourself!

Hello! My name is Kenzie Kesling. I was born and raised in Tacoma, WA with my twin brother, Brendan and younger brother, Jacob. I graduated from Curtis High School in 2018 and started school at Western Washington University the year after. Now, I live in Bellingham after graduating from WWU in 2022.

What did you major in at WWU?

At WWU, I double majored in Biology (Anthropology emphasis) and Spanish. I was involved in a lot of extracurriculars at Western including being an RA.

How did you end up in an education position with a biology degree?

I was looking for something to do for a year before I applied for a master's program and decided to apply for an AmeriCorps position because I was interested in helping my community. Both my mom and my stepdad are teachers, so I found the Education associate position at Skagit Fisheries and was interested in taking a shot at teaching myself—specifically something that is in the realm of Biology.

What programs are you a part of within SFEG?

I help teach classroom lessons and facilitate field trips for Skagit Fisheries. Throughout the Skagit watershed, we work with 15 different schools across two different programs. We teach students grades 3-12 and we have two different programs, our Salmon in Schools program, and Kids in Creeks program.

Salmon in Schools is a program

that focuses on younger students (Grades 3-6) where we introduce the topic of the salmon life cycle and talk about different habitat requirements for salmon. After we introduce the topic, we give the school 200 Coho salmon eggs to raise in a tank for a few months. These students get to go on two different field trips, one in the fall and one in the spring. In the fall, we take them on a field trip to explore types of salmon habitat and test water quality through our chemistry station, and in the spring the students get to go on their Salmon release field trip. On these field trips, kids get to release the salmon from their tank at the same place we took them on their fall field trip.

Skagit Fisheries also has a program geared towards older students (grades 7-12) called Kids in Creeks. In this program, the students are taught more in depth about salmon and their habitat—specifically riparian zones. After their classroom lesson, they then are taken on a field trip to do a service project. This could be planting trees, picking up litter, or even invasive species removal projects.

What do the kids get out of these programs?

The students get to experience learning in the great outdoor classroom that is the Skagit watershed. There are so many amazing things these Students get to experience and do that I was never able to. In learning outside, they get to help restore a lot of beautiful habitat while developing a sense of stewardship for the land in which they live.

What do you get out of these programs? What about the community in large?

Working with students, I think that I get a reminder of how important education is. Many of the students I work with are so grateful and excited to be in an outdoor classroom and that excitable energy can be contagious. However, I think that my favorite part of working with the SIC groups specifically has been doing art projects with them. With the art project lesson, I get to spend more one-on-one time the students and get to know them better and with that, I think that they give me

Also, there is a sense of comradery in much of the community that we work with that is reminiscent of where I grew up. It's amazing to meet so many people (students, parents, teachers, volunteers included) who care so much about their neighbors and where they live. So, in that vein, I think that I get a sense of purpose and community working with all the different people I encounter.

What should people know about the programs?

Salmon in Schools and Kids in Creeks are both super awesome! Both are geared toward helping the environment and I think it's super unique to have a program where students are literally raising salmon in their classroom.



Interns and AmeriCorps are vital to Skagit Fisheries

These young adults are passionate about serving their communities and making a difference for the future of salmon. Funds are needed to increase the number of opportunities and the diversity of individuals who participate. Unpaid internships can only attract those who can afford unpaid positions. With your help, we can create more opportunities for ALL those interested.

Donate now to support future conservation leaders.



www.skagitfisheries.org/ways-to-give

Scan the QR code above to explore options,
visit www.skagitfisheries.org/ways-to-give or call the office at 360-336-0172



BECOME A MEMBER

Members make salmon recovery possible. Help ensure successful salmon restoration efforts continue by becoming a member today.



DONATE

Show your commitment to the future stewardship of our local watersheds by making a donation today. Consider a recurring donation!



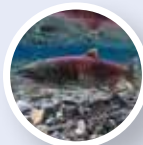
VOLUNTEER

We recruit and train volunteers to achieve our goal of increased public awareness for salmon habitat restoration. All volunteer projects are based on learning through hands-on activities.



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Make your gift an investment in the future of Salmon.



LEGACY GIVING

Make a lasting impact on the future of Salmon.



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Organize a Facebook Birthday Fundraiser in support of Skagit Fisheries.



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Visit us at the Mount Vernon Farmers Market

On June 10th, come say hi to SFEG team members at the Mount Vernon Farmer's Market where we will be celebrating Orca Action Month! The Farmer's Market is located on the Riverwalk in downtown Mount Vernon and will run from 9am-2pm.

