



2023 ANNUAL REPORT

Restoring Salmon for Future Generations

THE MAGIC SKAGIT

The Skagit River flows for 150 spectacular miles from the peaks of the North Cascade Mountain Range to rich fertile land of the Skagit Delta. Once you add up all of the Skagit's tributaries and sloughs, there are over 3,000 miles of waterways in the Skagit Watershed. It is truly an incredible place where there is a vast array of fish and wildlife occupying the diversity of habitat this large watershed has to provide. We are so fortunate that much of Skagit's ecosystem remains intact thanks to many before us that recognized its natural wonders and sought to ensure their protection. All of this spectacular habitat has helped to ensure that the Skagit remains a stronghold for salmon in the Pacific Northwest.

We are grateful to all of you who have volunteered your time, your land, or your resources to help ensure that the Skagit remains a healthy place for salmon, wildlife and our community. This last year we did incredible things! We planted nearly 40,000 native plants and trees along waterways in the Skagit watershed. This is no small feat accomplished by our Restoration Technicians, Washington Conservation Corps crew, EarthCorps crew, com-

munity volunteers, and local students. This coming year, we plan to plant just as many so be sure to look for community planting parties and how you can be part of this great success.

Our education programs continue to flourish, having surpassed engaging over 20,000 local students in watershed education programs! In particular we are excited about the growth of the Salmon in the Schools program. This program has received statewide attention, and we now work with Washington State's Office of the Superintendent for Public Instruction and Regional Fisheries Enhancement Groups around the state to offer this program to schools throughout Washington. This is an exciting opportunity to collaborate with other groups and expand the number of students we get to engage in the Skagit Valley.

Fish passage remains a high priority, and we are now nearing 100 miles of habitat opened for salmon and steelhead in our creeks and sloughs around the Skagit. We completed 4 more projects this past year and have many more projects in the works. Much of this work is due to collaborative partnership with local tribes and county governments over the past decade to

inventory and prioritize clusters of fish passage projects to fix in the basin. We are excited about the partnerships this has formed with local landowners and the City of Mount Vernon in the Carpenter Creek watershed for the coming year.

This conservation work would not be possible without our volunteers, members, landowners, project partners, and businesses investing in the Skagit's future. We are thrilled to have such a diverse group of stakeholders invested in helping to make the Skagit Valley a healthy place for all of us.

Gratefully,



Alison Studley
Executive Director



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

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Skagit Fisheries 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 credit Drew Fleshman and SFE Group Staff and Volunteers



ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Riparian Plantings: **39,021 Native plants**
over 90 acres of streams and shorelines revegetated with native plants

Habitat Opened: **3.05 Miles**
of habitat reconnected by removing 4 fish passage barriers

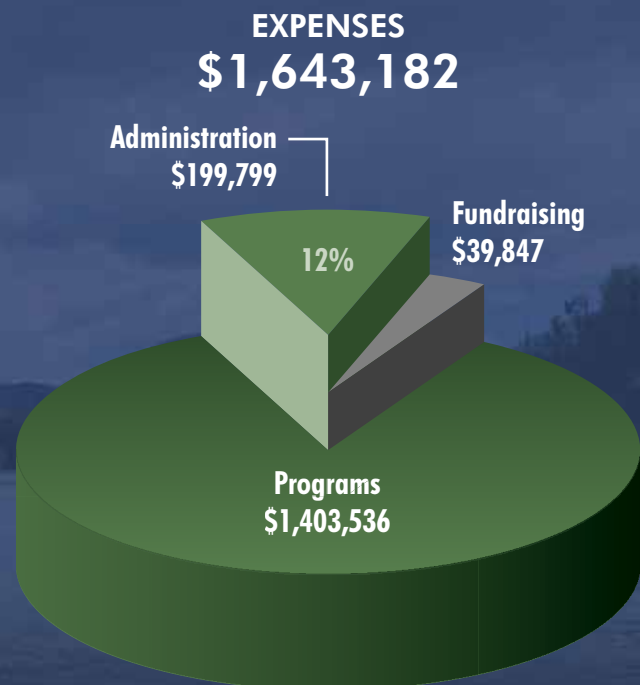
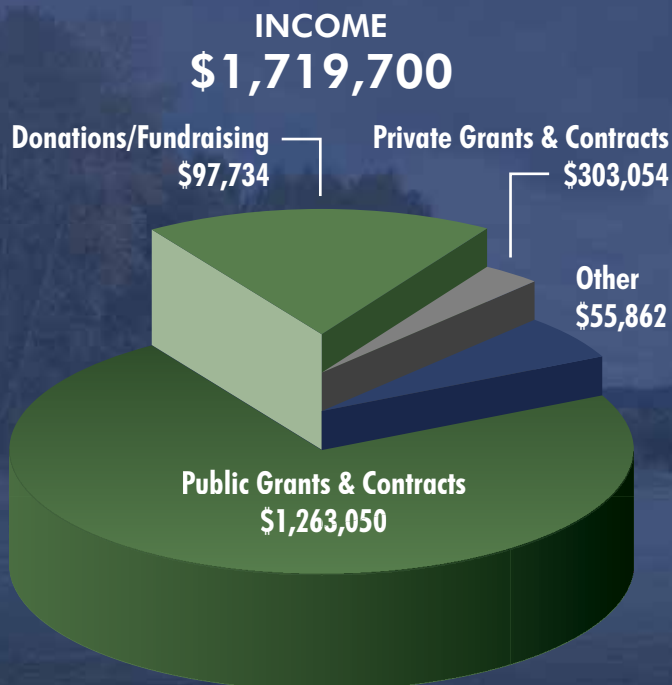
Community Outreach: **4,450 Individuals**
reached through community engagement programs

Volunteer Involvement: **7,861 Hours**
donated by community volunteers

Kids Educated: **1,359 Students**
engaged in environmental science education programs

Knotweed Surveyed: **34 Miles**
of river surveyed for invasive knotweed

2023 FINANCIAL SUMMARY



IMPROVING FISH PASSAGE

Lower Day Slough

Skagit Fisheries worked with two private landowners to improve fish passage on Lower Day Slough by installing bridges at two undersized road crossings. Improving these crossings immediately improved access to about a quarter of a mile of high-quality, groundwater-fed channel rearing habitat connected to the Middle Skagit River. These projects build on the successful upgrade of a site located approximately 1000 feet downstream, where a 60-foot bridge was installed as part of past fish passage improvement project in 2014. Providing access at these two additional sites restores unimpeded access to almost one mile of off-channel habitat known to be used by coho, steelhead, chum, and Chinook salmon, as well as bull trout and lamprey. Now complete, the bridges allow juvenile and adult fish to travel up and downstream freely. Currently, Skagit Fisheries is working with an additional landowner along this slough to help them remove an upstream blocking culvert and replace it with a bridge similar to their neighbors. Due to cost efficiencies, Skagit Fisheries is expecting to do this additional project this summer, using funds remaining from the previous grants. Many thanks to the private landowners who make this work possible as well as to the funding entities Puget Sound Energy and Salmon Recovery Funding Board.



Culverts on Lower Day Slough blocking salmon migration to important off channel habitat.



New bridge on Lower Day Slough allows unimpeded access to adult and juvenile salmon.

Riverfront Park

Riverfront Park is located along the Middle Skagit River in Sedro-Woolley with an unnamed seasonal tributary along the eastern portion of the park. Skagit Fisheries and the City of Sedro-Woolley have been working to restore habitat at Riverfront Park since 2018. Initial efforts focused on clearing invasive weeds and planting more than 3,000 native trees and shrubs to create a 100-foot forested buffer along this stream. A newly created nature trail crosses the stream via an old stream crossing that was identified as having an undersized culvert that created a salmon passage barrier. Skagit Fisheries secured funds from several sources including the Trout and Salmon Foundation, WDFW's Volunteer Cooperative Funds, and Puget Sound Energy to replace this undersized culvert with a 40-foot pedestrian bridge. The completed project provides adult and juvenile coho, chum and steelhead unimpeded access to 1.2 miles of habitat upstream of the new bridge. Skagit Fisheries contracted with a local trail building professional who led the effort to design and construct the new bridge structure. They were assisted by Skagit Fisheries volunteers, AmeriCorps, interns, and staff. A structural engineer was hired to ensure the design met all engineering criteria for a pedestrian bridge in a city owned park. Many thanks to the City of Sedro-Woolley for all their donated labor to make this project possible.



Culverts at Riverfront Park block salmon access in an unnamed creek under a walking trail.



Showing the size of one of the removed culverts with the newly completed bridge that allows salmon to migrate upstream and downstream while also providing park visitors better trail access.

Thompson Creek

Skagit Fisheries worked with a private landowner to remove and replace a fish blocking culvert on Thompson Creek to restore access to multiple species of salmon and steelhead. Thompson Creek is a small tributary to the Skagit River which crosses under Highway 20 between Concrete and Rockport. During the summer of 2022, WSDOT replaced a fish blocking culvert on Thompson Creek under Highway 20. The SFEG's project removed the privately owned barrier culvert immediately downstream of Highway 20 and replaced it with a fish friendly crossing. The new 16-foot span aluminum box culvert allows improved fish access to three quarters of a mile of diverse, forested stream habitat. Post-construction, the Washington Conservation Corps crew members planted the disturbed area with native trees and shrubs to jumpstart the recreation of healthy riparian habitat along the stream.



Culvert on Thompson Creek near Rockport creating a passage problem for salmon.



New large culvert reestablishes fish passage on Thompson Creek for salmon and steelhead.





PARTNERSHIPS FOR SALMON

Native Plant Restoration

Planting native trees and shrubs adjacent to rivers, streams, wetlands, and other waterbodies is what is called “riparian restoration”. Restoring riparian areas has been an important element of salmon restoration in the Skagit watershed for many years, however Washington State has more recently recognized the importance for this activity for salmon and has increased funding opportunities statewide. This is excellent news for Skagit Fisheries, as we work with many landowners and partners to plant tens of thousands of native trees and shrubs to restore riparian areas each year. Revegetating these waterways with native plants, not only helps to restore habitat for salmon, it also helps to filter pollutants and keep our waterways clean and healthy for shellfish, wildlife, and our community. This past year, Skagit Fisheries worked with many private landowners and public partners to plant over 39,000 native plants. Community members, students, staff, AmeriCorps, and Washington Conservation Corps members made this massive number of trees planted possible. Skagit Fisheries is thrilled to provide more opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to be a part of tree planting events. In addition to planting trees at restoration sites throughout the Skagit Valley, volunteers also help grow trees for future restoration projects at our native plant nursery. We expect to complete over a half a million dollars of riparian restoration projects in 2024. We hope to see you at an upcoming community planting party.



AmeriCorps members Myrriah and Kenzie potting plants alongside other volunteers at our native plant nursery.

Controlling Knotweed

The Upper Skagit Knotweed Control Program is a highly successful program recognized throughout Washington State for its accomplishment of controlling the spread of invasive knotweeds in the Skagit watershed. This program’s success is due to its multi-year comprehensive approach of surveying for knotweed starting in the upper most reaches of the watershed in order to stop the spread of knotweed downstream. Knotweed, if left untreated, can outcompete native vegetation and create monocultures of knotweed along waterways damaging critical riparian habitat in our watersheds. Recently, thanks to additional funding from a new America the Beautiful grant, Skagit Fisheries has been able to expand its survey area all the way to the Baker River confluence to continue to slow the spread of knotweed in the Skagit watershed. Skagit Fisheries partners with various organizations throughout the watershed to ensure any knotweed that we have access to is found and treated. In 2023 Skagit Fisheries and our Washington Conservation Corps AmeriCorps Crew traversed 4,651 acres along 34 miles of mainstem river and important tributaries throughout the Skagit watershed. Only 331 knotweed patches were treated throughout this area which if aggregated into one location would cover less than one-half acre. This is a true testament to the success of this knotweed control program.



Washington Conservation Corps members survey for the invasive species knotweed in riparian areas along the Skagit and Sauk Rivers.

Spawner Surveys

The Spawner Survey program is almost entirely made up of volunteers, with help from our AmeriCorps members and interns. During the 2023-2024 season, 40 volunteers have been going out weekly to survey 19 streams in both the Samish and Skagit watersheds. To start the season, Skagit Fisheries held a Spawner Survey Volunteer Workshop in October to train volunteers in identifying specific species of salmon and their ideal habitat. During surveys, data is collected for live fish as well as carcasses and redds (salmon nests). Coho are the most widely observed salmon across all the streams, but chum and pink salmon were recorded this season. Mud and Finnegun Creeks, tributaries to Lake Samish, are an exception to this generalization; these creeks have each seen hundreds of kokanee salmon (small landlocked sockeye salmon) this year. East Fork Walker Creek in the Nookachamps watershed has boasted the highest number of coho this season, with a total of over 200 live fish.

Skagit Fisheries board members planting trees at Earth Day 2023.



AmeriCorps member, Connor Garrod, and spawner survey intern Adam Martinez surveying Ennis Creek in the Samish watershed.

Folks at our Salmon Sightings event at Oyster Creek saw plenty of chum (with help from antiglare salmon glasses!).

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Salmon Sightings

Skagit Fisheries' 'Salmon Sightings' events bring the public up close to salmon, finding locations and times when people can safely view spawning salmon in the Skagit and Samish watersheds. This year Salmon Sightings events were held at Pressentin Park in Marblemount, as well as at Mud Creek along Lake Samish and Oyster Creek along Samish Bay. During these events, community members were able to catch glimpses of spawning pink, chum, and kokanee salmon, as well as even Chinook carcasses if they looked closely at Pressentin Park. These events are very important in showing off Skagit Fisheries restoration efforts and helping people get more connected to the ecosystems flourishing all around them. At these events, there is always something new for folks of any age to learn.

Salmon in Schools

Salmon in Schools works with 11 area elementary schools to study the salmon life cycle, both in the classroom and in the field. In this unique program, students receive 200 coho eggs from a state hatchery in January and watch them transition through 3 life stages over the course of 3 months. Upon release into local water bodies, students connect the concept of the importance of healthy habitat to the salmon they've raised for several months.

Internships

Skagit Fisheries strives to engage the community in all aspects of salmon habitat restoration. One way we do this is by providing internships to local college students offering them opportunities to learn career building skills while earning their college degrees. To expand the applicant pool beyond those who can afford to work for free, we continued to offer paid internships in 2023. Local college students have interned in our education and monitoring programs, expanding our ability to complete restoration and community engagement projects. We hope to continue growing this program as we expand our ability to provide learning opportunities for students of all backgrounds in career building internships.



Kids with the stuffed rainbow trout they won as a prize for completing the scavenger hunt activity at Oyster Creek.



Kids from 11 local elementary schools had fun last spring releasing salmon fry.



Education Intern Abbie Niskanen teaching students how to measure water quality.



Students in the Salmon in Schools program from Westview Elementary planting a tree.



(Left to right) Abbie Niskanen, Connor Garrod, Clare Spain, and Adam Martinez.



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We are very grateful to our community who continues to care so deeply for our natural environment. Our donors, supporters, and restoration partners 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 healthy watershed. 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 2023 Annual Report at SkagitFisheries.org.

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