



# THE REDD

*Dedicated to Restoring Salmon for Future Generations*



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SKAGIT FISHERIES ENHANCEMENT GROUP

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## River Journey

By Sage Mailhot, River Journey/Recorrido por el Río Intern

When I was in 8th grade, we dissected a salmon with educators from Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group. I remember learning about the salmon life cycle, and counting off the five species on my fingers, whispering to myself, “pinky for pink, ring for silver...” As I raised my hand to answer questions, I remember feeling proud – proud to know the kinds of salmon that were native to my home, proud to know the value of the fish, and proud to live in Skagit. It is a feeling that fills my heart when I hike up to Samish Overlook and gaze at the rolling hills of Alger that give way into farmlands, that give way into tidelands, Burlington and Mount Vernon off in the distance. The valley is a home to so many people and animals, and I am lucky to be one of

them. I know this place; it has raised me; I will steward it.

Years later when I enrolled in the Environmental Science program at the

*...stewardship begins with a connection to the land. Education and access to outdoor spaces are the catalysts for this relationship.*

University of Washington, I knew why I was there. Simply put, I owed the land my attention. But as I spoke with land managers and restoration specialists;

grant writers and scientists, I did not see the Skagit community well-represented in its stewards. Our county is in part Latine, yet this is not translated to involvement in environmental work. How can the gap in representation be bridged, so that our lands and waters are truly managed for all?

This year, Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group piloted the **Recorrido por el Río** program, or **River Journey**. This field-based, dual-language outdoor education program serves Latine middle schoolers and high schoolers within the Mount Vernon School District. Per the name, the cohort of students has been journeying throughout the Skagit River watershed since September.

CONTINUED  
ON PAGE 3



**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.

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# From the Director

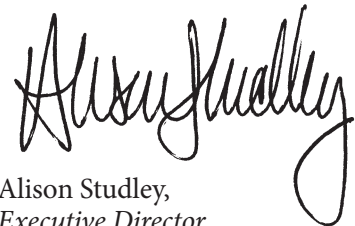
Spring has arrived, and the Skagit is waking from its winter rest. This is a wonderful time of year with longer days to enjoy, birds singing, frogs croaking, trees budding, and new blossoms opening each day. While the landscape was quiet, our staff, volunteers, and students were hard at work planting thousands of trees to support healthy habitat for all these critters, including salmon. Classrooms across the county have been learning about salmon, watching eggs hatch and grow into fry, and some lucky students have already taken spring field trips to release their young salmon into local creeks to begin their long journey. All these signs of spring give us hope and optimism for a great year ahead filled with many new restoration efforts for salmon.

Last month, we held our Annual Meeting and celebrated 2025's accomplishments with our largest attendance in years, a clear sign that the work of Skagit Fisheries matters deeply to you and our community. You can read more about last year's achievements in our **2025 Annual Report** included in this newsletter.

During our Annual Meeting, we honored several individuals who made exceptional contributions this past year. The **2025 Dick Knight Volunteer of the Year Award** was presented to Lori Shapiro for her enthusiasm for Skagit salmon and her joyful leadership

on countless student field trips. Our **Landowner of the Year**, Jennifer and Nick Lewis, were recognized for their partnership in restoring two salmon-bearing streams on their property. Since 2021, we have worked together to improve riparian habitat along Walker Creek and its East Fork tributary. Last year this effort culminated in the removal of a perched culvert, reopening 1.8 miles of upstream habitat. The fall rains quickly proved the project's success with hundreds of coho salmon returning to East Fork Walker Creek this fall and winter.

We also shared our newly updated **Strategic Plan**, which outlines our mission, vision, core values, and goals for the next five years. While this plan does not attempt to capture every ongoing effort, it provides a roadmap for how we will respond to a changing environment and build capacity for the future. We extend our sincere thanks to all our members, board directors, staff, and community participants who contributed to this year-long planning process to create our new five-year plan.



Alison Studley,  
*Executive Director*

## We Value

### *From our Strategic Plan*

#### **Purpose and Progress**

We are dedicated to making visible improvements to habitat. Our actions are focused on creating measurable, long-term results.

#### **Community Centered**

We believe local action is powerful. Collaboration with landowners, volunteers, educators, federal, tribal, state, and local governments is at the heart of meaningful salmon recovery.

#### **Compassion and Inclusion**

We value and embrace diverse perspectives, understanding that empathy for both people and the

environment is key to progress. We believe that everyone has something to contribute.

#### **Environmental Stewardship**

Our decisions are informed by science and a deep sense of responsibility to the Skagit watershed and its dependent species. Salmon are a measure of ecological health, and our work benefits all life connected to this ecosystem.

#### **Hope and Resilience**

We are driven by hope and inspired by possibility. Despite numerous challenges facing salmon recovery, we believe protection, restoration and education offer pathways to healing and renewal.

## River Journey – cont'd from page 1

The program seeks to provide a comfortable, welcoming, and culturally responsive environment in which to learn about the watershed that the students belong to. By providing curriculum in both Spanish and English and working with a diversity of community partners, Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group is able to connect with a demographic of students that may be missing out on outdoor education otherwise. This program is a collaborative effort between Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group, Vamos Outdoors Project, The Salish Sea School, North Cascades Institute, and Mount Vernon School District. Without the perspectives and enthusiasm that our partners bring to the effort, River Journey would not be possible.

We began our journey with a sunny

September rafting trip down the Skagit River – a new experience for many. As we drifted down the teal waters, bald eagles flew overhead and pink salmon swam beneath. The students were alight, splashing each other and asking questions about the fish whose humps crested the surface. At lunch, I shared a tin of pink salmon with anyone who would try it. For our following field trip, we moved down river to the tributaries of Mount Vernon. We assessed the quality of salmon habitat at Carpenter Creek, within Little Mountain Park. Then, just as the first snow dusted the North Cascades, we visited Diablo Lake for an overnight stay at North Cascade Institute's Environmental Learning Center.

Soon, we will return to Little Mountain Park with the students to improve the habitat by removing invasive species. We will install multi-lingual signage, designed to center on student artwork and words. Come June, at the end-of-program family picnic, students will have the opportunity to

guide their loved ones up the trail and point out the restoration site, salmon habitat, and signage.

As I can attest to in my own life, stewardship begins with a connection to the land. Education and access to outdoor spaces are the catalysts for this relationship. I am so grateful to have this opportunity to uplift the next generation of stewards via a similar pathway to the one that landed me where I am today.

*Sage Mailhiot is an intern with Skagit Fisheries and a Senior at the University of Washington studying Environmental Science. Skagit Fisheries will be looking for Spanish speaking interns for the next 2 school years for this program.*

*Thank you to those who contributed photos to this article: Rebeca Rios Escalera, Cyntia Castro Ortega, Sage Mailhiot, Elizabeth Drozda,*



# Skagit River Floods

By Rebecca Rising, Riparian Project Manager and Kelly Williams, Education & Outreach Specialist

When the Skagit River began rising in December 2025, forecasts warned it could crest at 42 feet in Mount Vernon – five feet higher than the record set in 1990. Evacuation orders spread through upriver towns like Hamilton and Lyman and then the lower lying communities, until more than 75,000 people within the 100-year floodplain braced for impact. In Concrete, the river climbed to a record 41.1 feet before surging downstream and peaking at a record 37.73 feet in Mount Vernon.

At our planting sites along the mainstem Skagit River, we did what little we could to prepare. We expected the current to tear newly planted trees from the ground and bury months of work beneath silt and debris. In some places, it did. In others, the story was very different.

In early February, we returned to several floodplain restoration sites to see what remained. At one extreme, several acres of plantings had been swept away, and hundreds of enormous logs were scattered across the pasture. At the other extreme – just half a river mile away – our crew found trees standing almost untouched, with barely a sign that water had recently flowed above their heads. The change felt as fleeting as the ring of bubbles left behind after a bathtub drains.

Most places fell somewhere in

between. As the water receded, many plantings remained rooted in place, blanketed in a fresh layer of river sediment – as if tucked in rather than torn out.

What remains now, and is already fading, are partial pictures: freeze-frames of a force that is never static. Bent branches and combed grasses hint at what happened here—and at what will happen again. The young willows on the sandbar seem to understand this

well. Their DNA carries the memory of disturbance, and they return to growing upright – even from scarred and broken stems – as long as they are able.

And like the willows, the community along its banks is resilient. We evacuate, we return, we replant. We mourn what is lost and tend what survives. In the

wake of the flood, what endures is not only sediment and scarred banks, but a renewed commitment – to the land, to the salmon, and to one another – carried forward on the current of a river that continues to shape us all.

In a few years, we hope the salmon from redds spared during this flood will return to the places where they are now scarcely more than a glitter in the vast gray-green current. When we see them, we will feel a quiet kinship, knowing something of the struggle it took for them to make it back.



*Digging a tree and protector out of sand at Ovenell Slough.*



*Bent tree branches along the Skagit River.*



# SKAGIT FISHERIES ENHANCEMENT GROUP



© Jessica Newley

## 2025 ANNUAL REPORT

### Fish Passage Improvement

Restoring salmon access to healthy habitat remains a top priority in our local watersheds. Through the Skagit Watershed Culvert Group, a long-standing partnership with tribal and county governments, Skagit Fisheries helps identify and remove barriers that block salmon from reaching essential habitat.

In 2025, we made significant progress by completing two fish passage projects and advancing design work at eight additional sites. On Carpenter Creek, replacing a barrier culvert on Ervine Lane with a 30-foot steel bridge reopened 2.5 miles of high-quality habitat for coho, steelhead, and sea-run cutthroat trout as part of a watershed-

wide effort that will ultimately restore nearly 9 miles for salmon migration. Additional Carpenter Creek projects are planned for

2026 and 2027.

In the Nookachamps watershed, we replaced an under-sized driveway culvert on East Fork Walker Creek with an 11-foot structure, reopening 1.8 miles of habitat for Chinook, coho, chum, and pink salmon, steelhead, cutthroat trout, and lamprey. Spawner survey volunteers have already documented salmon returning to these areas, demonstrating these investments truly opening the way for salmon.

*Culvert on Carpenter Creek before replacement.*



Volunteer Involvement:  
**7,035 Hours**  
donated by community volunteers

Community Outreach:  
**2,169 Individuals**  
reached through community engagement programs

Riparian Plantings:  
**31,178 Native plants**  
over 98 acres of streams and shorelines revegetated with native plants

New Fish Passage Projects:  
**4.3 Miles**  
of habitat opened by replacing two fish passage barriers.

Kids Educated:  
**1,491 Students**  
engaged in environmental science education programs

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

# Education Programs

Skagit Fisheries' education programs give local students meaningful, hands-on experiences that connect them to salmon, healthy habitat, and the Skagit watershed. In 2025, we launched the new River Journey (Recordo por el Río) program, where 50 English-language learners in middle and high school explore the watershed from mountains to sound through river rafting, canoeing, stream studies, and service projects. Through these immersive field experiences, students discover the Skagit's ecosystems and gain a deeper sense of belonging, confidence, and connection to the natural world.

Our staff and interns also worked with 1,441 students across 14 elementary schools through our Salmon in Schools program, guiding them as they cared for and released young coho salmon into nearby streams. This up-close experience fosters curiosity, environmental awareness, and a lasting sense of stewardship. Together, these programs help young people see themselves as part of the future of salmon recovery and of this community. These education programs faced significant funding challenges this year and your support ensured students continued access to meaningful environmental education. With your help, we can continue inspiring the next generation of conservation leaders.



*River Journey students explore the Upper Skagit*



*Students release young salmon in Hansen Creek*

# Planting for the Future

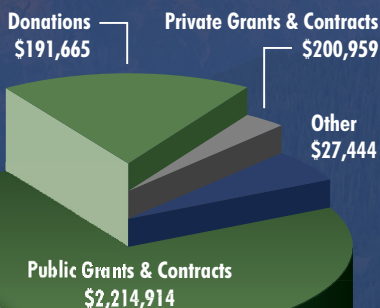
Restoring riparian areas along waterbodies is a key strategy for salmon restoration in the Skagit watershed. In 2025, Skagit Fisheries partnered with private and public landowners to plant more than 31,000 native plants. Community members, students, staff, interns, and Washington Conservation Corps members made this massive number of trees planted possible. Most projects took place along Skagit River sloughs, known to be important habitat for Chinook salmon. Additionally, one of the smaller streams where planting took place was Little Carey's Creek in Hamilton. Here a straightened stream channel was re-meandered through a forested area to improve salmon habitat and connectivity to a large wetland complex. These native plantings strengthen the entire ecosystem by creating wildlife habitat and filtering pollutants, helping keep local waterways clean and healthy.



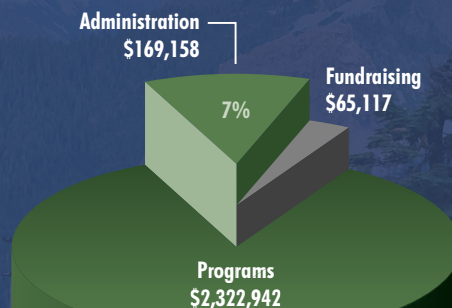
*Volunteers plant trees for Earth Day*

## 2025 FINANCIAL SUMMARY

**INCOME**  
**\$2,634,982**



**EXPENSES**  
**\$2,557,217**



Our mission is to engage our community in restoring salmon in the Skagit watershed through restoration, education, and stewardship.

Skagit Fisheries is an independent nonprofit 501c(3) organization.  
Tax ID#94-3165939

All donations are tax deductible to the extent that the law allows. Find out how you can donate at: [SkagitFisheries.org](http://SkagitFisheries.org)



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# Spawner Survey Season Wrap-Up

by Devon Bedard, Skagit Fisheries Monitoring Specialist

This past fall and early-winter, Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group's (SFEG) volunteer-based Spawner Survey Program completed its 28th season of salmon monitoring across the Samish and Skagit watersheds. What began in 1998 as a community effort to better understand local salmon populations has grown into one of the most enduring and beloved programs of SFEG and the 2025-2026 season was no exception. From October through January, 38 dedicated volunteers, staff, and interns logged almost a thousand hours in the field, wading through creeks, counting salmon, and collecting valuable data that help guide restoration efforts across our local watersheds. Spawner Survey volunteers monitored 27 distinct reaches across 21 creeks this 2025-2026 season. There were 10 reaches on 9 creeks in the Samish watershed, and 17 reaches across 12 creeks in the Skagit watershed.

This year was a relatively warm, wet winter for Skagit County with little to no snow and frequent heavy rainfall events. To start the season, the Skagit River saw its first noticeable increase in river height in early November and the second increase

just after mid-November. Volunteer survey data showed that live salmon sightings increased sharply in the days following the first two rain events in November. For example, approximately 450 live fish were observed after each November rainfall. Overall, November accounted for 1,666 out of 2,227 live salmon, or nearly 75% of the total fish seen this season. Most of the creeks surveyed in this program are small tributaries, so coho made up the vast majority of fish observed from November through January. Volunteers also recorded a few less common species this season, such as steelhead on Swede Creek in the Samish watershed, and coastal cutthroat trout on East Fork Walker Creek and Little Carey's Creek in the Skagit watershed.

In December 2025, after the peak November spawning window for coho, western Washington was hit by a large, multi-phase atmospheric river event that led to widespread flooding across the state. During the atmospheric river, the Skagit River crested at 37.73 feet near Mount Vernon on December 12, 2025. The flood event re-shaped stream channels, altered spawning gravels, and presented real challenges for both

the fish and the people monitoring them around the Skagit and Samish watersheds. The effects of this flood event on spawning salmon and their eggs buried in the gravel could be quite harmful and will remain an area of interest when monitoring salmon population levels in the Skagit over the next 2 to 5 years.

Nature is dynamic, and our amazing volunteers in the Spawner Survey Program allow Skagit Fisheries to get a real-time glimpse into the changes that are occurring at our local creeks. The volunteers in this program are a collection of community members, students, neighbors, and nature lovers who dedicate their free time to pull on waders and step into cold, often murky water in the name of salmon conservation. The relationships built along the way, with each other, with landowners, and with the watersheds themselves, are what make this program so special. The data collected each season not only informs SFEG's adaptive management but contributes to a long-term record of salmon presence in our local streams that spans nearly three decades. We are incredibly grateful to everyone who made the 2025-2026 season possible.



Volunteer John Leighton with a coho on Bridle Creek.



Volunteer Ben Owen on Swede Creek.



# Returning to the Skagit

by Shannon Allen, Washington Conservation Corp Crewmember

Hello! My name is Shannon Allen. I'm a member of Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group's (SFEG) Washington Conservation Corps Crew (WCC). I was born in Skagit County and am so excited to be back here stewarding the land where I grew up.

My first hands-on experience with restoration came when I attended Bay View Elementary school where some super cool scientist came in from SFEG to do a salmon dissection and talk about the role salmon play in our ecosystem. Although squeamish at the sight of the filet of fish, my young mind was fascinated by science that came in the form of practical skill and

fieldwork instead of from a textbook. My class even got to go around our watershed doing water quality testing to see how water naturally filters through wetlands.

With these young memories deep in my subconscious, I moved out of Skagit County to get my BS in Environmental Science from Seattle University. I was brought back to the county by chance after a friend encouraged me to apply to a WCC position. This is how I ended up working with the very people who first exposed my mind to the world of fisheries science.

While my work and education have

taken many turns, from a minor in Film Studies to an English teaching position abroad, I'm glad that my career path has taken me back to my home watershed.

Getting to explore the beautiful land along the Skagit River has been a wonderful experience which has strengthened my appreciation of the Pacific Northwest and the special nature of the Skagit.

I am forever grateful to those who have stewarded this land since time immemorial who, in turn, give me the opportunity to witness the wild of the Skagit River.

# An Internship Perspective

by Luci Stevenson, Education Intern

Over the past few weeks I have been getting to know the ways of being an education intern at Skagit Fisheries. This opportunity has been amazing so far, and I am excited to see where it goes over the next few months. My personal love for the outdoors is what drew me to seek out this internship, but I am starting to realize that it is equally fulfilling to see others enjoying the outdoors. As an education intern I have spent time with people of all ages, most of them seeming just as passionate about the world around them. It is super cool to see the community of volunteer members coming back weekend after weekend for tree planting parties, showing their dedication to local conservation. That



being said, my short time as an intern has made me think more about my own involvement in the community and how important being involved really is. After I graduate this spring I am going to make it a goal to become more involved in the communities around me.

I recently led a station on a field trip where I was helping the kids release their salmon fry into Carpenter Creek and it brought me back to my fourth grade self. I grew up in Oregon and I remember having salmon eggs in my classroom and being so excited to release them. Many of my memories



from that age are blurred, but releasing my salmon into the river remains clear to this day. Hearing how excited the

kids were to name their salmon, I could tell some of them would remember that day for a long time.

Living on the Columbia River, my family grew up doing a lot of fishing together. My brothers spent countless hours researching what gear to use, and eventually they certainly knew what they were doing. I lucked out because I could just come along and they would tell me what to put on, and in no time I would be reeling in a big coho. I still enact this strategy today, which is shown in the picture to the left, taken this summer of me reeling in a fish and my brother helping me net it. Beyond just catching fish, because most of the time I don't, fishing has brought my family together and brought me other meaningful relationships in my life today. I am happy to be contributing to the wellbeing of the Skagit watershed, and doing this internship is putting me on a path to continue work in the realm of conservation and the environment.

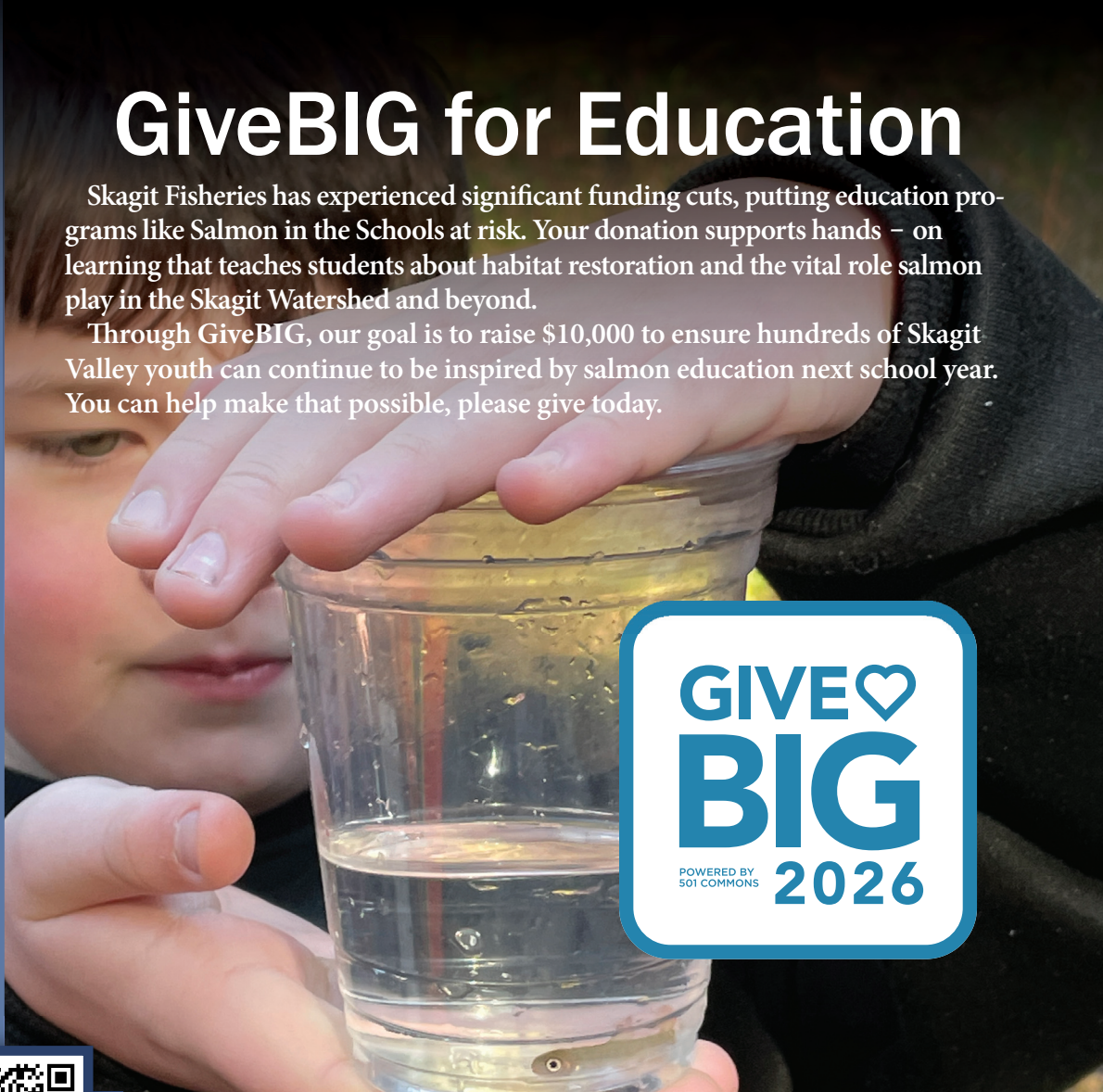
# Our Impact

*Our education programs make a positive and lasting impression on local youth. Two of our current team members (intern Sage Mailhiot and WCC member Shannon Allen) have been called to careers in conservation thanks in part to memorable experiences through our education programs. Read more about their paths in this newsletter and remember to GiveBIG and keep salmon education programs flowing.*

# GiveBIG for Education

Skagit Fisheries has experienced significant funding cuts, putting education programs like Salmon in the Schools at risk. Your donation supports hands – on learning that teaches students about habitat restoration and the vital role salmon play in the Skagit Watershed and beyond.

Through GiveBIG, our goal is to raise \$10,000 to ensure hundreds of Skagit Valley youth can continue to be inspired by salmon education next school year. You can help make that possible, please give today.



May 5, 2026



[www.wagives.org/organization/SkagitFisheries](http://www.wagives.org/organization/SkagitFisheries)

## EXPLORE OTHER WAYS TO GIVE

[www.SkagitFisheries.org/ways-to-give](http://www.SkagitFisheries.org/ways-to-give)



### DONATE

Show your commitment to the future stewardship of our local watersheds by making a donation today, or consider a recurring donation.



### LEGACY GIVING

Make a lasting impact on the future of Salmon.



### GIFTS OF STOCK

Skagit Fisheries accepts donations of stocks, bonds, and mutual funds. These gifts may include significant tax benefits to the donor.



### GIFTS OF IRA

Retirement plan assets can be used to make a charitable gift to Skagit Fisheries.



Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. All contributions are tax deductible to the extent that the law allows. Tax ID#: 94-3165939



SKAGIT FISHERIES  
ENHANCEMENT  
GROUP

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

# EARTH DAY 2026



**Saturday, April 25<sup>th</sup>**  
**9am - 1pm at Edgewater Park**

**Plant trees and remove invasive ivy for**  
**Earth Day!**

**Come celebrate our planet with hands-on activities,  
fascinating wildlife, and a chance to make a  
difference in our community.**



Sponsored by:  **HF Sinclair**



[www.skagitfisheries.org/event/earth-day-2026/](http://www.skagitfisheries.org/event/earth-day-2026/)