

"THE SALMON DANCE ON ITS FIRST ARRIVAL"

Yil-me-hu

SPRING 2017



THE NISQUALLY WATERSHED SALMON RECOVERY NEWSLETTER | WHAT'S INSIDE:

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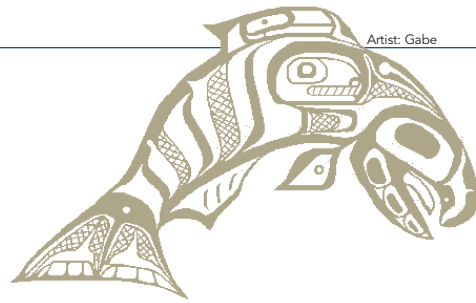
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Cover photo: A coho salmon recently spotted hanging out in Powell Creek. Photo by David Detrick.



Yil-me-hu

Yil-me-hu, Nisqually word that means "the salmon dance, on its first arrival."

The first fish ceremony — The first fish caught in the spring was prepared in an earth pit stove, shared and eaten by members of the village. The bones, left intact, were returned to the river, pointing upstream. This display was symbolic. It meant that the villagers were respectful to the fish spirits and wished that, because the ceremony had been done correctly, many more fish would come up the stream during that year. A dance followed the ceremony called the "yil-me-hu," a Nisqually word that means "the salmon dance, on its first arrival."*

* Carpenter, Cecilia Svinth, Fort Nisqually: A Documented History of Indian and British Interaction. A Tahoma Research Publication. 1986. p13.

Yil-me-hu is published by the Nisqually Indian Tribe Natural Resources Department and the Nisqually River Council to provide information about activities associated with the protection and restoration of salmon and their habitat in the Nisqually watershed.

If you wish to no longer receive this publication, please contact: Ashley Von Essen, vonessen.ashley@nisqually-nsn.gov.

Nisqually Indian Tribe



Natural Resources Department

4820 She-Nah-Num Drive SE, Olympia, WA 98513

Phone: 360-438-8687

Fax: 360-438-8742

Email: vonessen.ashley@nisqually-nsn.gov

Websites: www.nisquallyriver.org, www.nisqually-nsn.gov

Managing Editor: Ashley Von Essen

Writers/Editors: Rene Bracero, Christopher Ellings, Linsey Fields, Morgan Greene, Justin Hall, Ed Kenney, Jed Moore, Emmett O'Connell, Teeshia Osias, Cathy Sampselle, David Troutt, George Walter, Claire Williamson, Sheila Wilson

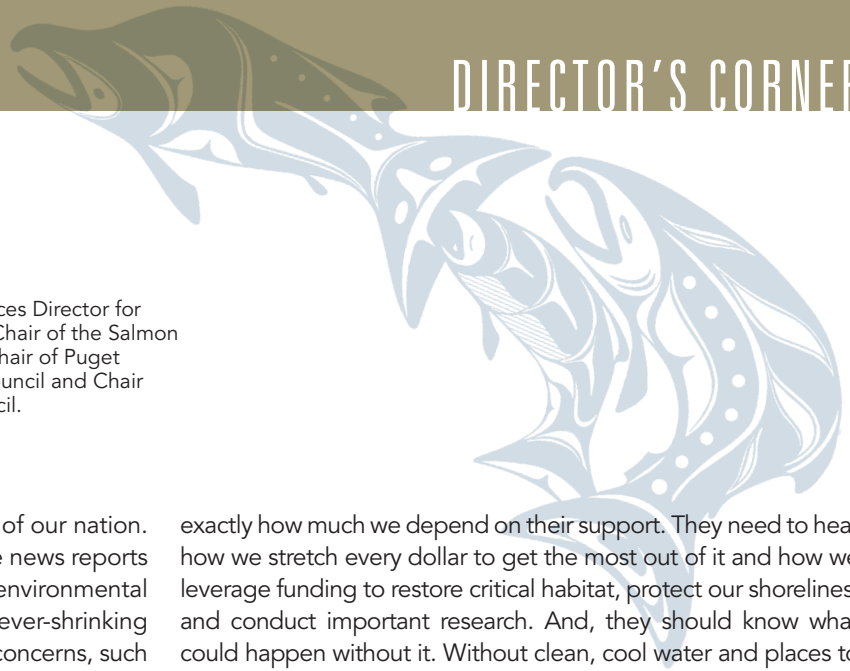
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David Troutt

David is the Natural Resources Director for the Nisqually Indian Tribe, Chair of the Salmon Recovery Funding Board, Chair of Puget Sound Salmon Recovery Council and Chair of the Nisqually River Council.



It's impossible to try to ignore the current state of our nation. On a national level, we are a country divided. The news reports daily of our administration's skepticism of key environmental issues, the ever-growing need for funding from an ever-shrinking budget, and ultimately, whether these ecological concerns, such as declining populations of ESA-listed salmon and climate change, are worthy of their precious dollars. Funding cuts plague us on the State level as well, putting many salmon recovery funding sources, including the Salmon Recovery Funding Board and Puget Sound Acquisition and Restoration, in jeopardy.

Through all this, one thing we have come to realize in our watershed is that no matter what, the great work of the Nisqually cannot and will not be undone. Progress made in the Nisqually Watershed is locally driven: it is the people who live, work and play here that have helped us accomplish so much. Certainly, the proposed federal budget will challenge our ability to move forward. Our federal partners, including Mount Rainier National Park and the Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge may see significant funding cuts, as could many other local organizations, including the Nisqually Indian Tribe. Decreased funding may limit our ability to put shovels in the ground and preserve habitat needed by salmon and other wildlife, but money doesn't buy bravery and it doesn't buy community support. These are our Nisqually strengths.

Vocalizing your support can go a long way. We all need to speak up and make sure our state and federal delegations know

exactly how much we depend on their support. They need to hear how we stretch every dollar to get the most out of it and how we leverage funding to restore critical habitat, protect our shorelines, and conduct important research. And, they should know what could happen without it. Without clean, cool water and places to feed and spawn, salmon don't stand a chance. Furthermore, without salmon, the vitality of Washington State's economy and social wellbeing declines.

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can go a long way.

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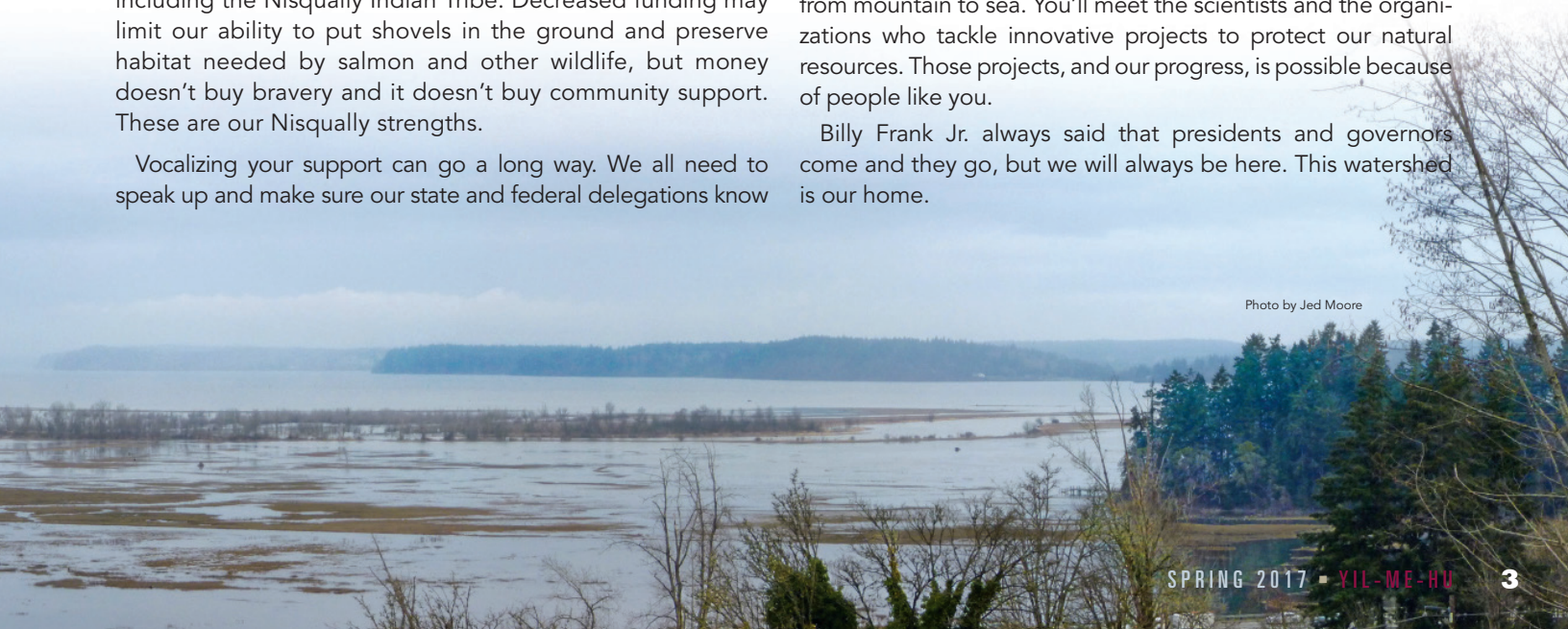
No matter what is happening at our State Capital or even at the White House, it's important to remember that we have a watershed filled with champions. These champions, our volunteers, dig out Himalayan blackberry and pull Scotch broom in the name of habitat restoration, toss frozen salmon carcasses into the Nisqually River on the coldest and snowiest of days, and plant trees and remove protective tubes in the pouring rain. We have an incredible community that continues to support us on the ground every day and we have amazing partners that forge ahead no matter the

financial future that may lurk ahead.

In the following pages, you'll learn more about the volunteers who monitor, restore, and enhance the Nisqually Watershed from mountain to sea. You'll meet the scientists and the organizations who tackle innovative projects to protect our natural resources. Those projects, and our progress, is possible because of people like you.

Billy Frank Jr. always said that presidents and governors come and they go, but we will always be here. This watershed is our home.

Photo by Jed Moore



S R E E T M U L V

CHAMPIONS OF THE WATERSHED

Photo by
Jim Reistroffer



The Nisqually Indian Tribe's Salmon Watcher Program asks volunteers to look for salmon in their backyard streams.

Volunteers make a major contribution to restoring habitat in the Nisqually Watershed by dedicating much time, energy and enthusiasm. They survey fish and wildlife, install restoration plantings, perform environmental monitoring and table at festivals. Volunteer planting events are coordinated by a team of partners including the Tribe, the Nisqually River Foundation (NRF), the Nisqually Land Trust (NLT), and Pierce Conservation District, and are a big part of how our salmon recovery restoration plantings get in the ground. To give just one example, the Ohop Restoration Project has involved hundreds of volunteers through the years. Since 2009, over 700 adults and 2,200 students have contributed over 6,000 hours and planted approximately 15,000 trees and shrubs in the Ohop Valley.

Volunteers play key roles in various ongoing environmental monitoring efforts throughout the watershed that contribute to a better understanding of salmon and wildlife habitat. For the last 25 years NRF has lead bi-annual water quality sampling at 35 different sites on tributaries and the mainstem. Gr oups of local students perform the sampling with help from teachers and parents. The Tribe's Salmon Watcher Program has been in place for 15 years: volunteers monitor salmon during the spawning season at over 15 different sites. Volunteers also document wildlife usage of the watershed through Northwest Trek's NatureMapping program.



Students help plant trees in the Ohop Valley.

Photo by Sheila Wilson

Justin Hall, NRF Executive Director, lends a hand planting trees.



Photo by Sheila Wilson

Nisqually Stream Stewards get a tour of the Clear Creek Hatchery from the Tribe's field crew supervisor, Nano Perez.



Photo by Morgan Greene

Every year, the Tribe and NRF partner to present the Nisqually Stream Stewards training program. Across an eight week period, participants attend free classes on biology and ecology of the watershed, tribal history and culture, salmon issues and identification, and sustainable forestry among other topics. Following completion of the training program, volunteers make a 40-hour volunteer commitment. This is a great way to meet new people, network with local environmental groups, and learn more about this beautiful area. Nisqually Stream Steward Warren Bergh has this to say about his experience: "The resources provided by the staff and speakers are superb and the field experiences and hands on work bring life to our classwork. I have enjoyed the opportunity to work with a diverse group of volunteers who share their ideas and concerns of the watershed. I highly recommend volunteering with the Nisqually Stream Stewards."

For the last two decades, restoration in the Ohop Valley has been a major priority for a number of local partners. This list of partners is ever growing and we are excited to work with the most recent addition: Eatonville School District. The District is developing a Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) campus near Ohop Creek on property that was transferred to the District by the NLT. A vegetable garden, a laboratory and a native plants healing garden are in the planning stages. Students will have the opportunity to learn in an outdoor classroom while assisting with maintenance of the surrounding restoration plantings or sampling benthic invertebrates in the creek. Hands-on learning in nature helps inspire a conservation ethic in our youth, the future stewards of this great place in which we live.

There are many diverse volunteer opportunities coming up over the next year. We are seeking volunteers to process images from the fish counter camera on the mainstem of the Nisqually River and wildlife cameras at Ohop Creek. Work parties will be held to maintain existing restoration plantings, and install new plantings along the Mashel River. The Nisqually Stream Stewards and Salmon Watchers programs are always accepting new volunteers. Northwest Trek is also accepting volunteers for their amphibian monitoring and NatureMapping programs. Other options include helping out during the Nisqually Watershed Festival, Eatonville Salmon Fest or during salmon carcass tossing events.

A big thanks to all of you who come out and volunteer – we couldn't do it without your help!

For more information on the Nisqually Stream Stewards program or other volunteer opportunities: Contact Justin and Sheila at streamstewards@nisquallyriver.org or 360-438-8715



Volunteers collect aquatic insects to check the health of local streams.

Photo by Don Perry

Stream Stewards graduate Warren Bergh helps toss frozen Chinook into Nisqually tributaries.

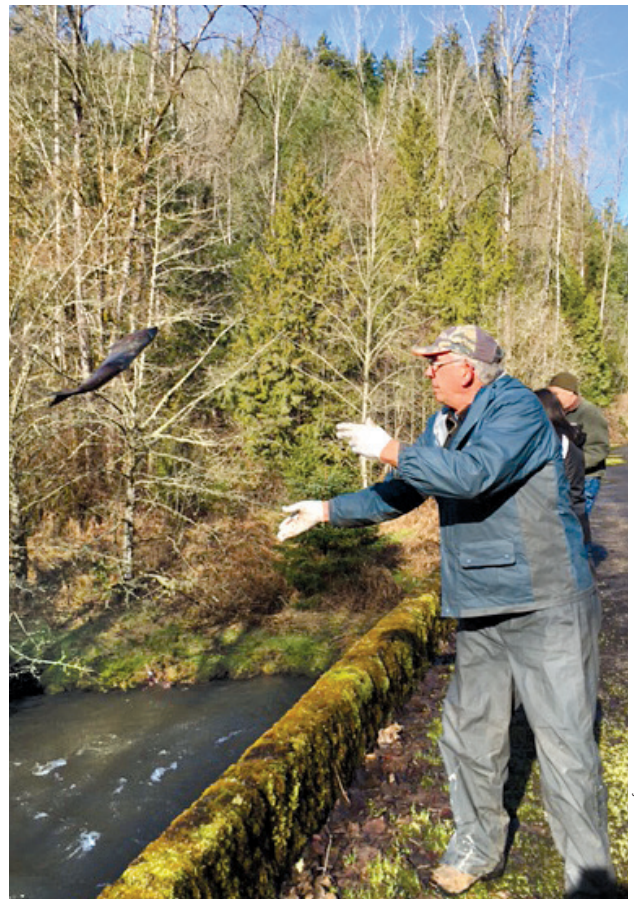


Photo by Michael Williams

Caring for and conserving the many salmon populations in the Nisqually watershed has long been important to the region's economic, cultural, social and ecological values. Winter steelhead were once an abundant component of the Nisqually ecosystem. Since the late 1800s, many factors have contributed to a dramatic plummet in the population, including increasing local seal and sea lion populations, the declining health of Puget Sound, and barriers blocking fish passage.

A backwatered segment of Horn Creek.



Photo by Claire Williamson

NISQUALLY STEELHEAD HABITAT

Steelhead are known to utilize habitat in both the Nisqually River and the small creeks and streams that run through our backyards. High quality freshwater habitat, no matter how small the stream, is a key component of healthy steelhead populations in the Nisqually watershed. In an effort to assess the health and potential of these “backyard habitats” the South Puget Sound Salmon Enhancement Group (SPSSEG) partnered with the Nisqually Indian Tribe to launch a pilot study in Harts, Horn, and Brighton Creeks.

The project began in fall 2016 with a coordinated landowner outreach effort amongst project partners. As a result, a patchwork of access was granted by targeted landowners. A small field crew comprised of biologists from the Nisqually Indian Tribe, the Nisqually River Foundation, and SPSSEG began assessing fish habitat in the three streams identified. Biologists inventoried and documented presence and absence of pools, riffles and runs, substrate composition, canopy cover, invasive vegetation and stream widths. The project also assessed culverts and unused dams for fish passage along both private and public roadways.

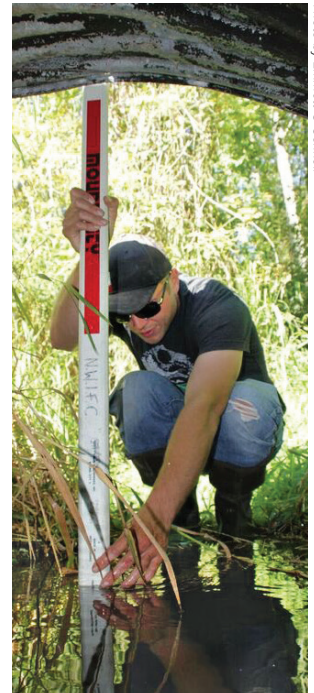
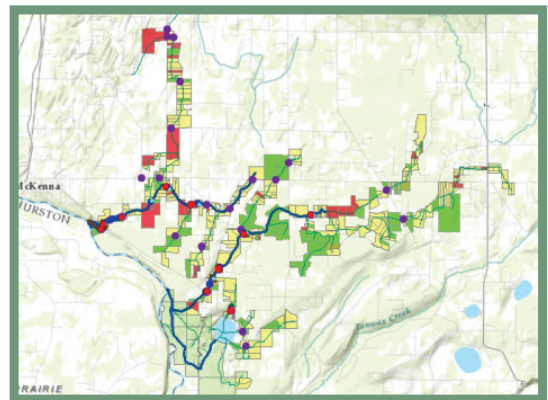


Photo by Emmett O'Connell

Nisqually River Foundation field biologist Walker Duval measures a culvert for fish passability.

By collecting GPS points, biologists have been able to map streams using Geographic Information Systems, more commonly known as GIS. Mapping the on-the-ground data collected provides a picture of habitat quality and quantity in each stream segment and its potential for steelhead spawning and rearing, while identifying future restoration projects. This project has proved to be an important step towards steelhead recovery. Projects partners continue to collect data in these reaches while planning future phases in other areas of the watershed. Stay tuned!



Map by Brian Zierdt

Each dot on the map represents a unique habitat feature along the streams. Access to the streams was key to this pilot study's success; green parcels are where permission was granted, red means access was denied, and yellow is no response.

NISQUALLY COMMUNITY FOREST BUYS FIRST 640 ACRES

Photo by Kirk Hanson

Just before Thanksgiving 2016, the Nisqually Community Forest (NCF) bought its first 640 acres in the upper Busy Wild portion of the Mashel River sub-basin.

absentee owners, either distant corporations or investors with no long-term commitment to the industry itself. For example, well over 50% of the commercial timberland in Pierce County is not locally owned. The NCF is a grass roots effort to return forestlands back to local ownership and management.

On the East Coast, community forests have been a small but important part of the landscape for centuries. They give local residents a stake in the management of forests they live near and are impacted by. Profits and jobs stay in the community. Forests are managed to maximize forest health and environmental and recreational benefits while providing local economic support.

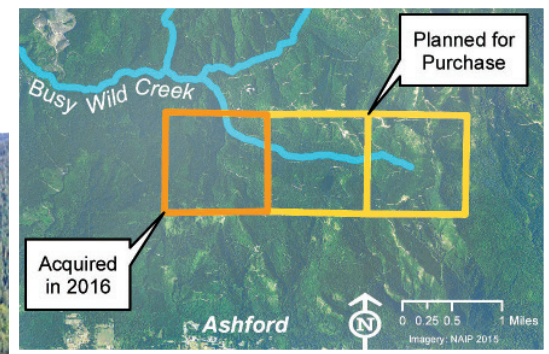
The goal of the NCF is to own at least 25,000 acres of forest lands primarily in the Mashel River Sub-basin and to manage those lands to provide environmental, economic, and cultural benefits for Nisqually Watershed communities. Benefits include the protection of clean air and water, promotion of healthy forests, streams and wildlife populations, and creation of forestry, recreation, and tourism jobs.

The NCF is working on a deal to acquire an additional 1,280 acres adjacent to the property already purchased. At the same time, NCF is developing plans to manage the forest that will result in the highest habitat benefits for salmon and wildlife, while still providing timber, local jobs, and recreation opportunities.

Last year's purchase was just the start of returning our forests back to local ownership and management!

The NCF is a model for a new form of forest ownership and management in the West. One of the most important things about western Washington timber land is how productive they are. Timber has generated wealth for many generations of Washingtonians, generally through locally owned and managed operations. Pay and profits stayed here, building our state's wealth. Unfortunately this is often not the situation today. Much timberland is owned by

Photo by Jed Moore



Map by
Cathy Sampselle,
Nisqually GIS
Program

NISQUALLY DELTA SEA LION STUDY



Nisqually Indian Tribe fishermen and Nisqually Indian Tribe Natural Resources Department staff have observed a dramatic increase in California and Steller sea lion winter utilization of the Nisqually Delta over the last decade. The sea lions appear to time their migration to overlap with the Nisqually winter chum salmon run, between late November and late January. Nisqually winter chum support a culturally and economically important fishery for the Tribe and, until recently, were generally considered healthy. Additionally, the timing of the sea lion residency in the Delta also overlaps with the Nisqually winter steelhead run. Nisqually winter steelhead are listed as 'threatened' under the federal Endangered Species Act. Nisqually steelhead have declined from runs in excess of 7000 to around 600 fish over the last 20 years and face extinction if marine survival continues to decline. In order to determine the impact of sea lions on both Nisqually winter chum and Nisqually winter steelhead, the Nisqually Fish Commission allocated some funding to conduct a preliminary investigation.

The purpose of the study was to document the approximate abundance, local distribution, and feeding patterns of California and Steller sea lions in the Nisqually Delta. Additionally, the study will collect sea lion scat (a.k.a. poop) in order to analyze their diet composition. The results of the study will enable managers to better understand the severity of sea lion predation on Nisqually winter steelhead and Nisqually winter chum salmon abundance.

Results from the study are still being analyzed, but several interesting findings are:

- Biologists from the Nisqually Natural Resources Department and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife conducted over 285 hours of sea lion observations between November 7 and February 3, 2016. Over that time, the biologists observed 127 confirmed salmon/steelhead kills.
- Sea lions arrived and began foraging in the Nisqually in early December but appear to enter Puget Sound in November with the earlier Puget Sound Chum runs.
- The largest total count of seals and sea lions combined in the Nisqually Reach was made at the Breakwater Derelict Barge on December 21: 65 Harbor Seals, 10 California Sea Lions, and 3 Steller Sea Lions. These counts represent only a small percentage of the actual number of seals and sea lions in the area at that time.
- The busiest day saw 32 confirmed kills in the estuary by approximately 12 sea lions and 10 seals.
- Most of the feeding occurred during slack tides, particularly the low slack.
- Sea lions moved upstream on incoming tides.
- Sea lions did not appear to respond to human observers and even made kills right next to the boat, (assumed not intimidated by boat presence).

The next step in the study is to analyze the sea lion scat in order to determine the total contribution of chum and steelhead to their diet. The diet composition can be combined with the predation observations and the total counts of sea lions in order to estimate the total number of chum and steelhead that may have been consumed. This will enable managers to better account for chum and steelhead mortality, greatly improving their ability to forecast run sizes and set fisheries.



A sea lion snacks on a chum salmon.

Photos by Jed Moore

Nisqually Environmental

In 2015, the Nisqually Indian Tribe's Department of Natural Resources created a successful environmental outreach program, known as the Nisqually Environmental Team (NET). NET involves many partners who are committed to getting the community together by promoting and encouraging environmental stewardship, as well as tackling climate change issues. The program has been able to build a bridge between the tribal and surrounding communities.

2016 was a successful year for NET. The program has completed or assisted many projects, including participating in salmon carcass tosses, tree plantings, Salmon Camp, support crew for the Paddle to Nisqually Canoe Journey, Gathers Rain community events, and helping at Wa He Lut Indian School with water quality and salmon lifecycle education. The NET also created a climate change awareness brochure in partnership with Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission, Washington Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction's Office of Native Education program, and the Sauk Suiattle, Squaxin Island, and Chehalis Tribes.

As NET grows, we expect positive outcomes to continue to include new and rewarding challenges that will inspire our students to pursue higher education and seek careers that promote culture, tribal sustainability, and the health of natural resources.



Photo by Rene Bracero

Students learn from Keoni Kalama about services offered by the Nisqually Indian Tribe's Marine Services program.



Lending a hand as support crew for the 2016 Paddle to Nisqually.



Salmon Campers get a tour of the Nisqually Community Garden.

Team Reaches Out to the Community

Ongoing Programs for the NET include:

Internships and youth participation are key components of NET. The goal of the program is to introduce tribal youth to natural resource professionals in hopes of inspiring the next generation of environmental champions. There are endless shadowing opportunities in the program, including working at the Kalama and Clear Creek Hatcheries, assisting Nisqually Marine Services, and coordinating the summer's Salmon Camp.

Nisqually Salmon Camp is a summer program designed to educate youth about cultural and natural systems that define the Nisqually watershed's geography. One of the focuses of Salmon Camp is learning the history of the land, while studying the Medicine Creek Treaty, the Boldt decision and Treaty Rights at Risk. The program works in partnership with the Nisqually Youth and Community Center's Summer Youth Program to provide youth a great opportunity to learn about natural resources career pathways through hands-on experience opportunities.

Gathers Rain is a quarterly event that coincides with the seasons of the salmon runs. NET collaborates with other Nisqually Indian Tribe departments, including the Nisqually Tribal Library and Head Start, to increase community involvement, get the youth and tribal community interested, and to communicate the importance of salmon and their life cycles. The event focuses on sharing traditional knowledge and current issues, such as climate change and other concerns that fisheries are currently facing. At the event, people are exposed to traditional cultural appreciation by listening to stories from tribal fishermen and participating in educational activities. There is also a raffle and a delicious traditional meal prepared.



Photo by Erika Warren

Community members learn about the importance of healthy habitat from local organizations.



Photo by Caitlyn Kren



Photo by Rene Bracco

Nisqually youth examine fish collected while beach seining with research biologists.

Nisqually River Council Celebrates 30 years of Action

Partnerships and collaboration have been two of the key reasons so many successes stem from the Nisqually Watershed. The vision that so many stakeholders share isn't an accident: it's been a 30 year work in progress!



Meeting at the Ohop Grange in 2005.



In 1985, the Washington State Legislature passed a bill requiring the formation of the Nisqually River Task Force, and the development of the Nisqually River Management Plan. At first, the many people in the room did not agree on a common path for the future. Tensions arose and conflicts grew so intense that for almost the entire year, no progress was made in developing a management plan. It was almost a year later that Billy Frank Jr. – one of the key members of that Task

Force – began to pursue deeper connections with other members of the team. After a while, the members realized that despite different opinions in *management*, they all really wanted the same thing: a watershed that was healthy and able to support the plants, animals and people who called it home.

That common sense of trust eventually led to the completion of the first Nisqually River Management Plan and the formation of the Nisqually River Council (NRC) in 1987. The NRC is made up of the voices of the Nisqually Watershed: Tribal, federal, state and local agencies, non-profits, and local citizens all have voting seats at the table. Even more impressive is that collaboration remains at the heart of the NRC. Over the last three decades, our collective purpose has allowed the Nisqually Watershed to complete large-scale, innovative projects that contribute to a healthier environment.



Photo by Sheila Wilson

NRC says Farewell to



Over the years, the Nisqually River Foundation has conducted a lot of interviews for a variety of positions. We can safely say that the most interesting was with Morgan Greene. Morgan interviewed for our Climate Change AmeriCorps position from the back of her car over Skype, outside of a closed library (to use their Wi-Fi) in rural Oregon. Needless to say, Morgan knocked that interview out of the park and has continued to do that with every challenge given to her over the last three and a half years.

As we celebrate our 30-year anniversary this year, we look back at some of our successes over the years:

- The continuation and expansion of the 25-year Nisqually River Education Project, which offers service-learning opportunities to watershed schools
- Fostering a group of dedicated volunteers and citizen scientists through the Nisqually Stream Stewards program, a joint program with the Nisqually Indian Tribe
- Providing a platform for mutual respect and discussion, helping promote broad community support for innovative and large-scale restoration projects, including the Nisqually Delta and Ohop Valley restoration sites
- Participating in the establishment of the Nisqually Community Forest, an effort to conserve local forestlands, benefit our watershed communities and economies, and protect our clean waters



The NRC in 1987, the very beginning.

As we move into the future, maintaining our common purpose is more important than ever. Healthy lands, people and economies depend on all of us working together. We hope that the NRC continues to provide a space for all stakeholders to come together to share ideas, create solutions, and make a difference.

We invite you to join us as we continue to make the Nisqually Watershed a more sustainable place. The NRC meets on the third Friday of each month; email info@nisquallyriver.org to be added to the mailing list. We hope to see you there!



The NRC in 2014 at Mount Rainier National Park.

Photo by Justin Hall

Program Coordinator

After completing her one year AmeriCorps position, we hired Morgan to coordinate the Nisqually River Council. In addition to staffing the Nisqually River Council and the Citizens Advisory Committee, Morgan completed the Nisqually Forest and Water Climate Adaptation Plan, spearheaded the development of the Nisqually River Water Trail, co-taught the ever popular Nisqually Stream Stewards Class, helped on a number of Nisqually River Education Project student field trips, kick-started the Foundation's strategic planning process, and has just been generally indispensable. She has had a lasting impact on the Nisqually Watershed.

However, the time has come for Morgan to leave us. At the end of April, Morgan will be headed to new challenges in Alabama where her husband will be fulfilling a lifetime dream to learn to fly helicopters with the US Army. Once you are a part of the Nisquamily you can never truly leave, you just go to new places to spread the love. Good luck, Morgan! You will be greatly missed!



Photo by Sheila Wilson



NISQUALLY RIVER EDUCATION PROJECT – 2016 AND BEYOND!

For over 25 years, not only has the Nisqually River Education Project (NREP) has been educating youth on environmental issues and the importance of the natural world, but also training these students to be citizen scientists. Here's what NREP has been up to during the 2016-2017 school year:

NISQUALLY NEARSHORE FIELD TRIPS

For the third year, NREP worked with partners at the Nisqually Reach Nature Center, National Fish and Oyster Company, and the Puget Sound Restoration Fund to bring 228 students from Pioneer Middle School, entire 6th grade, along with 23 parent chaperones out to explore the beach. New this year was an updated field guide, which included new plankton survey activities and information about how ocean acidification affects shellfish survival and farming.



Photo by Sheila Wilson



Photo by Morgan Greene

SUMMER TEACHERS INSTITUTE

In 2016 Summer Teachers Institute had a record-breaking 61 local educators sign up, representing grades two through high school. This three day workshop provides continuing education opportunities for teachers who participate in NREP, South Sound GREEN, and Chehalis Basin Education Consortium. This year's topic was Oceans: Ocean Acidification and Sea Level Rise, and included a tour of the Chehalis River aboard the Lady Washington and visits to Twin Harbors and Lighthouse State Parks to explore their beaches and learn about local impacts of climate change.



Photo by Kim Williams

WATER QUALITY MONITORING

NREP hosted two water quality monitoring days in October 2016 and February 2017 at 37 different sites throughout the watershed. Each day brought 49 teachers and over 1,000 students out to measure 6 different parameters at all 37 locations! Students were able to report their data at the 25th Annual Student GREEN Congress.

Photo by Sheila Wilson



HABITAT RESTORATION

NREP led nearly 750 students in planting almost 2,500 native trees in shrubs in the 2016 planting season. Students visited active restoration sites on Ohop, Muck, and Red Salmon Creeks.



Photo by Sheila Wilson

EYE ON NATURE

Eye on Nature brought 398 local elementary and middle school students to the Billy Frank Jr. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge to learn ethnobotany, sound mapping, and NatureMapping, a citizen science project which teaches students how to identify wildlife and record what they see and where they see it.



Photo by Sheila Wilson

SALMON CARCASS TOSSING

Who doesn't love tossing goeey, stinky fish into the Nisqually? This past winter 281 students and approximately 40 parent chaperones returned more than 20,000 lbs. of hatchery Chinook carcasses to the Mashel River and upper Nisqually River.

A big thanks to all the helping hands!
Want to volunteer with NREP?
Visit their website at:
nrep.nisquallyriver.org or
email Sheila Wilson at
sheila@nisquallyriver.org.

STUDENT GREEN CONGRESS TURNS 25



Keynote speaker Gene Tagaban shares the art of storytelling as he portrays "One Crazy Raven."

Photo by Amy Wilson



On March 23rd, the Nisqually River Education Project (NREP) and South Sound GREEN (SSG) hosted the 25th annual Student GREEN Congress at the Evergreen State College. This event is the culmination of two water quality monitoring days where students are able to compare data collected and brainstorm ways to improve their local rivers and streams. Student delegates range from 4th grade through high school and represent schools from the South Sound and Nisqually Watersheds.

This year, over 400 students represented their school in a morning "State of the Rivers" session, sharing water quality data and developing action plans to improve water quality in their communities. In the afternoon, they attended educational workshops: salmon carcass dissections, making bird boxes, getting up close with stream bugs, shellfish tasting, Native American storytelling, fly casting, live raptors, and much more.

Our 25th Anniversary is a special opportunity to recognize those who work to keep the spirit of environmental stewardship alive and recognize the importance of hands-on, science-based learning. Students were welcomed to the event by Washington State Governor Jay Inslee, who prepared a video address, and Maia Bellon, director of the Washington Department of Ecology. The keynote speaker was Gene Tagaban, a member of the Takdeintaan clan, who also known as "One Crazy Raven." Gene is an accomplished storyteller, speaker, mentor, and performer.

Since its inauguration, Student GREEN Congress has reached thousands of students and hundreds of teachers. From the students who are just learning about their local habitats, to the teachers and volunteers who have participated for decades, Congress is a day of learning, gaining new skills, and adopting conservation plans to better local watersheds and communities.

In afternoon workshops, participants take part in hands-on activities hosted by local organizations. These students get up close and personal with mussels and other marine critters.



Maia Bellon, the director of the Washington's Department of Ecology, shares the importance of healthy rivers and streams.

Photo by Candia Grimm

Photo by Amy Wilson



Delegates make their way to the Longhouse Education and Cultural Center at the Evergreen State College.

Photo by Amy Wilson



Salmon Watcher Monitors Progress in Backyard Stream

— by Ed Kenney

MY NEIGHBORS AND I ARE SO EXCITED BY THIS YEAR'S SIGHTINGS OF COHO SALMON SPAWNING IN THE POWELL CREEK AND ELBOW LAKE CREEK TRIBUTARIES OF THE NISQUALLY RIVER THAT WE CAN BARELY CONTAIN OURSELVES!

We have salmon fighting, salmon splashing, salmon tail-walking and salmon quivering as they spawn!

It was a snowy day in December of 1980 when I first observed the salmon spawning in our creek, the largest tributary of the Nisqually River on the Thurston county side. My wife and I had just moved out to this remote acreage to build a solar-powered log cabin and raise children off the grid. We saw many salmon that winter and the next few. I guess we assumed they would always come back to spawn and raise their own children off the grid. 30 years would pass until we would watch those coho spawning again!

When we first moved out to Powell Creek, our drinking water came directly from the creek. We would often see coho spawning in the beautiful gravels in early December and sometimes late into February as we filled our 5 gallon buckets. I knew they were coho because, as a frequent salmon and steelhead fisherman, I saw the white lips, maroon spawning colors and aggressively hooked jaws of the males.

Then one year no salmon returned. We thought maybe it was just a bad year for salmon. The next year there were no salmon ... and no salmon the next. We weren't aware at first that three culverts a couple miles downstream from our property had failed and the salmon could no longer migrate upstream. When efforts to get the local timber companies, state and county agencies to repair these culverts yielded no results, my two sons decided to raise Nisqually coho in our creek over a three year period, sending over a million baby coho salmon back into the Powell Creek system.



It was tough to see so many carcasses of dead salmon below the failed culverts downstream in the years that followed.

Meanwhile, the Nisqually Land Trust had begun to purchase Powell Creek property, starting in 1990 with the purchase of a third of an acre. Sixteen years later a landmark purchase of 260 acres followed and now the

Land Trust owns over 450 acres of Powell and Elbow Lake Creek property below my house. The Land Trust worked with the Nisqually Indian Tribe, The Nisqually River Council and South Puget Sound Salmon Enhancement to prepare the way for this year's coho return.

Neighbors who live closest to the creek have seen a coho or two each year since the three failed culverts were removed by South Puget Sound Salmon Enhancement in 2008 and a 50 foot long bridge was installed in 2009. "Salmon watchers," volunteering for the Tribe by spending 15 minutes a week at key sites, have seen a couple more, but this is the first year that any of us have seen the coho actually spawning. Before my neighbor David Detrick filmed them, I had only seen a couple of single coho females in the hundreds of hours I had spent walking the creeks. After last year, which featured the lowest coho return on the Nisqually in living memory, I had almost decided to abandon any hope of ever spotting coho again in my creek.

The coho have not quite reached my house yet, but they're getting close. With just a bit more restoration, they've got a fighting chance to reach their historic habitat.

Hope!