



WaterTalk

Alaska Idaho Oregon Washington

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Salmon Recovery, A Focus for Region 10

A note from Elbert Moore, Director of EPA's Office of Ecosystems and Communities

In the last two decades, no other federal environmental law has had more effects on ecosystems and communities of the Pacific Northwest than the Endangered Species Act. The listing of salmon and steelhead has the attention of local, state, federal and tribal governments, as well as businesses, environmental groups and the general public. Consequently, salmon recovery is one of the most relevant environmental management and public policy issues facing the region.

A key focus for EPA Region 10 programs is protecting and restoring habitat for salmon and bull trout. Much of our grant money is directed at this issue, including funds for wetlands and nonpoint source management, regional geographic initiatives, forest planning, and state revolving loan funds. Our decisions on sediment management and pesticide use, and our review of environmental impact statements, all play a major role in salmon habitat protection and recovery.

Because much of our work is related to salmon recovery, we are working to better define EPA's value-added role in addressing this issue. We are

also identifying both short and long term measures of success to assist us in periodically assessing our progress.

Recovery of salmon and steelhead will require unprecedented efforts and sacrifices. Successful recovery, however, will mean survival of a cultural and economic icon, and help assure that the environment and the quality of life of the entire region are preserved. Saving the salmon means saving the ecosystems upon which they depend, and that translates to a very broad-based recovery of habitats, as well as reform of hatchery and harvest management, and hydropower operations.

One of the major challenges we face is how to most strategically make progress to address salmon recovery in the region.

Derek Poon, EPA's Regional Salmon Ecologist, is working to help assess EPA's strategic directions. More details about salmon recovery planning are available at www.nwfsc.noaa.gov/cbd/trt/. (Although the web site is sponsored by the National Marine Fisheries Service, EPA is a partner in the effort and our strategy will complement the information you find on the web site.) Your thoughts are welcome. Send your suggestions to Derek at poon.derek@epa.gov or call 206/553-4497 or 1-800-424-4372 x4497.

In This Issue...



EPA News to update you on agency activities



Tools to clue you in on resources, publications, opportunities, and services



WaterWords to share stories from communities around the Greater Northwest



Spotlight to showcase success stories and environmental stars



Ecosystem to provide news that goes beyond water topics

This issue's "Spotlight" shines on a new topic. The following article offers a personal and interesting profile of a long-time EPA employee, and the adventures which landed her in the Director's seat at EPA's Alaska Office.

Meet Marcia Combes, Director of EPA's Alaska Operations Offices

Throughout her 14-year EPA career in Alaska, Marcia Combes, 41, faced many challenges, but making Alaska her home was a major one. Today, as Director of EPA's Alaska Operations Offices, she recalls how it happened.

As a chemistry major at Creighton University in Nebraska, Combes realized she did not want to work in a lab. She grew up spending time on her relatives' farm and loved the outdoors. "I wanted to go to a place that had mountains and fresh air." Instead, she went to work as an auditor for an insurance company, the job she held throughout college to pay for her education. One day, when the personnel director asked her about her plans, Combes said she wanted to go to Alaska. The director had friends who drove to Alaska every summer to fish. A little while later, "I left for Alaska with complete strangers, my parents sobbing in the driveway."

The trip covered 3,000 miles, across three U.S. states and three Canadian provinces. "Three days into the trip I wondered, what have I done?" she recalls, but it was too late to turn back.

Her adventure lasted for 19 years. At first, she worked for a recreational company. Then she interned with the Indian Health Service and constructed water and wastewater systems, doing surveys and running water pipes. "I just love being in the field," she says. "That's what I miss in this job."

Combes began her career with EPA under an arrangement that lets students work while attending school. This arrangement allowed her to study engineering at the University of Alaska. Over time she held various EPA positions, and in January 2000 she became Director of EPA's Alaska Operations Offices.



Combes (left) and EPA's Administrator Whitman tour Alaska.

For Combes today, the adventure is still alive, and she finds time to indulge her first love – the outdoors – by exploring mountains, rivers and glaciers. The most exciting part of her job is the challenge to protect the environment. "Since Alaska became a state in 1959, we don't have older industries or the same pollution problems as other states," she said. "We can get ahead of pollution in the environment and make a difference for generations to come."

For years, EPA's Alaska office has been doing just that. It cleaned up eight Superfund sites, mostly Department of Defense installations. Combes notes, "We are close to the end in cleanup of all Superfund sites in Alaska."

Much work remains. "One of the major issues is rural sanitation and protection of subsistence cultures," said Combes. She is referring to the 229 federally recognized tribes in Alaska whose members depend on fish, animals, plants and berries for food. "Seafood processing, oil drilling and mining all affect the values of the culture. We have to balance development with food subsistence and the way of life of Native Americans." The harsh climate poses unique challenges to maintain safe drinking water and proper sewage disposal.

Spotlight on Marcia Combes

(continued from previous page)

Alaska natives affected by this issue live in villages scattered throughout the state, ranging in size from 25 to 1,000 people. Most villages rely on individual diesel generators for energy. More than 30 percent of homes still lack basic indoor sewage systems. EPA has provided technical assistance to more than half of these villages to carry out their environmental projects.

EPA is the primary source of funds for improving drinking water, sewage systems and solid waste disposal in rural Alaska. Combes points to her work under the Indian General Assistance Program to help the tribes develop environmental capacity to carry out projects in their communities. The results of this work include school-based environmental education projects, community recycling initiatives, and training for natives in water-sampling techniques.

The visit of EPA Administrator Whitman in July, 2001 was the highlight of Combes' career. Combes traveled with the Administrator throughout Alaska. "It was an energizing experience to be around her," Combes said.

What are her plans? "This is as exciting a career as I can imagine," said Combes. "In ten years I may be looking to spend part of the time somewhere else. But it doesn't get more challenging than being in Alaska. This is an incredible opportunity to make a difference in our world."

Comment on EPA's Review of Drinking Water Rules

EPA has completed a detailed review of 69 existing drinking water standards. Based on that review, the agency is requesting comment on its preliminary decisions to revise the standard for total coliforms and not to revise, at present, the remaining 68 standards for chemical contaminants.

Coliform bacteria are indicators of possible microbiological contamination. The agency's revisions to the standard will be designed to better indicate potential risks to public health. EPA also examined standards for 68 chemical contaminants and determined that, at this stage, they should not be revised. However, the agency notes that new health assessments are currently underway for 36 of these contaminants. The results of those studies will be considered as

soon as they become available, and the agency will decide whether revisions for these standards are warranted.

Under the Safe Drinking Water Act, EPA must periodically review existing standards and, if good science indicates there is a threat to public health, revise them. The current review addresses standards developed before 1997. The public has the opportunity to comment on these preliminary decisions for the next 60 days. The agency also will hold a public meeting and consult with EPA's Science Advisory Board. The results of the review were published in the *Federal Register* on April 17. The list of standards is available in a fact sheet with additional information at <http://www.epa.gov/safewater> on the Internet.

EPA Initiative to Protect America's Waterways

EPA recently announced a new initiative to protect, preserve and restore waterways across the country. The Administration's 2003 budget for EPA proposes \$20 million in grants for community-based watershed approaches. These funds would support efforts in up to 20 local watersheds and technical assistance for other communities.

The initiative will focus on high-value watershed resources where strong and diverse partnerships exist, and where clear objectives are aimed at cleaner water. The initiative will support innovative use of programs like

pollutant trading, watershed permits under the Clean Water Act, enforcement, local education and other creative approaches.

EPA will seek the views of Congress, states, local governments, agricultural groups, environmental groups, industry, and watershed practitioners in designing and implementing this initiative. A *Federal Register* Notice announcing a 60-day comment period will be issued soon. For more information, visit <http://www.epa.gov/owow/watershed/initiativefs.html>. Or, call Bevin Reid, EPA, 206/553-1566 or 1-800-424-4372, or e-mail reid.bevin@epa.gov.

2002, Year of Clean Water

October 18, 2002 marks the 30th Anniversary of the federal Clean Water Act. This date represents a milestone in the efforts to protect our nation's water resources. It also offers an opportunity to enhance public appreciation for the importance of our water resources, celebrate successes, build a better understanding of remaining challenges and solutions, and rekindle the public stewardship ethic and support for watershed protection.

In support of these goals, Congress and a number of national organizations have proclaimed 2002 as the **Year of Clean Water**. America's Clean Water Foundation, a nonprofit organization serving as the primary sponsor and national coordinator of the Year of Clean Water, is leading a number of events. These events are designed to promote public involvement, provide education and outreach, support technical exchange, and document the status of water quality since the initial passage of the 1972 Clean Water Act. One event is National Water Monitoring Day, featured in an accompanying article.

For details about Year of Clean Water activities, visit the web site at www.yearofcleanwater.org.

On this site you also can get information on:

- history of the Clean Water Act.
- state and federal Year of Clean Water proclamations.
- Year of Clean Water publications, videos, posters and bookmarks.
- resources for kids.

Perhaps you will organize your own Year of Clean Water activity! The Clean Water Foundation can be reached at 202/898-0908.

Mark Your Calendars for National Water Monitoring Day!

It's time to start thinking about **National Water Monitoring Day!** Volunteer monitors, federal, state, Tribal and local monitoring staff, and citizens are invited to register for this special event. And, mark your calendar now for **October 18**, the 30th anniversary of the Clean Water Act.

One of a series of events celebrating 2002 as the Year of Clean Water, National Water Monitoring Day is designed to educate the public about water quality issues and the role of monitoring and volunteers; encourage partnerships between volunteer monitors and water monitoring agencies; take a snapshot of water quality 30 years after the passage of the Clean Water Act;

acknowledge the accomplishments of the Act; and identify work that still needs to be done. Planning is spearheaded by America's Clean Water Foundation and representatives from agencies and volunteer monitoring organizations.

Monitors will take to the waters on or about October 18. All protocols, equipment, and monitoring methods will be welcome. Even classrooms and citizens who've never tested their water can participate with an inexpensive Year of Clean Water kit. Pre-register your location online before September 30. For more information, and to pre-register or order a kit, visit www.yearofcleanwater.org.

Watershed Award Program Seeks Applicants

Applications are now being accepted for the **CF Industries National Watershed Award**. This annual award recognizes corporate and community excellence in watershed protection. Each year, one corporation and three communities are recognized for their leadership.

Administered by the Conservation Fund, the award focuses on innovative, non-regulatory

approaches to improving water quality. Particular emphasis is placed on local partnerships that demonstrate the success of economic incentives, voluntary initiatives and education. Application forms are due June 1. For an application and more information, call or email Beth Koonse at 304/876-2815 or b.koonse@freshwaterinstitute.org. Or visit the web site at www.conservationfund.org.



Resource Helps Education Grant Applicants

EPA announces its newest environmental education publication, **Great Grants: Environmental Education Success Stories of EPA Region 10, Volume II**. This booklet provides an overview of the regional projects funded under the National Environmental Education Act from 1996 through 1998.

The booklet can assist potential grantees in project design, help reduce duplication of efforts, give an understanding of the breadth of EPA's regional education grant program, and provide educators with ideas and inspiration. For each grant there is a description of the purpose and goals, the education

methods used, the results and products, the challenges, and successes in educational and environmental terms.

For a free copy, call EPA's Public Environmental Resource Center toll free at 1-800-424-4372 or 206/553-1200.

Booklet Shows Enviro Ed Funding Sources

As a service to the education community, EPA Region 10's Clearinghouse for Environmental Education has compiled a catalog of **Environmental Education Sources for the Pacific Northwest**.

This 40-page resource lists a wide variety of grant sources for educators. It includes eligibility information, deadlines, and contact information. For a free copy, call 1-800-424-4372 or 206/553-1200.



Skykomish Students Win President's Award For Video

A video project has earned six Skykomish high school students recognition from President Bush and EPA. Begun as a class project, **An Oily Sky** documents the issue of oil seeping through the soil from an old railroad fueling station in the community. The documentary was one of 10 national winners in the EPA-sponsored **President's Environmental Youth Award** program. The students and their teacher, Don Emerson, received their award at a national ceremony in the White House Rose Garden.

The video project raised public awareness, and documented how oil had been seeping into the

Skykomish River as early as the 1920s but was dismissed as being a minor problem. Studies in the 1990s found about 160,000 gallons of underground oil. Some recovery efforts were begun, but by 2000 only 700 gallons of the oil had been recovered and oil was still seeping into the river. Thanks in part to this class project, local and state officials have started work on remedial action. A first step in the cleanup took place last summer by the building of a barrier wall to keep oil out of the river.

The President's Environmental Youth Awards program is celebrating 31 years of recognizing student excellence and achieve-

ment. Each year, one outstanding project from each region is presented with a Presidential plaque at an award ceremony. All participants receive certificates. Youth from kindergarten through high school can participate. The program is aimed at encouraging individuals, school classes, summer camps, public interest groups, and youth organizations to promote environmental awareness and positive community involvement.

For more information visit: www.epa.gov/enviroed/awards.html. Or call Sally Hanft, EPA, at 206/553-1207 or 1-800-424-4372, or email hanft.sally@epa.gov.



Showcase: Nonpoint Education Products

The Washington Department of Ecology has launched an online clearinghouse of environmental education products about nonpoint pollution. **Showcase** is an innovative and easy-to-use clearinghouse of tools for Northwest environmental educators looking for outstanding existing products related to nonpoint water pollution. The products can serve as models, or perhaps can be adapted or directly distributed by educators who want to take

advantage of proven successes. The site provides contact information as well as other useful background information, including how to obtain the products.

More than 115 educational products, ranging from CDs and publications to videos and classroom materials, were reviewed against four criteria: execution, effectiveness, relevance and adaptability. "Adaptability" would allow others to customize the

product for their own location. Eighty products are now listed on the site, and Ecology continues to review new candidate products. There's an online form for nominating education products.

Showcase is now available on Ecology's web page, at <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/forms/showcase/>. For details, call Annie Phillips, Ecology, at 360/407-6408 or e-mail aphi461@ecy.wa.gov.

Need Capacity Building Help?

Here's a new **resource for watershed groups and local governments** seeking help with capacity building. An EPA web site designed by the Nonpoint Source Capacity Building and Funding Work Group offers links to technical tools for scientific or engineering support, information technology, or help with legal issues, project management, outreach and planning. It also provides links to resources for activities such as permitting, enforcement, contracting, fund raising and resource management. Visit the site at <http://www.epa.gov/owow/nps/capacity>.

Water Efficiency In Your Home

Learn what you can do to reduce water use in your home. Take a virtual tour of the **Water Saver Home** website at www.h2ouse.net. This website, developed by the California Urban Water Conservation Council in partnership with EPA, helps you find water savings opportunities in each area of your home.

There are many ways to save water in the home – detecting and fixing leaky faucets, installing high efficiency clothes washers and toilets, and watering the lawn and garden with the minimum amount of water needed. Fixing a silent toilet leak may save as much as 500 gallons per day. Installing high efficiency plumbing fixtures and

appliances can help a typical family of four reduce indoor water use by one-third, save about \$95 per year on its water and sewer bill, and cut energy use by as much as six percent.

Water efficiency plays an important role not only in protecting water sources and improving water quality, but also in reducing the amount of energy used to treat, pump and heat water – currently about eight percent of U.S. energy demand. Water heating accounts for 19 percent of home energy use. If 20 percent of U.S. homes used high efficiency clothes washers, national energy savings could be 285 billion BTUs per day, enough to supply the needs of over one million homes.



Learn About Volunteer Wetlands Monitoring

EPA now offers **Volunteer Wetlands Monitoring: An Introduction and Resource Guide**. This resource, available only

on-line, explains why and how people monitor wetlands. It also briefly describes a few of the handbooks and manuals that

offer detailed information on wetland monitoring for the layperson. Visit www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands/monitor/volmonitor.html



Beneficial Landscaping: Attract Wildlife with Native Plants

Spring is a great time to re-establish our lovely native flora in landscaped areas to improve habitat for wildlife (and to reap the many other environmental, economic and aesthetic benefits)! Joan Cabreza of EPA's Aquatic Resources Unit, a seasoned natural landscaper and Native Plant Steward, has developed a wonderful list of pointers for this purpose.

Basic Principles

1. Work with your site, don't fight it. Identify the micro-habitats (every yard has them - *see column to right*) and find plants that fit your site's special conditions.
2. Strive to provide all four elements of ideal wildlife habitat: food, water, shelter, space.
3. Use local native species when possible. They are less disease-prone; require less care; conserve water and energy; attract wildlife; and are attuned to local climate cycles.
4. Strive for diversity of food sources and diversity of habitat. Food sources include seeds, nectar, fruit, nuts, pollen and insects. Habitat could include deciduous and evergreen plants, rocks and large wood.
5. Use at least three layers: overstory, understory and groundcover.
6. Preserve existing vegetation and micro-habitats where possible to preserve healthy soil fungi.
7. Use groundcovers; avoid creating areas of bare soil or bark.
8. Minimize pruning to increase shelter/cover. Leave low branches on shrubs.
9. Avoid pesticides and other chemicals. Learn to tolerate some natural damage, and let a natural good-bug/bad-bug balance develop.

Backyard Micro-habitats

Look for the following micro-habitats, then choose plants according to the conditions and what function you want to provide in the garden (spring flowers, fall fruit, *etc.*).

- Sunny dry habitats
- Sunny wet habitats
- Moist shady habitats
- Dry shady habitats
- Really soggy habitats (saturated soil)
- Hedgerows and edges
- Large wood (stumps, old logs) habitats
- Stony habitats (rock piles, rock walls)

Also consider things like very windy areas, areas of really poor soil, pockets of cold, or areas of high foot traffic when choosing a plant, to be sure it can stand up to tough conditions.

For more information on this or other topics in Beneficial Landscaping, contact Elaine Somers at 206/553-2966, 1-800-424-4372, somers.elaine@epa.gov.

Or, visit our website at www.epa.gov/r10earth/bl.htm

May

American Wetlands Month, Save Our Streams Program, 1-800-284-4952, www.iwla.org/sos.awm.

5-11: National Drinking Water Week, American Water Works Association, 303/794-7711, www.awwa.org.

8-10: Environmental Health: Protecting Children, Olympia, Washington. Washington Department of Health, (360) 236-3071, www.wseha.org.

20-21: Urban Wetlands: Sustaining Multiple Functions, Portland, Oregon. Oregon State University, 503/725-4832, 1-800-547-8887 x4832, www.cwest.orst.edu/wetlands/conference/

31: Living On the Edge: Grassroots Watershed Planning in the Pacific Northwest — A Satellite Conference. Downlinks in AK, ID, OR, and WA Cooperative Extension Offices. <http://wawater.wsu.edu/living/flyer.htm>, Jan Seago, 360-786-5445 x7911.

June

2-5: Wind Power 2002 Conference and Exhibition, Portland, Oregon. American Wind Energy Association, www.awea.org/conference/index.html, 202/383-2500.

20-22: Collaborative Planning for the Metropolitan Landscape, an International Workshop on Sustainable Land Use Planning, Bellingham, Washington. Western Washington University, 360/650-2132 x2133, <http://www.ac.wvu.edu/~huxley/ISOMUL>.

25-28: Community Involvement Conference and Training, Portland, Oregon. EPA, www.epancic.org, 301/589-8487.



WaterTalk

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WaterTalk is published quarterly by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 10. WaterTalk seeks to be a useful tool for those who protect water resources and ecosystems in communities of the Greater Pacific Northwest, by providing practical resources and relevant agency news.

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In This Issue

Salmon Recovery

**Environmental
Education**

Award Programs

Free Resources

**Environmental
Events**