

Beyond Boundaries:

Resource Stewardship
in the Skagit River Basin

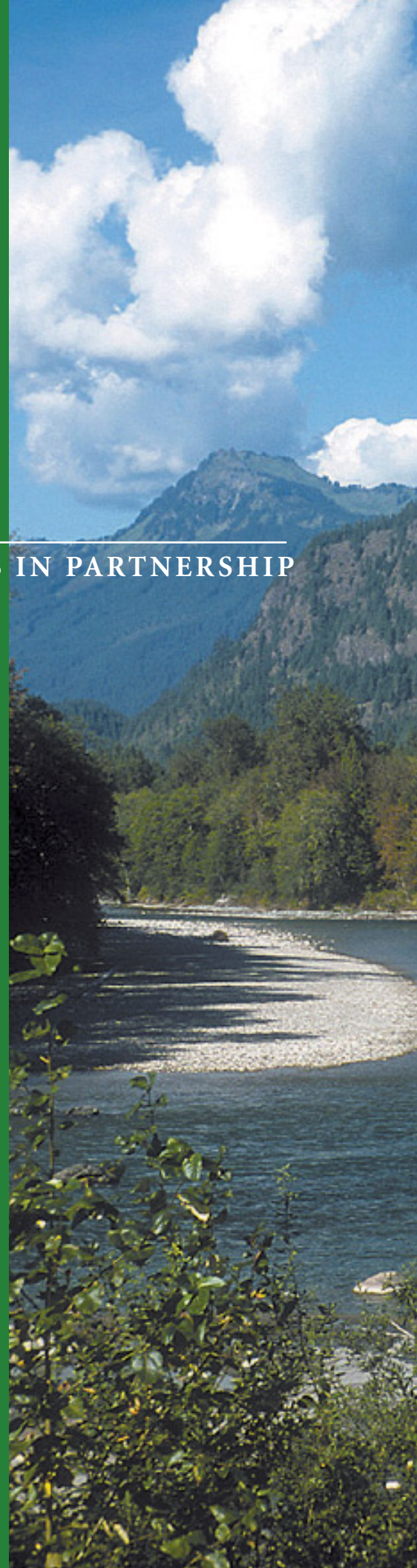
COMMUNITIES AND NATIONAL FORESTS IN PARTNERSHIP



Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie
National Forest



OCTOBER 2001





Prologue

This publication is about people, place, and partnerships—a story of relationships among the Forest Service, communities, and organizations in the Skagit River basin in western Washington. It’s about the power of partnerships to help conserve and restore resources when people are inspired and motivated to push beyond boundaries and work together.

The Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest is located in a unique and inspiring place, largely wild, yet within a stone’s throw of major metropolitan areas. The convergence of abundant natural resources and 5.5 million people creates an environment that is on the one hand passionately prized, and on the other hand threatened by increasing pressures and conflicting demands on natural resources. This climate has fostered abundant opportunities for developing partnerships that push beyond geographical, legal, administrative, political, and personal boundaries to find effective solutions.

Partnerships can help accomplish work, but partnering is as much about building relationships as it is about outcomes. Working in partnership is a way of thinking and engaging with others. It is a way of building trust and facilitating the process of joint problem-solving. Partnerships take hard work, but the results usually outweigh the difficulties as long as partners share mutual interests and remain true to their own values and capabilities.

The partnership story as it plays out in the Skagit involves many people, resources, and issues. A common thread to the stories in this document is the Pacific Northwest salmon, currently in decline. The large and relatively intact Skagit River watershed is widely recognized as a critical stronghold for wild salmon in Puget Sound and a key to salmon recovery efforts. The push to protect and restore salmon affects every aspect of life here, galvanizing local conservation efforts and fostering controversy.

Every region has its own resource conflicts and its own opportunities to build the relationships that can lead to solutions. The lesson that we want to share is that partnerships can work and can help provide a foundation for effective resource stewardship. We hope that Forest Service staff and others will see similarities to their own situations and find our collective partnership experiences useful.

This is our story, on this landscape, but it is part of a bigger picture. Nurturing partnerships at all levels will become even more important as emerging issues reach across regional, national, and global boundaries. It will be essential not only to have partners but to be partners in the important work of caring for the land and serving people.

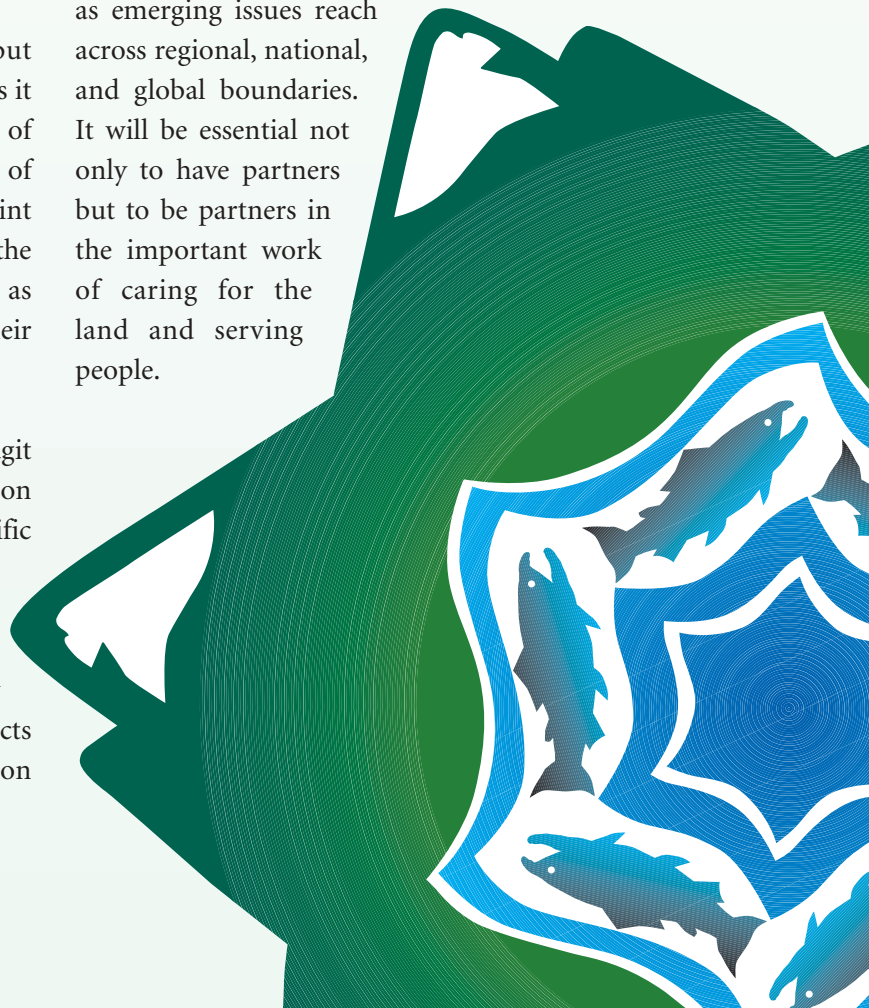


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“Ecological understanding is a cultural imperative for each of us... And what better place to begin that deeper appreciation than in the place we live. From such appreciation can come wise decisions and actions to preserve and protect what is left of the Puget Sound basin’s natural beauty and wild, self-sustaining life in variety.”

– A.R. Kruckeberg, *The Natural History of Puget Sound Country*



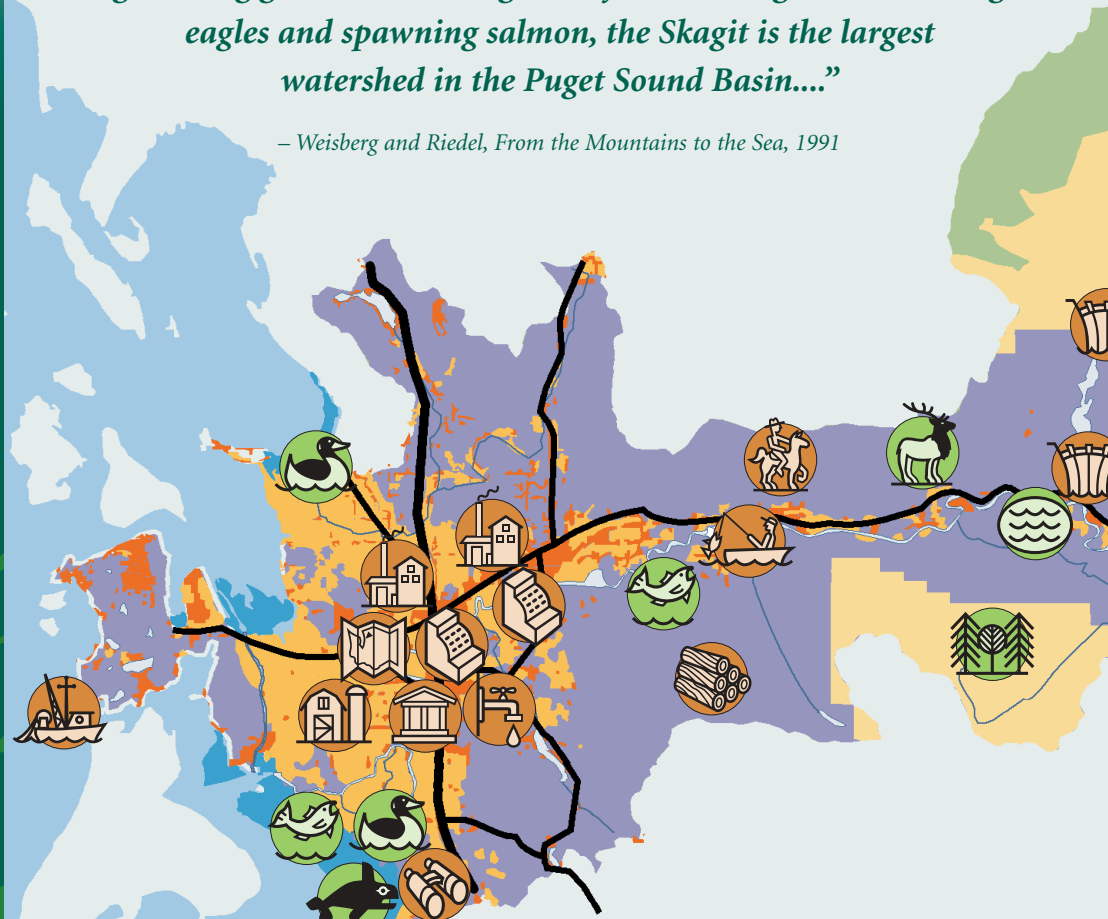
An Extraordinary Place

“The Skagit is one of the great rivers of North America. The river and its tributaries are the focus of life and energy for more than 1.7 million acres of the North Cascades - one of the most rugged mountain ranges in North America. Containing hundreds of glistening glaciers, tumbling waterfalls, rushing creeks, soaring eagles and spawning salmon, the Skagit is the largest watershed in the Puget Sound Basin...”

– Weisberg and Riedel, From the Mountains to the Sea, 1991

Livelihoods and Lifestyles

-  Farming/Agriculture
-  Logging/Wood Products
-  Fisheries (commercial)
-  Manufacturing & Construction
-  Trades, Services, Schools
-  Government
-  Tourism-Related Businesses
-  Camping
-  Recreational Fishing, Hunting
-  Watchable Wildlife
-  Horseback Riding
-  Water Use
-  Power Generation



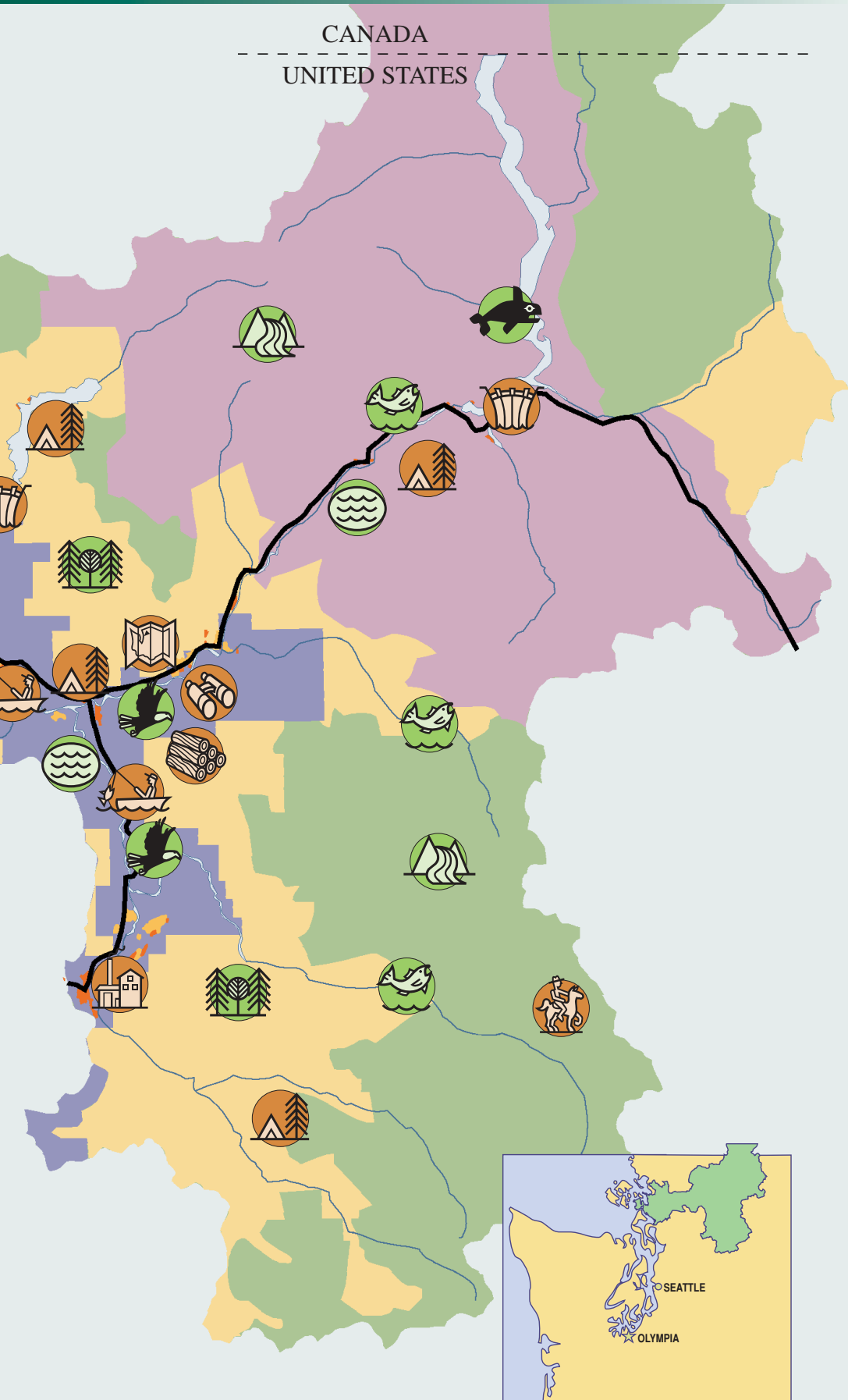
The Skagit River basin provides the setting for the stories we are telling here. This extraordinary place has inspired and motivated an uncountable number of strong and diverse partnerships.

The Skagit appears largely natural and undeveloped in its sweep from the peaks of the North Cascades to the open waters of Puget Sound. The largest river in the region, the Skagit is one of the few rivers to support five types of salmon as well as seagoing trout. With its numerous tributary streams, high mountains, deep canyons, broad floodplains, estuaries,

forests, fields, and farms, the Skagit retains a wealth of environments vital to fish, wildlife, and humans alike.

Over the past century, increasing human uses and competing demands on the Skagit's natural resources have presented a daunting challenge in the effort to maintain naturally functioning ecosystems. At stake are not only the survival of the region's salmon, forests, waters, wildlife, and wild places, but also the cultural identities, family heritages, lifestyles, and livelihoods of the people whose lives are so intimately linked with this landscape.

The symbols and graphics represent only a sampler of some of the major natural resources, human uses, and stewardship challenges in the Skagit River basin



Landscape and Resources

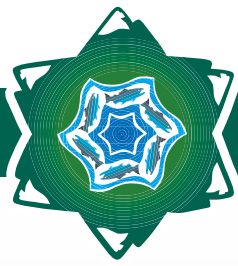
Landscapes/ uses/ownership

-  Farmland
-  Wilderness
-  Estuary/wetlands
-  National Park
-  National Forest
-  State & Private Lands
-  Towns/Urban Areas

Wild inhabitants and resources

-  Fish
-  Water
-  Forest
-  Waterfowl
-  Eagles
-  Elk
-  Glaciers
-  Human Cultural/ Historical Places

The symbols and graphics represent only a sampler of some of the major natural resources, human uses, and stewardship challenges in the Skagit River basin



The Forest Service in the Skagit

The Forest Service stewardship mission, Caring for the Land and Serving People, has long been served by formal and informal partnerships. Collaboration with others in firefighting, commodity production, conservation, and other resource management efforts has reinforced the notion that we are not just ‘The Government’. Rather, the Forest Service is people—people who live in and build relationships within their communities to address shared resource management concerns.

The Forest Service mission is becoming ever more challenging as we strive to maintain functioning ecological systems in light of the accelerating and sometimes conflicting needs and demands of a diverse public. Our broadly defined role of resource steward increasingly relies on partnering. Successful resource stewardship requires: (1) working cross functionally within the agency, (2) coordinating programs with other federal agencies, and (3) going beyond geographical and administrative boundaries to develop partnerships of mutual interest with individuals, organizations, tribes, agencies, and communities.



The Skagit River basin has a long history of people working together, on a wide range of resource management issues. The Forest Service has a stake in the condition of the entire landscape, since the resources we manage both affect and are affected by activities outside national forest boundaries. Key management decisions and resource concerns have provided both opportunities and mandates to work cooperatively (see box below).

As a partner, the Forest Service is sometimes viewed as having capacity and resources unavailable to many grassroots organizations, nonprofits, or individuals. We do have specialties to offer (see sidebar), but our partners also contribute much that may be unavailable to us: different kinds of experience, expertise, and enthusiasm; established programs; or the ability to lobby Congress and fundraise. For the Forest Service in the Skagit, the process of partnering enables us to work together more effectively for the benefit of the resources we care for in common.

How did we get here?

Key resource management decisions and concerns have motivated the Forest Service to form resource-based partnerships. A few include:

- *The Skagit Wild and Scenic River was designated—but left unfunded—in 1978. Because about half of the Wild and Scenic River is in non-federal ownership where the Forest Service has no regulatory authority, we had the opportunity early on to work cooperatively with other agencies and jurisdictions to protect the values for which the river was designated.*

- *In the late 1980s, concern over the impact on fish habitat from increased sedimentation due to roads compelled the Forest Service to work with partners to develop a basin-wide approach to watershed restoration.*

- *Implementation of the 1994 Northwest Forest Plan, along with current salmon recovery efforts, have created the need for the national forest to become more involved in basin-wide partnerships.*

What The Forest Service Brings to the Partnership Table

Land and Resources, and their Management

- Land base
- Infrastructure (roads, trails)
- Facilities (campgrounds, buildings)
- Terrestrial and aquatic habitats
- Cultural and historical places
- Natural sites and settings
- Sustainable resource products
- Land management strategies, practices, and experience

People, Processes and Programs

- Familiarity with processes and procedures
- Experience with regulatory requirements
- Interdisciplinary and multi-resource perspectives
- Established outreach programs
- Staff with technical expertise and local ties
- Institutional longevity
- Regional, national, and international links and perspectives

Expertise and Technology

- Access to scientific research
- Place-based knowledge
- Ability to collect, store, analyze data
- Technology development and transfer
- Training opportunities
- Inventory and monitoring
- Clearinghouse for information

Asset Leveraging

- Grants and donations
- Community assistance
- Seed money and matching funds
- Challenge cost-share dollars

Services

- Recreation experiences
- Conservation education
- Visitor orientation and information
- Interpretive services
- Public safety efforts (e.g. fire, flood)

“Watersheds are complicated biological systems. This fact, coupled with the diversity of ownerships, jurisdictions, social interactions and regulations, makes for highly complex problem solving. Success can be achieved only with collaboration and good communication at all levels of government and with key interests engaged and working together.”

– John Phipps, Forest Supervisor, Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest

Pacific Coast Watershed Partnership

The Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest participates in the Pacific Coast Watershed Partnership (PCWP), one of 12 national Large-scale Watershed Restoration Demonstration Projects funded by the Forest Service. The purpose of the program is to change the way the Forest Service approaches watershed management—from concentrating watershed restoration efforts within national forest boundaries to exploring the use of holistic large-scale watershed restoration partnerships.

The PCWP and the other demonstration projects emphasize collaboration: with the people whose

livelihoods depend on the watershed, with those who simply cherish the land, and with organizations striving to create a vigorous self-sustaining landscape. The partnership projects show how the Forest Service and communities can work together rather than in conflict, building connections between ecological and economic health. The projects highlight places where local and regional efforts, driven by common visions and goals, are: reflecting public values, integrating watershed restoration efforts, using science, fostering learning-by-doing (adaptive management), restoring and enhancing habitats of species at risk, and protecting and improving watershed conditions.



A Web of Partnerships

What We've Learned

Build partnerships smartly

We can neither do it alone nor do it all. Partners bring different strengths and contributions—know your strong points, so you can complement each other's skills and build a smart partnership that makes the most of what everyone has to offer to achieve mutual goals.

Partnerships are relationships

Partnerships that last and accomplish the most are built on personal relationships, trust, flexibility, and caring about common concerns and mutual interests. Each partner should be able to work toward both their own individual goals and the shared goal. While partnerships are about mutual interest they may not always be of direct or equal benefit to each.

Partnerships are place-based

People have a passion about their place—where they live, recreate, and work. The strongest partnerships are based in places people care about, reflecting their culture, heritage, livelihoods, and quality of life. Because each place is unique, each partnership is unique.

This section introduces just a few of the many different projects in which the Forest Service has partnered in the Skagit River basin. The stories are organized around six types of stewardship goals important here today—watershed restoration and salmon recovery, habitat protection, education, recreation, community development, and assessment and monitoring.

Our partnerships vary in form and size, from informal information sharing with a few constituents, to

long-term, intensive programs. They are always in flux—some collaborations grow stronger over time, while others taper off or alter their form as needs and players change. The web of Skagit partnerships is wide and deep—some are individuals, agencies, or organizations, while others involve multiple agencies and groups under a larger umbrella, such as a watershed council. In many cases a single organization is involved in different types of projects, playing diverse roles and bringing varying contributions and needs to different endeavors.

Why Partnerships?

Partnerships make sense because ecological, social, and economic issues and concerns are impossible to tease apart or keep within boundaries, especially when working at a landscape scale. A partnership approach also is wise given the increasing pace of development, declining budgets, expanding agency mandates, changing societal values and expectations, increasing scientific information and awareness of the complexities of natural systems, and a broadening desire among national forest users and neighbors to participate meaningfully in forest management. Through their diversity and flexibility, partnerships can lead to more creative ideas, better decisions, and ultimately better conditions on the landscape.

EDUCATION

HABITAT



*“We cannot do it alone. The issues are too broad,
the land base too large, and the resources too scarce.”*

– Mike Dombeck, former Chief of the Forest Service



What We've Learned

We can and must work across boundaries

All kinds of boundaries—geographical, legal, administrative, organizational—need to be crossed or bridged to see the bigger picture, work at a broader scale, take a longer-term perspective.

Partnerships aren't the easy way

Partnerships take a lot of time, effort, commitment, and energy, to be successful over the long term. Partnerships aren't always the right choice (e.g., where there is an apparent conflict of interest). Some partnerships just don't make it.

Monitoring and feedback are essential

Without monitoring our progress (both on the land and within our partnerships) we can't measure the benefits of our actions; we need frequent reporting, both formal and informal. We need to reward and recognize partners and their achievements, large or small.

Partnerships can benefit all aspects of Forest Service work

Good collaboration reaps good relationships and good will. We all get more work done, achieve more of our natural resource agenda, and jointly solve problems through partnerships.



Partnership Activities: Watershed

Watershed restoration is a cornerstone of Forest Service management direction in the Pacific Northwest, where declines in fisheries and water quality have resulted from the disruption of natural systems. We strive to understand and restore natural physical and biological processes, as well as places important to local communities, through such activities as unblocking fish passages, reducing sediment in streams, or revegetating riparian areas.

Until the 1990s, watershed and fish habitat improvement projects often focused on a single site or target species. But restoring whole watersheds and ensuring species recovery requires a broader approach. Since the mid 1990s, a watershed scale approach to restoration has been used in the Skagit, creating both incentive and opportunity for extensive partnership efforts.



Who Among Us Would Argue Against Working Together?

Salmon once swam the Skagit River by the millions, but today salmon and trout are found in only a fraction of those numbers. There are many causes for the decline and many opinions about potential solutions. However, few would argue that for restoration actions to be effective, they must be coordinated across landownership and jurisdictional boundaries, to involve all those who have a stake in healthy watersheds.

Early in the 1990s, several organizations in the Skagit began meeting informally on sub-basin and watershed scale issues. Over time, these groups evolved as people became familiar with each other and the interconnected nature of their interests and concerns. The Forest Service helped to coordinate informational meetings among agencies and organizations as part of the interim watershed assessment

process under the Northwest Forest Plan. By 1997, these relationships were formalized as the Skagit Watershed Council, an umbrella organization of 38 members with disparate interests, missions, and philosophies but with one overriding common interest: the restoration of the Skagit River watershed and its resident salmon.

The Skagit River basin is recognized as supporting the best remaining habitat for wild salmon in Puget Sound. Council members feel strongly that protection and restoration of these salmon stocks are vital to recovery throughout the region. The council supports voluntary restoration and protection of salmon habitats and the natural processes that form and sustain them. Through collaboration, technical assistance and education, the council seeks to fulfill its mission, which is to understand, protect, and restore the

“We are together because we know that this inclusive approach is our only hope, the only way to ensure abundant salmon in this river system in the future.”

– Shirley Solomon, Skagit Watershed Council Chairperson

production and productivity of the Skagit and Samish watersheds in order to support sustainable fisheries. The Forest Service supports the work of the council with contributions of staff time and financial assistance.

Among the tangible results of this partnership effort is the councils’ highly regarded restoration strategy. The council has adopted the strategic approach of using the best science available to identify target areas for restoration and protection that are biologically important for salmon recovery and protect the best habitat first, and to complete those projects that are most cost-effective.

Less visible but equally important are the relationships and history of working together that have developed. Still, Council Chairperson Shirley Solomon suggests that building consensus around controversy among groups who might

otherwise have little in common has been no easy task: “Who among us would argue against working together? But actually working together in a way that gets things done is not particularly easy, especially in a partnership of the big tent variety that this council represents. Interests and world views cannot but collide at times.”

Buffering those collisions will be critical for future successes. “The council currently functions as the hub for coordinating watershed restoration and salmon recovery efforts in the basin,” said Dave Pflug Seattle City Light Fisheries Biologist and council member. “But the history of watershed councils is that they have a five year life-span. The challenge is to keep the council alive so that we continue to have a mechanism for collaboration on these vital issues.”

A Sampler of Other Watershed Restoration Partnerships

MAJOR PARTNER

Seattle City Light

The City of Seattle (which owns and operates 3 major hydroelectric dams on the Upper Skagit River) has developed an Early Action Plan to address Endangered Species Act concerns and help in species recovery. Implemented through the Skagit Watershed Council, SCL provides funding to protect and restore high quality habitat in watersheds where the city has an interest.

MAJOR PARTNER

Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group

The SFEG has supported several restoration projects on National Forest System land and played a major role in the implementation of the Skagit Watershed Council Restoration and Protection Strategy.

MAJOR PARTNER

Skagit County

The national forest and Skagit County have partnered on several fish passage improvement and flood repair projects both on and off National Forest System land.



Partnership Activities: Habitat Protection

Protecting habitats for all living things, including people, is a key focus of resource stewardship. Forest Service management emphasis has shifted in recent decades from a focus on habitats for individual species, to protecting whole landscapes and their numerous habitats that support species native to the system.

Where resources are relatively intact, such as in the Skagit, it is less expensive and more feasible to protect

high quality habitat than to fix problems in the future. We won't succeed through regulation alone, but rather through working together, having a commitment and ownership in the outcome. Land acquisition and habitat protection efforts throughout the Skagit River basin feature agencies and organizations sharing strategies, priorities, and funds. The Forest Service engages in partnerships to manage habitats in an ecosystem context, rather than piece by piece.



Skagit River Bald Eagle Natural Area

Each November, a remarkable interaction plays out on the forested riverbanks of the Upper Skagit River: the return of spawning runs of salmon and hundreds of hungry bald eagles. The primary setting for this natural drama is an 8,000-acre natural area created by a unique partnership between a private nonprofit conservation organization and several cooperating local, state, and federal agencies and organizations.

Since 1976, the Skagit River Bald Eagle Natural Area (SRBENA), under the management of The Nature Conservancy (TNC), has protected habitat for one of the largest wintering populations of bald eagles in the lower 48 states. This multi-partner conservation effort began with a focus on the preserve, but quickly expanded to work at the landscape or watershed scale.

“The aim of this approach—looking at the entire Skagit watershed and devising strategies to protect the areas of highest quality habitat—is to protect not only eagles, but salmon and all other species in the watershed,” says TNC’s Bob Carey. “That requires several things, including working closely with our partners.”

In this case, the partners include the Forest Service, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, the National Park Service, the Skagit Watershed Council, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Skagit Land Trust, Seattle City Light, and The River Network.

The SRBENA not only provides protected land but also serves as a hub for conducting critical scientific and educational activities involving local communities. During the eagle

"What's noteworthy here is the way we're all building on each other's work. In an area where there are so many different landowners, it's essential that we work together and that we focus on what's most ecologically significant."

– Bob Carey, *The Nature Conservancy*

wintering period, TNC naturalists and other partners conduct a weekly bird census, give guided tours of the area, and make presentations to local school and community groups. The Forest Service, as Skagit Wild and Scenic River manager, helps manage human disturbance during eagle wintering season through voluntary timing restrictions on river use and volunteer Eagle Watchers who focus visitor use in designated areas.

Thanks to TNC and its partners, land is protected for eagle roosting in winter, participation of community members in volunteer programs is on the rise, and thousands of people attending the annual Upper Skagit Bald Eagle Festival are learning about bald eagle habitat and management needs. Bob Carey attributes much of SRBENA's success to its strong partnerships.

"The idea is not to buy large areas within the watershed," Bob explains. "We have neither the resources nor the desire to do so. Rather, the objective is to work cooperatively with both private landowners and public partners to protect the most ecologically important parts of the watershed and to ensure that natural processes still unfold and a functioning landscape is maintained."

Changing resource values and declining partnership funding are among the challenges facing SRBENA and other partnership efforts that seek to gain protection for large areas and natural processes. More landowners and stakeholders need to be involved if landscapes from ridgetops to estuary are to be connected and conserved.

A Sampler of Other Habitat Protection Partnerships

MAJOR PARTNER

Skagit Land Trust

The Skagit Land Trust has worked with the national forest to prioritize acquisition of high quality riparian habitat including a recent purchase of 15 acres at the confluence of Diobsud Creek and the Skagit River. This parcel has over 900 feet of forested shoreline, providing pristine habitat for bald eagles and 4 species of wild salmon.

MAJOR PARTNER

Seattle City Light

Seattle City Light's land acquisition program purchases land in the upper Skagit basin in an effort to improve connectivity and provide habitat as mitigation for the impacts of the Skagit Hydroelectric Project.

MAJOR PARTNER

River Network

The River Network secures properties of interest in partnership with other organizations to achieve mutually agreed upon conservation goals. In the Skagit they have been instrumental in facilitating acquisitions that were later sold to the Forest Service.

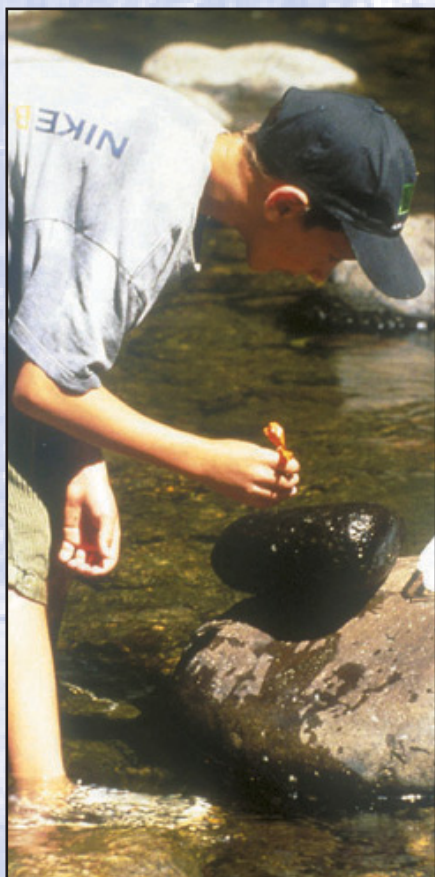


Partnership Activities: Education

Effective conservation education helps people understand their environment and how it relates to their daily lives. Such education instills awareness and concern, especially among younger members of society, and provides people of all ages the tools they need to participate effectively in stewardship of natural and cultural resources.

The Forest Service embraces education both as an effective tool to achieve stewardship goals and as a way

to learn from the unique knowledge, advice, and values of local people. An extensive partnership network has developed across the Skagit River basin, providing abundant opportunities for effective and comprehensive educational efforts. The national forest's contributions often center on: (1) providing a place in which outdoor education can occur, (2) translating and providing accurate and timely scientific and technical information, and (3) providing financial support to ongoing educational activities and programs.



Natalie Fobes

Skagit Watershed Education Project

The plea from local teachers was loud and clear: "It's easier to find out information about the Amazon than about the river outside our classroom windows!"

Their voices reached the ears of the North Cascades Institute (NCI), a non-profit educational organization committed to connecting people, nature, and community in the Pacific Northwest. Their response: creation of the Skagit Watershed Education Project, or SWEP.

All seven school districts signed on for the program, which focuses on creating a sense of stewardship for the Skagit River basin. Integrated classroom and field activities are designed around the entire watershed, with an emphasis on the

relationship between a healthy watershed, a healthy fisheries population, and healthy communities.

SWEP began in 1990 as a partnership between the schools and NCI, but within a few years, as national forest management focus shifted more to the watershed level and to the growing need for conservation education, the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest joined in. The partnership has since grown to encompass several other collaborations between the forest and NCI.

"It was great timing," says NCI's Tracie Johannessen. "We had been able to get the program off the ground and developed an ongoing relationship with the schools, but it

“We all learned that to be a good partner you don’t go out to find someone to do what you need done. You go out and take a look around to see what’s going on and how your message can fit in.”

– Tracie Johannessen, North Cascades Institute

was hard for us to get enough staff to cover all the field trips. The Forest Service had a common interest and was able to provide funding and staff assistance. It’s a great relationship.”

What makes this partnership work? “It’s all about flexibility,” says Tracie. “It’s about being cooperative, having a give and take, playing to each other’s strengths.”

Other reasons for success hinge on the program’s inclusiveness— involving students, teachers, parents, landowners, natural resource managers, Skagit River Tribes, and business interests who recognize the value of education in ensuring the health of the Skagit basin.

The SWEP program reaches more than 750 elementary school

students and their parents annually. Watershed education continues to gain momentum and attention as a vehicle for the integration of community and schools. The program has received national recognition and now has more than 40 partners.

A challenge for SWEP is to stay ahead of the curve, anticipating and aligning program objectives with changing community and partnership needs. Trying new approaches, organizing in new ways, learning, and adapting will continue to help this partnership thrive.

A Sampler of Other Education Partnerships

MAJOR PARTNER

Upper Skagit Bald Eagle Festival

The Forest Service helps the Eagle Festival organize and staff the Bald Eagle Interpretive Center. The annual Eagle Festival provides project leadership; the national forest assists with funding, materials, supplies, and River Rangers to lead interpretive programs.

MAJOR PARTNER

Local Schools

In 2001, 26 students of Ms. Korn’s 6th grade class from Central Elementary School in Sedro-Woolley, Washington, monitored the survival of trees planted in newly acquired lands along the Skagit River. The children used their math and science skills collecting and analyzing data about tree growth and survival and shared their findings on the school website.



Partnership Activities: Recreation

A key element of resource stewardship is protecting and facilitating uses of natural and scenic sites, settings, and landscapes, which serve to nurture individual needs and values. But a dramatic increase in recreation, tourism, and travel in the Pacific Northwest, coupled with a continued decrease in regional recreation funding, has resulted in overcrowding, poor facility conditions, and degraded forest settings.

The outstanding natural environment of the Skagit River watershed supports a wide array of year-round

recreational opportunities, from hiking, fishing, and boating, to snow sports, mountain climbing, and wilderness experiences. Most of these types of recreation are available on the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest and adjacent public and private lands. The forest works with partners to ensure the integrity of the outdoor recreation experience while emphasizing watershed and wildlife habitat protection, restoration, and enhancement.



Wildcat Steelhead Club: For the King of All Sportfish

Fishing for certain sportfish often takes on mythic proportions when the stories are told. Recreational fishing has long been celebrated as an opportunity to relax in a natural setting while meeting the challenge of outsmarting the fish. The Skagit River steelhead is one of those mythic fish, and the Wildcat Steelhead Club was formed in 1936 to promote the enjoyment of fishing for all fish, but particularly the steelhead.

In its early days, club members focused on advancing the recreational activities of fishing and hunting in area rivers and in the high country. But in recent years as the numbers of fish have declined and the conflicts over dwindling stocks have risen, members have expanded their concerns to habitat protection and other issues vital to their form of recreation.

“Sadly, today with overall declines in local fish stocks, club members spend more time arguing over fisheries harvest issues and lobbying for the sport fisher’s share of the catch, than they do out on the river,” says club member Ron Tingley.

The club sponsors an annual river clean-up day, works for the betterment of local hatcheries, and disperses salmon carcasses in small streams to replenish natural nutrients. The Forest Service, the Steelhead Club, and others partnered on the development of eagle watching sites along the river to focus visitor use and help mitigate disturbance of eagles during winter. In these and other ways, club members work in partnership for the protection and enhancement of the river and its resources

“I grew up on the river, and fishing was part of daily life along the river. The funny thing is, my father, who ran tugboats up and down the river every day, never fished, he said it was too easy.”

– Ron Tingley, Wildcat Steelhead Club

Sometimes the interests and needs of the partners don't quite align, straining the relationship. In its role as Skagit Wild and Scenic River manager, the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest may make management decisions that conflict with the club's interests as river users. For example, when the Forest Service limited fishing on the Skagit during bald eagle winter feeding times, the fishing community and the club found themselves at odds with agency decisions.

But club members are hopeful that their concerns about habitat and fisheries can also be addressed through local collaborative processes embodied by the Skagit Watershed Council, of which both the Steelhead Club and the Forest Service are members. Keenly aware that habitat

isn't the only factor affecting the sustainability of salmon stocks, club members feel strongly that in order to be effective they need to be involved in cooperative local efforts to restore the fisheries resource on the rivers they care about.

Speaking to the challenge of achieving salmon and steelhead recovery in the face of continuing fishing pressure, Ron says, “Politics is getting in the way of listening to what science is trying to tell us.”

Challenges for recreational partnerships include not only addressing political realities, but also gaining awareness that although interests may diverge, resolving the conflicts can help build stronger partnerships, which in turn can help resolve future conflicts.

A Sampler of Other Recreation Partnerships

MAJOR PARTNER

**Washington Trails Assn.,
Sierra Club, Audubon
Society, Skagit Alpine Club,
Mt. Baker Alpine Club**

These organizations volunteer many hours to reduce the national forests' backlog of trail maintenance. With their assistance the forest accomplishes 20–30% more trail work annually.

MAJOR PARTNER

**Skagit County Parks
and Recreation**

The Forest Service administers a county grant for the Snopark program and snowmobile trail grooming on Forest Service roads.

MAJOR PARTNER

**Pacific Northwest
Trail Association**

The SKY (Service Knowledge Youth) program is a collaborative effort between school districts and private partners to provide high school students with an outdoor-based work experience blended with academic instruction. SKY is working with the Forest Service to develop a program for high school students to work on trails.

MAJOR PARTNER

North Cascades Institute

In 1993, NCI and the Forest Service created the Eagle Watchers program to help manage the convergence of wintering bald eagles and the tourists who flock to watch the birds along the Skagit River. Volunteers inform thousands of visitors about bald eagles, salmon, and related habitat and management issues.



Partnership Activities: Community

Effective stewardship of the national forest supports—and depends on the support of the communities of which the Forest Service is a part. Rural communities can participate more meaningfully in the management of their national forests when they have the technology and the capability to do so. The Forest Service has both directives and incentives to encourage partnerships with our rural communities and tribes, especially those affected by declines in timber harvest and salmon populations in the Pacific Northwest.

The Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest is considered an ‘urban forest’ because of its proximity to the Seattle–Vancouver metropolitan area, but many of our staff live and work in rural communities. Our rural community partnership efforts focus on extending technology, expert assistance, professional knowledge, and resources to help small communities whose economies and lifestyles are tied to natural resources meet their economic, social, and environmental goals.



Concrete, Washington: On the Road Again

Sometimes it takes a couple of starts before you end up on the right road. When the upper Skagit Valley town of Concrete created its first Community Action Plan in 1994, the direction seemed to point toward tourism as the destination that would help them recover from economic downturns related to forest resource issues. Tourism was a logical choice given the town’s scenic location at the gateway to the North Cascades.

Determined to get where they were going on their own, the town bypassed planning help from an outside nonprofit organization, Northwest Small Cities Services. Community leaders applied for Forest Service funds to begin downtown improvements to attract more tourists. They found themselves confronted by an unexpected

roadblock—turned down for the grant in part because their action plan didn’t address major water and sewer improvements, and in part because their reluctance to accept outside help or take on debt may have been interpreted as an inadequate level of local commitment.

After going back to the starting line, community leaders accepted a partnership with Northwest Small Cities Services. Members of the community formed a team with the Forest Service, the town council, and other state and federal agencies, to prepare for and work with others at the 1996 Northwest Timber and Salmon Communities Symposium to develop a new plan of action. This time the focus broadened to emphasize infrastructure

“Today, more than ever, we are committed to working in partnership with others, in the public and private sectors, who are trying to facilitate locally led changes that benefit both the land and rural communities.”

– A Strategic Plan for the USDA Forest Economic Action Programs, September 2000

improvements, not only to meet their own residents’ needs but also to increase the potential for development of all kinds and to meet newly emerging state regulations for water quality and growth management. This time around, tourism development was still identified as a goal, but one further in the future.

The most long-lasting impacts from this partnership effort have been the changes in community attitude—from a long tradition of independence to a willingness to work with partners, and from a feeling of uncertainty to an awareness of their own power to address problems that had seemed beyond their capacity to solve. In the process of accepting and nurturing relationships with others, the

community has actually become more self-sufficient.

The Forest Service’s role in Concrete’s journey has evolved to focus more on helping with strategic planning and some design and engineering consulting. The town has numerous challenges ahead as they work toward a strengthened and more diverse economy enhanced by their proximity to abundant natural resources.

“The initial process did what it was supposed to do—launch the town onto its feet,” says forest environmental coordinator Karen Nolan, who worked alongside Concrete throughout the initial planning process. “They’re pretty much in control of their own future.”

A Sampler of Other Community-Building Partnerships

MAJOR PARTNER

Town of Darrington

Forest Service employees initiated and helped plan and construct the Kids’ Place Early Learning Center in Darrington, as well as a kiosk and restrooms for the community park.

MAJOR PARTNER

Economic Development Association of Skagit County

The Skagit Wood Products Project is a non-profit organization assisting small value-added wood product businesses in northwest Washington. Partnership funding helped with early feasibility studies and planning.

MAJOR PARTNERS

Samish Indian Nation, City of Burlington, Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians

Forest Service funds have helped with numerous community projects including: the production of the Samish Nation’s five-year economic development plan, the development of the Burlington Farmers’ Market, and the launching of the BankSavers Business Startup Project for the Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians.



Partnership Activities: Assessment

Monitoring and evaluation, with feedback to the assessment and planning processes, are key to the success of resource stewardship. Unless we learn from our efforts and become aware of what works and what doesn't, millions of dollars may be wasted on misguided attempts to manage multiple resources and improve resource conditions across the landscape.

Science can provide not only technical information but also a common language to start discussion among those with different viewpoints. Effectively engaging in

such dialogue requires a long-term commitment of resources, technical expertise, and extensive local knowledge. The Forest Service has long been a storehouse of technical and scientific data about individual species as well as ecosystem functions and processes, while tribes, communities, and organizations are storehouses of local wisdom and experience on the land. Successful resource stewardship requires partners with complementary skills and capacities to maintain a commitment to assessment, monitoring, and evaluation.



Dick Knight

Is Good Science Enough?

In the Puget Sound region, local Indian tribes have not only a vested interest in the survival of salmon, but also a legal right to the assurance of the salmon's continued existence. Tribal scientists consequently have played a major role in salmon recovery efforts. The Skagit River basin is home to several treaty Indian tribes: the Swinomish, Upper Skagit, and Sauk-Suiattle. Together they formed a partnership known as the Skagit System Cooperative (SSC), a natural resources consortium that addresses fisheries management issues.

For the tribes, fisheries management is not merely a technical exercise concerning another creature or piece of real estate. It is about maintaining opportunities for the exercise of ceremonial, subsistence, and commercial rights to

harvest fish. Under the Treaty of Point Elliot (1855) the Puget Sound Tribes retained the "right of taking fish at usual and accustomed grounds and stations," and they are making a concerted effort to restore sustainable fisheries for future generations.

SSC recognizes the need to use the best available science to evaluate the effects of human activities on salmon and their habitats and to develop strategies to reverse the decline of the species. The Research and Restoration Program of SSC has been involved in studies of historical habitat loss, current habitat condition assessment, stock status assessment, development of recovery strategies, restoration projects, and monitoring and evaluation. The Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, the Skagit River Indian Tribes, and others have been working

Monitoring, and Evaluation

“We are now entering a new era, in which science and scientists—along with managers and stakeholders—will be intimately and continuously involved with natural resource policy development.... However, we are still very much at the stage of learning how the scientific, the technical, and the social can be integrated”.

— Jerry Franklin, biologist, in *Science Findings* May 2000

collaboratively on these issues for the past 15 years.

The SSC believes that good science should lead to good management decisions, particularly with regard to a strategic approach to implementation of restoration projects. Because SSC works for the benefit of the fisheries interests of the Skagit Tribes, their work is a contribution to cultural survival. “For the first time, all groups interested in salmon restoration in the Skagit River basin can sit down at the same table and begin to identify what needs to be done to bring our salmon back,” says Lorraine Loomis, of the Swinomish Tribal Senate.

Inventory, assessment, monitoring, and research conducted by SSC and others, including the Forest Service,

in the Skagit Basin have provided a working knowledge of the functions and processes of the Skagit River system. This knowledge forms the basis for the Skagit Watershed Council’s Habitat Protection and Restoration Strategy and has guided development of procedures for its implementation.

The success of these collaborative efforts in restoring salmon will test the effectiveness of our scientific theories. “The public expects that there will be measurable benefits from expenditures for stewardship activities,” says Dave Pflug, fisheries biologist with Seattle City Light, another partner in assessment activities. “We need to be able to measure these benefits, at the watershed scale, and provide information to the public and feedback to the planning process.”

A Sampler of Other Assessment, Monitoring and Evaluation Partnerships

MAJOR PARTNER

North Cascades National Park

Skagit River Stewards is a volunteer monitoring program coordinated by the Forest Service and North Cascades Institute in partnership with North Cascades National Park and the Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group (SFEG). Volunteers collect aquatic insects (which are indicators of stream health). Data are used by the national forest to monitor the conditions in the Skagit Wild and Scenic River, by the national park to develop a regional index of aquatic conditions, and by the SFEG to measure the success of stream restoration projects.

MAJOR PARTNER

Skagit Chinook Work Group

This coalition of agencies and organizations is developing a limiting factors analysis and recovery strategy for the six Skagit chinook salmon stocks.

MAJOR PARTNER

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)

The WDFW has conducted assessments of off-channel habitat and fish-passage blocking culverts on streams throughout the Skagit Basin. In addition, the WDFW monitors the status of all fish stocks in the basin.



“If we assume that biodiversity is worth conserving, it is far less clear how we go about actually conserving it. How do you take the whole world into account?”

— Science Findings, November 2000

The need to establish and nurture relationships with stakeholders in management issues will only expand in the future as the stewardship challenges developing in our local communities take on regional, national, and global proportions. Working beyond geographical and administrative boundaries will become critical to achieving resource goals at multiple scales. Monitoring our progress, both on the land and in our partnerships, will also be an essential element to achieve our mission over the long term.



Crossing Management Boundaries in North Cascades National Park

A national park that is also designated wilderness might seem an unbeatable way to protect a sensitive landscape and its inhabitants forever. But North Cascades National Park (NCNP), a gem at the mountainous headwaters of the Skagit River, illustrates that even undeveloped lands are closely connected to the world around them—that ecological challenges cross boundaries and so must their solutions.

“Administrative boundaries are invisible to the migratory species that travel through and to many other habitats, which may be degraded or threatened with development or alteration,” notes Bruce Freet of the NCNP. “Air pollution also crosses boundaries, coming into the national park system, in the form of acid rain or persistent organic pollutants. These can affect the water quality of the park’s lakes, streams, and glaciers,

which are critical to the water budget for the entire Skagit River watershed.”

Addressing such challenges at the NCNP involves broadening the boundaries to work at multiple scales and with various partners. NCNP and its national recreation areas are known together as the North Cascades NPS Complex (NOCA). The NOCA complex itself is part of a larger network of seven national park system areas known as the North Coast and Cascades Network, which facilitates work at the local level while linking the NCNP with other ecoregions including Southeast Alaska/British Columbia and north coast California/Oregon.

The national park system has the dual and sometimes conflicting mandate of providing for public enjoyment and protecting resources

Challenging stewardship issues include:

- Habitat fragmentation
- Water quality and quantity
- Introduction and spread of exotic plants and animals
- Recreation demands
- Energy use
- Preservation of farmland and open space in the face of increasing urbanization
- Additional listings of endangered species, declining fisheries, and other species losses
- Ecological literacy for an engaged and knowledgeable public
- Maintaining a connection to the land and natural resources in our daily lives
- Lack of resources to complete needed plans: decreasing staff and funding levels
- Political influences in natural resource management, which may conflict with science and with biological or ecological needs
- Continued threats to sustainable populations.
- Implications beyond our boundaries: air pollution, loss of biodiversity, displacing our environmental problems to other parts of the world

for future generations. In the late 1990s as science and resource management co-evolved, the priority tipped more toward resource protection. The shift created new challenges, including funding and a need to monitor progress. In 2001, NCNP embarked on a long-term ecological monitoring program to evaluate the status and trends over time of the natural resources that the park is mandated to protect. Developing and implementing monitoring strategies and activities necessary to deal with cross-boundary issues has led to close partnerships with research institutions, agencies (including the Forest Service), and many others.

“Monitoring natural conditions at multiple scales and time frames can provide insight into the range of natural variability,” says Freet. “The results provide reference conditions

for more heavily developed or altered landscapes outside the park boundaries. Scientists can use conditions in the park to assess changes from historical conditions and set goals for restoration.”

Ecological monitoring will provide valuable information that allows the NCNP to serve as a barometer of conditions within and beyond the Skagit watershed. This long-term monitoring, with occasional research, may provide a window into the complexity of local and global ecosystems and an opportunity to show the essential connection of our actions and intentions, beyond boundaries and over time.

Definitions

Society’s evolving views of ecology, conservation, stewardship, and partnership have contributed to an emerging perspective on the vital role of partners in managing resources across boundaries, at landscape scales such as river basins.

Resource Stewardship ~ An approach to resource management that considers ecological, economic, and social/cultural factors in deciding appropriate protection and uses of natural resources. Guiding principles are:

* The **interconnectedness** of communities of living things and the physical environments in which they interact. *Effective stewardship requires reaching across political or jurisdictional boundaries to collaboratively achieve common goals in a particular place and time.*

* **Sustainability** of watersheds, forests, rangelands, and communities—taking no actions that would limit future land management options.

Partnership ~ A type of collaboration built on personal relationships and mutual interest, in which people, organizations, and/or institutions voluntarily work together toward common goals that are consistent with their individual values, objectives, and resources. *Effective partnerships are synergistic, allowing more to be accomplished than would be possible with everyone working alone.*



“That so many geese would crowd together on a single farm field indicates that wildlife friendly farming has worked. What is worrisome though, is the unrelenting development pressure that is turning agricultural expanses into slivers of property.”

– Ducks Unlimited website

The partnership approach to problem solving will become increasingly important, yet ever more challenging in the future. As resource conflicts increase, it will take more and more effort to foster the trust and understanding that are critical to solving problems. It will take strong personal relationships to get past the inevitable stumbling blocks. And it will be important to be able to anticipate the changes that may affect our ability to do good work as partners.

In the long haul, partnership challenges for the Forest Service resemble those confronting all interpersonal relationships.

Expanding Partnership Boundaries on the Skagit Delta

While far downstream of national forest borders, estuary habitat has become part of the partnership story for the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest because this habitat has been identified as a limiting factor in salmon recovery. The Skagit River delta is extremely important to juvenile salmon, which spend time there to feed and acclimate to salt water. The delta also provides habitat for 80 percent of the wintering waterfowl in western Washington, some of which also use habitat on National Forest System land.

In the Skagit, as in much of Puget Sound, most of the natural wetland habitat was diked and dredged at the turn of the last century, replaced by farm fields. Over time the waterfowl have adapted to the farmlands as a food source (salmon have not been as successful), but today farms are

subject to increasing pressures. Loss of farmlands and remaining wetlands is threatening habitat for wintering waterfowl, migrating salmon, and the agrarian economy in the Skagit Valley.

“While restoration of Puget Sound’s estuaries is essential for the survival of chinook and other wild salmon, it also provides myriad benefits for birds and wildlife as well as for human recreation and enjoyment of nature,” according to People for Puget Sound, a conservation organization dedicated to renewal of the region’s estuaries. Ducks Unlimited (DU), a major partner in the Pacific Coast Watershed Demonstration Project, is another key player in efforts to protect the estuary and ensure that sufficient habitat and food remain to support the life stages of migrating waterfowl and other wetland birds as well as salmon.



Ducks Unlimited

Challenging partnership issues include:

- Communication and follow-through
- Maintaining real personal commitments to make partnerships work over time
- Keeping issues and relationships alive as conditions and expectations change and individual partners or staff move on
- Engaging diverse communities of place and interest
- Expectations and accountability
- Learning how to assess when conflicts are just not resolvable
- Having all people in the Forest Service trained and experienced in working as partners, both within and outside the agency
- Supporting people in developing and sustaining partnerships
- Competition among each other for resources and the need to be strategic with limited resources.

Biologist Lorna Ellestad, a third generation Skagitonian, formerly represented DU in the Skagit. Lorna has built strong relationships with the farming community, working to alter farming and drainage practices on marginal lands, creating higher crop yields and providing benefits to wildlife. “The value of these resources compels us to action,” she says. “We couldn’t do better work for the resource in any other place in Puget Sound.”

Increasingly DU is attempting work salmon-friendly designs into its wetland and waterfowl improvement strategies, part of an effort to keep farm-friendly issues in the limelight while expanding awareness to embrace the challenge of salmon recovery. While not always in agreement with the single species focus, DU seeks to build agreement on the broader ecosystem stewardship issues including protection of rural

areas from development and restoration of natural processes and functions that benefit all species.

Driven by her passion for this place, Lorna worked tirelessly to create win-win situations for the farmer and the resource. But farmers are increasingly overwhelmed by development pressure, growth management restrictions, high fuel prices, and low food prices. The inherent tug-of-war between natural resources and human needs is making it tougher to keep partnerships going.

Keeping partnerships alive into the future will require finding creative ways to support the goal of diverse and functional habitats in the Skagit River basin. For the Forest Service, moving beyond our boundaries to include partnerships in the Skagit River delta is one way we hope to address this key challenge.

Partnership Tips

Partnerships are:

Relationships—based on

- mutual trust
- honesty
- understanding
- flexibility
- open communication
- constructive conflict resolution

A way to achieve a common goal

- not a way to farm out your own work
- not just about your agenda, but about mutual interests

For the long term

- Be ready for change

Partnerships need:

Clearly defined goals, tasks, responsibilities

- be true to your own mission and values but...
- work toward the common goal

The right mix of partners

- skills
- resources
- stakeholders

Organizational support

- commitment
- accountability

A clear way to measure progress and success

- Reward the small achievements
- Monitor, learn, adapt

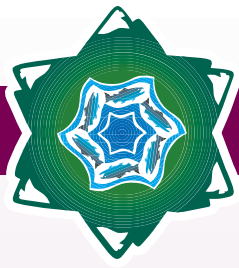
Partnerships must overcome:

Time and resource limitations

- be selective about how much to tackle
- avoid burnout

Barriers and Boundaries

- turf battles
- adversarial approach
- red tape
- negativity



Partners and References

Selected Partners in the Skagit

The following are a few of the major partners with whom the Forest Service has worked on substantial projects and programs over the past 15 years. Innumerable other individuals, organizations, and agencies have been partners in the Skagit, working together to conserve and restore natural resources.

Backcountry Horsemen

Crown Pacific

<http://crownpacificpartners.com/>

Ducks Unlimited

http://www.ducks.org/news/pacific_nw_part_2.asp

Economic Development Assoc. of Skagit Co.

National Marine Fisheries Service

Natural Resources Conservation Service

<http://www.wa.nrcs.usda.gov/nrcs/>

North Cascades Institute

<http://www.ncascades.org/>

North Cascades National Park

<http://www.nps.gov/noca/>

Pacific Northwest Trail Association

<http://www.pnt.org/>

Padilla Bay

National Estuarine Research Reserve

Puget Sound Energy

<http://www.psechoice.com/index.html>

River Network

<http://www.rivernetwork.org/>

Seattle City Light

<http://www.ci.seattle.wa.us/light/environment/lightimpact/>

Sierra Club

<http://www.cascadechapter.org/>

Skagit Audubon Society

<http://wa.audubon.org/>

Skagit Chinook Workgroup

Skagit Conservation District

Skagit County

<http://www.skagitcounty.net/index.htm>

Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group

<http://www.skagitfisheries.org/>

Skagit Land Trust

<http://www.skagitlandtrust.org/>

Skagit System Cooperative (Skagit Tribes)

Selected References

This publication derived much inspiration and information from dozens of excellent materials on the subjects of partnerships, collaboration, and ecological stewardship. The following are a handful of the publications that might be of use to others in developing and maintaining effective resource partnerships.

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<http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/mbs/>

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Skagit Valley College

<http://ww2.svc.ctc.edu/dept/Environ/index.htm>

Skagit Watershed Council

<http://www.skagitwatershed.org/>

The Nature Conservancy

http://www.tnc-washington.org/preserves/skagit_river.html

Town of Concrete

Upper Skagit Bald Eagle Festival

<http://www.skagiteagle.org/>

WA Department of Ecology

<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/>

WA Department of Fish and Wildlife

<http://www.wa.gov/wdfw/>

WA Department of Natural Resources

<http://www.wa.gov/dnr/base/dnrhome.html>

WA State University Cooperative Extension

<http://mtvernon.wsu.edu/>

Washington Trails Association

<http://www.wta.org/>

Wildcat Steelhead Club

US Fish and Wildlife Service

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The Roger Rule for Restoration Partnerships

- We are all in this boat together, acting in good faith.
- We are engaged in developmental work so we don't always know exactly how to get where we want to go.
- We will undoubtedly encounter Class IV rapids.
- When we do, if we don't all pitch in and help, our boat will sink.

-Roger Nichols, Forest Service geologist



"Our goal of restoration and protection of salmon habitat in this basin will not come easy. It will take science and story, on-the ground progress, plus solid planning and evaluation. It will also take time and resources and the goodwill of the entire community."

-Skagit Watershed Council Chairperson Shirley Solomon

"Stewardship of habitat [was then and] remains today divided among many landowners, each with a different perspective on risks and values associated with natural ecosystems. In addition, most of the habitat in the United States is privately owned and not subject to similar management goals and policies."

- Ross Kiester in Science Findings November 2000

"We recognize that some of our individual objectives will be met through the partnership, while other objectives will have to be met some other way."

-Tracie Johanessen, North Cascades Institute