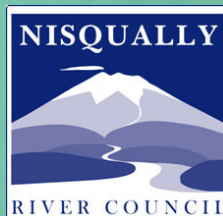


"THE SALMON DANCE, ON ITS FIRST ARRIVAL"

Yil-me-hu

SPRING 2025



THE NISQUALLY
WATERSHED SALMON
RECOVERY NEWSLETTER

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Cover Photo: Students from Beachwood Elementary School toss frozen salmon carcasses into the Mashel River as part of a hands-on learning program with the Nisqually River Education Project.

Photo Credit: NREP



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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.

Nisqually Indian Tribe



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David Troutt
Director of Natural Resources
for Nisqually Indian Tribe

As we move into 2025, a look back to the previous year seems warranted and may provide some view into the new year and beyond. 2024 was a banner year for Nisqually salmon. We experienced a rather large return of natural chinook salmon in terms of numbers and timing. We sampled more fish after November 1st than any previous year. We documented coho salmon in almost all accessible waters in the watershed.

But the biggest surprise and welcomed gift was the return of our unique wild winter chum salmon. We have not had a planned commercial fishery in almost 10 years to protect this ecological and culturally critical important salmon. We fished this year! Our smokehouses were full as were the spawning grounds. Although all the numbers are not yet in, it appears that this return will be at or near a record return.

The 2024 salmon runs in many areas of Puget Sound have been nothing short of remarkable, signaling a significant step forward in the long-standing efforts to restore and protect vital salmon habitats. After years of investment in habitat restoration, policy reforms, and collaborative conservation initiatives, the sight of strong salmon returns is a testament to the success of these efforts. While challenges remain, this year's record salmon runs offer hope for the future of these iconic fish and the communities that depend on them and the importance of patience.

The success of the 2024 salmon runs did not happen by chance. It is the direct result of 30 plus years of dedicated investment in restoration projects and policy changes that prioritize ecosystem health. Key factors contributing to this success include habitat restoration projects to

restore critical spawning and rearing habitats, such as estuary reconnections and streamside replanting, and have created healthier environments for juvenile salmon.

With climate change posing a significant threat to salmon, adaptive measures such as improved water management, reforestation, and riparian shading have helped mitigate rising water temperatures.

Finally, science-based fishing regulations, including adaptive harvest limits and conservation hatchery programs, have played a key role in maintaining sustainable populations. Making changes to long-

standing management paradigms are paying dividends with increased spawning escapements and then the resulting adult returns.

These robust salmon returns serve as a beacon of hope, proving that dedicated conservation efforts coupled with patience to see a response can yield tangible results. Beyond ecological benefits, healthy salmon runs support the regional economy, sustain cultural traditions

and treaty rights, and provide food for predators like our resident orcas, which have also been struggling in recent years.

The great salmon runs of 2024 in Puget Sound stand as a powerful reminder that conservation efforts can make a difference. Investments in habitat protection and restoration are paying off, demonstrating that strategic, science-based approaches can restore balance to ecosystems and revive salmon populations. As we celebrate this achievement, we must also recommit to sustaining these efforts for future generations, ensuring that salmon continue to thrive in the Nisqually River, Puget Sound, and beyond.

We fished this year! Our smokehouses were full as were the spawning grounds. Although all the numbers are not yet in, it appears that this return will be at or near a record return.

PARTNERS UNITE TO CLEANUP MASHIEL RIVER LANDFILL



Photo Credit: GSI Water Solutions

Wetland habitat positioned at the bottom of the slope.



Photo Credit: Jake Pool

A Volkswagen Beetle entrenched into the slope of the landfill.

In the early 1950s, the Town of Eatonville began leasing 2.25 acres from Weyerhaeuser Timber Company for their landfill operations with Pierce County. Located in what is known today as the Nisqually State Park, the Eatonville Landfill sits at the top of a very steep bluff just above a wetland that flows into the Mashel River. Until its closure in 1980, citizens were able to bring a large variety of solid waste materials to the site for long-term disposal and burning. Unfortunately, due to the openness of the site, activities were unable to be closely monitored or documented. Evidence shows that items allowed included, empty barrels, automobile parts and tires, and household appliances.

With the listing of salmon under the Endangered Species Act in the late 90s, several local stakeholders, including the Nisqually Indian Tribe, began to take a closer look at habitat conditions of the Nisqually River and its tributaries. As researchers began to inspect water quality and quantity of the Mashel, several hazardous materials were found. Metals, such as arsenic, copper, hexavalent chromium, lead, petroleum products, and semi-volatile organic compounds were discovered in soil, groundwater, and surface water samples.

These results not only rattled the Nisqually Tribe and its community, but the Town and its residents as well. The site was officially declared and listed as a “Contaminated Site” by the Washington Department

of Ecology in 2020. It became apparent that a plan was needed to clean up the site and funding was needed to implement the work. But who was going to take the lead for convening the relevant parties and finding a solution when the responsibility for the impacts of the site wasn’t clear?

The Nisqually Indian Tribe’s Natural Resources Department took the lead and convened a team of attorneys from Cascadia Law Group to take on this problem and find a solution. Within the year, the team led by Maia Bellon, former Director of the Department of Ecology, had found a path forward with all the local, state, and private parties.

Summer of 2024, Ecology released the Draft Cleanup Action Plan for the former landfill and distributed it for public comment. The proposed plan calls for full remediation of the site, including removal of all waste and contaminated soils. It’s estimated that 23,000 yards of soil will need to be removed—that’s enough to completely fill over 230 football fields! Following the clean-up, long-term monitoring and adaptive management will be implemented, as well as the planting of native trees and shrubs on the property.

Construction is scheduled to begin Summer 2025, with the full restoration expected to take up to ten years for completion.

Additional information can be found at Ecology’s website: <https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/cleanupsearch/site/15271>.



Photo Credit: GSI Water Solutions

A test pit exposes several layers of waste deposited over the life of the landfill.

CONNECTING PEOPLE AND RESTORATION IN THE MIDDLE OHOP

The Ohop Valley is a gorgeous glacially carved gem in the Nisqually Watershed with picturesque views of Mount Rainier and pastoral farmland. Historically, the valley was a salmon's paradise with wetlands, beaver ponds, and cedar forests providing a diverse portfolio of habitats for salmon to grow and thrive. This all changed in the late 1800s. Ohop Creek was channelized, wetlands were drained, and forests were cleared, promoting agriculture and limiting flooding.

The listing of Nisqually Chinook and steelhead under the Endangered Species Act, as well as the impact of declining salmon runs on the Nisqually Indian Tribe's ability to exercise the fishing rights guaranteed with the 1854 Treaty of Medicine Creek, motivated the Tribe and their partners to reimagine the Ohop Valley as a balance between salmon recovery and farmland. The recovery of Ohop has been wildly successful with hundreds of acres of wetland, riparian forest, and stream restored. This next exciting phase will take place in the "middle reach," the most critical section of Ohop for spawning Nisqually Chinook, steelhead, coho, and pink salmon.

The annual flooding of Ohop Creek led early settlers to try everything from redirecting the upper creek into the Puyallup Watershed, ditching the creek, to armoring the bank to redirect flows. These actions, while allowing successful agriculture practices for nearly 200 years, have been detrimental to salmon, destroying large portions of critical habitat. Restoration partners, including the Nisqually Land Trust (NLT) and the South Puget Sound Salmon Enhancement Group, are striving for a balance between keeping the remaining landowners and

their homes from flooding and undoing years of harmful alterations. NLT and the Tribe have been successful in acquiring over 200 acres for protection in the middle Ohop Valley. These properties, along with participating landowners, have opened up the possibilities for increasing the quantity and quality of both instream and riparian habitat for native species.

The next phase of Ohop Creek Restoration, located upstream of previously completed restoration

projects, will significantly improve salmon spawning and rearing habitat by adding large woody debris, creating pools, and removing bank armoring. Additionally, large portions of the floodplain will be replanted to bring back the riparian forest which is important for controlling flooding, shading the stream, and for wildlife habitat, including beavers, who have already begun their own restoration of the creek. Partners are finding creative ways to implement ecosystem restoration while protecting roads, bridges,

and homes. This will involve opening up side channels and creating swales within the valley to direct water away from existing infrastructure, significantly reducing the threat of flooding to landowners.

The continued restoration of the Ohop Valley is a prime example of balancing ecosystem restoration with the needs of rural communities. Landowners who were once skeptical of the Tribe are now helping lead the salmon recovery effort as stewards of the Creek and its salmon. Salmon are a keystone species, connecting ecosystems from the North Pacific to the slopes of Mount. Rainier. They also connect people across the Pacific Northwest from all walks of life and the continuation of the Ohop Creek Restoration Initiative is a wonderful example of this connection.



Photo Credit: SPSSEG

A downed red alder serves as a delicious treat for a busy beaver!

SALMON TOSSING: AN UNFO

Nutrient-dense! Delicious! Frozen! You might think that's the latest protein shake trend, but in this case, it describes the hundreds of pounds of frozen salmon piled in the back of the truck as the Nisqually River Education Project (NREP) rolls up for a salmon carcass tossing field trip. This winter, 300 students took part in the unique experience of tossing frozen salmon into the waters of the Mashel River and Ohop Creek—all in the name of habitat restoration.

Salmon begin their lives in the Nisqually River as tiny fish, heading out to the ocean to grow. By the time they return, they're much larger, their bodies packed with nutrients and minerals from the sea. Historically, when hundreds of thousands of salmon made their way back to spawn, their decomposing bodies naturally enriched the entire ecosystem. Larger salmon runs meant more marine-derived nutrients in the watershed, fueling everything from microbes to bears.

But with today's diminished salmon populations, fewer of those nutrients make their way back upstream—enter the salmon toss! To help restore balance, the Nisqually Indian Tribe donates salmon carcasses from their hatcheries, where fish are processed each October. The carcasses are frozen in massive totes, trucked to key habitats like the Mashel River and Ohop Creek, and then... that's where the students come in.

The first challenge students face is purely mental: Who wants to pick up a dead fish and haul it through the woods? Luckily, the winter weather is on our side—frozen fish don't squish, and they don't smell (much). The next challenge is physical: a solid block of frozen fish is, well, cold. NREP provides thick rubber gloves to insulate students' hands and keep them clean, along with ponchos—because while frozen fish might not be too pungent, any residue that thaws on a hot bus ride home? Best to avoid that and keep the bus drivers and parents happy!

At Boxcar Canyon, on the Mashel River, students walk to the top of the rock formation, fish in

hand. There's always a moment of hesitation from the first student. "We just... toss it in?" But once that first salmon sails through the air, the rest follow in a flurry of flying fish. Students race back down to the water's edge, tracking their salmon as they bob along the river. On an especially cold day, when the river was nearly frozen, one fish floated by on a chunk of ice. A student watched it drift away and mused, "I wish we could have made a floating funeral pyre."

Beyond the simple joy of throwing things into water, students recognize the impact they're making. At Ohop Creek, middle and high schoolers in the G.R.I.T.S Program (Growing Relationships In The Soil) spend part of their school day working on a nearby farm. These students were the first to participate in salmon tossing at Ohop Creek, eager to make history. Armed with wheelbarrows, they made quick work of transporting fish, even wading through shin-deep water to find the best spots. Ever resourceful, they even incorporated the discarded salmon tails (which are clipped to mark tossed fish for biologists) into their composting project.

The experience sparks curiosity and important conversations. Students ask questions about where the salmon go, how long it takes for them to break down, and what other animals rely on their nutrients. They start to make connections—how salmon, trees, insects, and even the smallest bacteria are all linked in this cycle. Many leave the trip not just with cold hands, but with a newfound respect for the river and its inhabitants. Teachers report that weeks later, students are still talking about their fish and how their actions contributed to something bigger than themselves.

From hesitation to hands-on conservation, salmon tossing field trips offer students an unforgettable experience—one that connects them to the river, the salmon, and the cycle of life in a very real way. And, let's be honest: there's just something undeniably fun about chucking a frozen fish into a rushing river.

FORGETTABLE EXPERIENCE

A heartfelt thank you to the Nisqually Indian Tribe for their leadership in salmon recovery and for sharing their knowledge, resources, and frozen fish with the next generation of environmental stewards. Their hard work and dedication ensures that the watershed—and the salmon that depend on it—will continue to thrive into the future.

A Prairie Elementary student carefully balances their salmon.



NREP Director Dawy Clark shares the plan for the day with students from Cougar Mountain Middle School.



Students get familiar with their fish!



Students at the GRITS Farm prepare to load up the wheelbarrows.



THE RESILIENCY OF NISQUALLY CHINOOK PROVIDES HOPE FOR RECOVERY



Photo Credit: Craig Smith

Nisqually Natural Resources staff take biological samples from spawned Chinook carcasses.

Nisqually Fall Chinook, along with all Chinook in Puget Sound, were listed as ‘threatened’ under the federal Endangered Species Act 25 years ago. The general consensus by salmon managers at that time was that the historic population of Chinook in the Nisqually River was wiped out by habitat degradation, overfishing, dam construction, and other impacts. Additionally, genetic testing in the Nisqually in the late 1990s and early 2000s showed that the Chinook left in the Nisqually were part of the hatchery population originally from the Green River.

Even though the native Nisqually Chinook was presumed to be lost, the Nisqually Indian Tribe’s goal was to recover naturally producing Chinook to restore the Treaty Right fishery on Chinook and support regional recovery of the species. The Tribe

developed the Nisqually Chinook Recovery Plan (2001) under the premise that native Nisqually River fall and spring Chinook were extirpated over half a century ago, so the first step to recovery was to restore habitat throughout the watershed and the Nisqually Reach nearshore to provide a home for a naturally reproducing Chinook population.

Over the last 25 years, which is five generations of Chinook salmon, the Nisqually Indian Tribe and several non-profit and governmental partners have led an effort to restore and protect tens of thousands of acres of habitat in one of the most ambitious watershed restoration efforts in the world. In order to track the effectiveness of the restoration investment, the Tribe and their management partners, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), have



Photo Credit: Walker Duval



Photo Credit: Rene Bracero

been monitoring the abundance, distribution, and ecology of Chinook for decades and have recently made an amazing discovery.

While collecting biological and genetics data to evaluate how Chinook are responding to the habitat improvements and management actions in the Nisqually, the Tribe's Natural Resources Department and WDFW has discovered that wild, self-sustaining Nisqually Chinook are not extinct but have recovered from near extinction to persist as a highly productive and incredibly diverse population. The "discovery" of this wild stock is quite remarkable and represents a watershed moment in Nisqually Chinook recovery. Habitat restoration and harvest changes in Puget Sound and in the Nisqually River has allowed these fish to reverse their slide toward extinction and to reassert themselves as the "Kings" of Nisqually salmon within just five generations. These Chinook are significantly larger in body size than the hatchery population, have a much longer run time, and utilize the entire Nisqually River for spawning and rearing.

The Tribe has revered, protected, managed, and depended on Nisqually salmon stocks for countless generations. The rapid industrialization of the Salish Sea post-colonization and the resulting impacts on salmon populations has

threatened the cultural connection to salmon with severe restrictions on fishing seasons to protect depressed stocks. On the Nisqually River, the litany of habitat, hatchery, and harvest impacts on Nisqually Chinook was vast and swift, leaving managers to hypothesize that the wild Nisqually Fall Chinook stock was extirpated. Fortunately, the

Nisqually Indian Tribe and WDFW conduct extensive monitoring and evaluation which enabled the managers to find this amazing genetically distinct, naturally producing, wild Chinook population in the Nisqually River.

This finding is a true turning point away from the era of degradation and loss to restoration and recovery of not only Chinook salmon in the Nisqually River, but also Puget Sound Chinook as a whole. There is still much to learn about the life history, abundance,

and productivity of the local Nisqually Chinook stock, so monitoring and evaluation programs will need to remain rigorous to meet this challenge. There is also much to be excited about. The return of our unique Nisqually Chinook gives us tremendous hope both in the Nisqually and the Puget Sound region, as well as the verification that all of our combined efforts and investments can, and do, make a difference. The future looks bright for the king of salmon in the Nisqually.



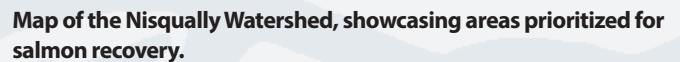
Photo Credit: Walker Duval

Nisqually fisherman land a local Nisqually Chinook.



At the bottom of this pyramid of recovery are 25 “Lead Entities,” each of which operates as a hub for the recovery of their local salmon stocks. Each LE is established at a selected organization, staffing a coordinator to lead the effort locally. They work within their watershed(s) to organize local partners, stakeholders and Tribes, develop and maintain recovery plans and strategies, and implement high priority habitat restoration and conservation projects. For the Nisqually Watershed, the Nisqually Indian Tribe is that organization. The Tribe leads the way to recovery, bringing together local partners to ensure local priorities are implemented using the most up to date science available. The Tribe also houses and maintains the watershed’s two active recovery plans for ESA-listed Chinook salmon and steelhead trout.

Each year, the LE facilitates an annual grant round that helps allocate funding from the state's Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB) and federal Pacific Coast Salmon Recovery Funding, as well as Puget Sound Acquisition and Restoration and other state funding sources, to much needed local salmon



This process leads to over \$2.5 million of funding being put to work in the Nisqually Watershed each biennium. This funding not only directly funds restoration and permanent protection of salmon habitat across miles and acres of salmon habitat, but is used to help leverage millions of dollars in other local, state, and federal funding.

HONORING KAREN FRASER:

A LEGACY OF STEWARDSHIP

On a warm summer evening framed by brilliant views of Mount Rainier and the Nisqually River at Wilcox Family Farms, former state senator Karen Fraser looks out at the mountain with a smile and hopeful expression. Tonight, she is being honored as the fourth recipient of the Daniel J. Evans Nisqually Stewardship Award and joins the ranks of fellow honorees Billy Frank Jr., Congressman Norm Dicks, and Jim Wilcox. It's a night that only happens once every five years and while the award offers a day of celebration, it also acts as an opportunity to look back at our shared history here in Nisqually.

The Nisqually River has always been an invaluable part of Washington's natural and cultural landscape, gaining formal recognition as a river of statewide significance in 1972. A decade after the designation, Governor Daniel J. Evans' administration called for a plan to protect the Nisqually Watershed. The result was the creation of the Nisqually River Task Force in 1987 and its first chair was none other than Karen Fraser. Already known for making history as the first woman elected Mayor of Lacey in 1976, Fraser was serving as a Thurston County Commissioner at the time and would continue her career as a public servant in the State House of Representatives and State Senate.

At the award ceremony, Karen Fraser reiterates that it was those crucial first years of the task force, when concerns of governmental overreach flared, that she and her colleagues' focus on collaboration helped shape the future of our watershed. Under her leadership, the group committed to voluntary action establishing a new model for how local, state, federal, and tribal interests could all work together to co-manage our natural resources. No longer were economic, social, and environmental goals thought of as separate, but instead intrinsically linked to the overall health of our watershed and communities.

It's clear from her speech that Fraser has been committed to spreading the model of Nisqually stewardship to natural landscapes throughout Washington State. Her dedication to partnerships and working towards a sustainable future led to the creation of the Nisqually River Council (NRC) and has had a

significant impact in establishing Nisqually as a nationwide model for collaborative conservation. This award, named in recognition of Governor Evans' efforts four decades ago and presented by the Nisqually River Foundation (NRF), carries with it the legacy of all those who desire to protect our natural environment.

The Nisqually we see today with an established wildlife refuge, robust outdoor education program, and engaged community was once just an idea. It was only through working together with our partners and neighbors that it has been brought to life and this same collaboration is how we can continue to build and establish a healthy environment. The NRF chose to acknowledge Karen Fraser's career-long dedication and commitment to these ideas as we

work to uphold our mission to protect and promote the watershed for current and future generations.

Thank you to Trent Hart who designed the award featuring three raku-fired ceramic pink salmon on a smoked tile base etched with an image of the capitol and to event sponsors: Nisqually Indian Tribe, Wilcox Family Farms, Cascadia Law Group, JZK Inc., Bill Bryant & Barbara Feasey, Chateau Ste Michelle, South Puget Sound Community College, & St Benedict's Episcopal Church.



Photo Credit: Matt Brickey

The night's honoree, Karen Fraser.



Photo Credit: Matt Brickey

NRF Board Members honor Karen Fraser with a one of a kind piece of artwork from artist Trent Hart. From the left: Jim Wilcox, Maia Bellon, David Troutt, Justin Hall, Bill Bryant, Karen Fraser.

NREP TRAINS STUDENTS



NREP's Environmental Educator Colbi Stewart collects posts following a busy day of planting trees! Photo Credit: NREP



Eatonville Middle School students pose with their newly planted tree.

Another crisp fall morning dawns in the Ohop Valley as Nisqually River Education Project (NREP) staff eagerly await the arrival of a school bus. When it pulls up, dozens of students spill out, forming a circle to receive their instructions for the day: restoring the delicate riparian habitat near Ohop Creek by planting native trees and shrubs.

This creek has been the focus of a multi-decade restoration effort, led by the Nisqually Indian Tribe and their partners at the Nisqually Land Trust and the South Puget Sound Salmon Enhancement Group. The Nisqually River Foundation supports this work by recruiting student volunteers through NREP's partnerships with local schools.

This past November and December, more than 1,800 students—ranging from fourth graders to college students—helped plant an impressive 2,300 native trees and shrubs.

Each planting trip begins with an introduction to the area and their mission for the day. NREP staff stress the importance of planting trees correctly—after all, a single well-planted tree that thrives is far more beneficial to salmon than a dozen hastily planted ones that don't survive their first year. Many students come prepared, having already learned about riparian restoration in classroom visits led by NREP Environmental Educators Alex and Colbi. They take pride in demonstrating their knowledge, eagerly listing the five key ways trees support salmon habitat:

- Fallen leaves create habitat for stream bugs—aka salmon food!
- Root systems stabilize soil and prevent erosion.
- Photosynthesis produces oxygen, which diffuses into the water, helping salmon breathe.
- Tree canopies provide shade, keeping water cool and comfortable for salmon.
- Fallen branches and logs create slow-moving pools where salmon can rest.

Once introductions wrap up, it's time to gear up. Gloves, jackets, boots, and shovels—provided by NREP—ensure students stay warm and dry, even in the November rain. Excitement builds as they grab their tools and head into the

ENTS IN “TREE-P-R”

field. After a quick demonstration on proper planting technique, students disperse, searching for the perfect plant to choose. The plants are pre-positioned according to a carefully designed plan—species that thrive in clusters are grouped together, while taller trees are kept clear of power lines and roads.

The first step—clearing the planting area of grass—quickly proves more challenging than expected. “You made it look easy!” is a common refrain as students struggle to break through the tough grass layer. With some encouragement—and the reminder that NREP staff have plenty of practice and are here to help—students soon find their rhythm. After the hole is dug, they use “Tree-P-R” (gently compressing the pot’s sides like CPR), to ease the plant out, nestle it into its new home, and carefully crumble the soil clods to help its roots spread. Finally, they complete the process by “dancing” around the sapling to gently tamp down the soil.

As the day wraps up, students gather in a closing circle to reflect on their work and how it made them feel. Each chooses a single word to sum up their experience. Some go with the obvious—“cold” or “muddy”—and they aren’t wrong! Others take a deeper approach, offering words like “powerful” and “helpful.” And, of course, there’s always a classic favorite: “fun.”

Beyond the hard work and fun in the field, these planting trips foster a deep connection between students and their local environment. As they dig, plant, and get their hands dirty, they gain a firsthand understanding of what it takes to restore and protect a watershed. Many leave with a newfound appreciation for the role they play in caring for their environment, excited to share their experience with family and friends. These moments of learning and stewardship are at the heart of NREP’s mission—empowering young

people to become active participants in conservation.

None of this work would be possible without the leadership of the Nisqually Indian Tribe, the South Puget Sound Salmon Enhancement Group and the Nisqually Land Trust, whose dedication has been instrumental in restoring Ohop Creek and the broader Nisqually watershed. Their vision and commitment to salmon recovery continue to inspire the next generation of environmental stewards. Thanks to their efforts—and the thousands of students who lend a helping hand each year—this landscape is being transformed into a thriving habitat where salmon, wildlife, and people can flourish for generations to come.



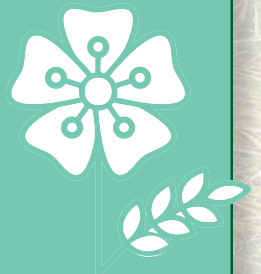
Students from Shining Mountain Elementary show off their muddy gloves—proof they were working hard!



with their new snowberry plant! Photo Credit: NREP

WHAT DID WE PLANT?

- Vine Maple
- Big Leaf Maple
- Red Alder
- Serviceberry
- Black Hawthorne
- Oregon Ash
- Ocean Spray
- Tall Oregon Grape
- Western Red Cedar
- Mock Orange
- Pacific Nine Bark
- Sitka Spruce
- Black Cottonwood
- Douglas Fir
- Red Flowering Currant
- Nootka Rose
- Clustered Wild Rose
- Scouler's Willow
- Red Elderberry
- Rose Spirea
- Snowberry



NWF: CELEBRATING 35 YEARS



Photo Credit: Emma Turner

This past September, as the salmon returned to the Nisqually River and the trees throughout the watershed began expressing their brilliant displays of color, we gathered with our community for the 35th annual Nisqually Watershed Festival. While the event celebrated over three decades of community science, art, and collaboration, it also served as a place to gather for all those who love the outdoors and the unique wonders of the Nisqually Watershed. With the sound of bagpipes, drums, and traditional songs announcing the start of the day, attendees explored all that the festival had to offer.

"Critter Corridor" was abuzz with activity as families rushed to decorate colorful wooden salmon, paint real salmon to print on t-shirts and paper, and interact with dozens of local non-profit organizations. Surrounding these booths were bear furs, survival crafts, and of course, FIN the 25-foot giant wild salmon! As staff walked the grounds announcing upcoming performances and activities, it was obvious that these personal connections to our local environmental community are what make this event such an impactful celebration. Festival goers may arrive as newcomers, but they leave ready to explore all that Nisqually has to offer throughout every season of the year.

As morning gave way to afternoon, percussion and samba dancing electrified the Mainstage, which was followed by an array of large birds being introduced by The Falconer. Onlookers stared with mouths

agape, as kids literally jumped out of their seats, as they watched each bird devour a mouse in its own unique fashion. The wide eyes of the audience were met with those of owls and vultures whose impressive wingspans were a match for their mighty beaks and talons.

The theme of this year's festival was "Salmon of the Watershed," and amidst the "Insect Extravaganza" and birds of prey, there were also beautiful pieces of local student artwork on display depicting the species of salmon that call the Nisqually their home. The award-winning artists were celebrated on the Mainstage, as were the Nisqually Stream Stewards.



Photo Credit: Emma Turner

These guests, as well as hundreds of others, sampled delicious treats and fair foods, including salmon barbecue plates, at the festival's food court. As the music drifted over to the tables, guests welcomed the reprieve before jumping back into the next activity awaiting them

– perhaps a chance to win even more trading cards from the Killer Whale Tales.

From dogfish dissections to salmon storytelling, we're grateful we had the chance to connect with our community and share our love of the science, nature, history, and people that make Nisqually all that it is. We're already counting down the days until this fall when we get to celebrate 36 years of sharing in the wonders of Nisqually with our community. Mark your calendars for the last Saturday of September and we'll see you then!

Learn more & get involved: <https://nisquallyriver.org/festival/>

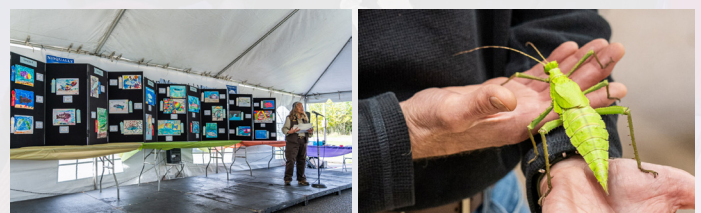


Photo Credit: Emma Turner



Something's Bugging these Kindergarteners!

This winter, Assistant Director Julia Fregonara and Environmental Educator Colbi Stewart of the Nisqually River Education Project brought the magic of freshwater life to three kindergarten classrooms at Eatonville Elementary School. Their mission? To introduce young learners to the fascinating world of benthic macroinvertebrates—tiny but mighty streambugs that play a crucial role in the ecosystem, especially for salmon!

The lesson kicked off with the “Benthic Macroinvertebrate Dance” to help students remember what these creatures are all about. They crouched low to represent “benthic” (since these bugs live at the bottom of streams), jumped up with arms wide for “macro” (meaning big enough to see without a microscope), and wiggled wildly for “invertebrate” (because they lack a backbone). With their energy high and curiosity sparked, it was time for the real excitement—the live streambug investigation!

Students carefully used spoons to transfer the wriggling streambugs into magnifying viewers, getting an up-close look at their intricate features. Many were amazed to learn that bugs could live underwater and showed impressive care in keeping them submerged. One teacher marveled

at how intently focused the students were—at one point, the room was completely silent as they all concentrated on their delicate “bug transfers.”

Among the crowd favorites was the caddisfly, a master builder that constructs its home from rocks and sticks for protection. The energetic alderfly also stole the show, inspiring students to create their own dances mimicking the bug’s lively movements. Excitement peaked when Colbi revealed a surprise guest—a lively crayfish, far larger than the other creatures, which drew gasps and squeals of delight.

As the lesson wrapped up, many students wished they could take their new insect friends home as pets. Though they were initially disappointed to learn the bugs would be released back into their habitat, their enthusiasm quickly shifted to the idea of exploring their own local waterways. Many eagerly shared stories of visiting ponds, streams, and the Mashel River, promising to keep an eye out for their own streambugs in the wild.

This hands-on experience not only introduced students to an unseen world beneath the water’s surface but also deepened their connection to the environment around them. We are grateful to the Nisqually Indian Tribe for providing site access for the collection of these fascinating streambugs, allowing students to experience firsthand the diversity of life in their local waters. By fostering curiosity and care for these tiny but vital creatures, the Nisqually River Education Project continues to inspire the next generation of watershed stewards—one streambug at a time.

Students deliberating over which bug they want to look at first. Photo Credit: NREP



Students carefully attempting to transfer a streambug into their viewer. Photo Credit: NREP



A student uses the side portal on the viewer to examine the bug's underside. Photo Credit: NREP



Nisqually Indian Tribe



Natural Resources Department

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MEET ROSE:

NATURAL RESOURCE'S NEW EXECUTIVE SECRETARY!



I am Rose Wells, also known as Rose Henry. I am new to the Natural Resources Department, the Executive Secretary. My father is the late Richard Wells Jr. I absolutely love my new position here! I love nature, I love animals, our Mother Earth and feel strong about our Constitutional rights as Nisqually Tribal Members.

Previously I worked for Tribal Council and then ran the Victims of Crime Department. After my father passed, I took a year off work to focus on healing. I worked at Northwest Trek as a liaison between Northwest Trek and the Nisqually Indian Tribe. This was a grant funded project and such a wonderful opportunity. I was able to take four of Nisqually's Youth out to Northwest Trek and get some experience with animal, groundskeeping, and animal education.

I look forward to working in the Natural Resources Department and with all the Nisqually Tribal members.

