

After the Goodell Creek Fire:

Interview with Seattle City Light's Newhalem & Diablo Fire Chief

In August of 2015 the Goodell Creek Fire (ultimately the Skagit Complex) started with a lightning strike on North Cascades National Park land adjacent to the two Seattle City Light (SCL) company towns of Newhalem and Diablo where a series of hydroelectric dams generate about 20% of the City of Seattle's electricity. The fire went from a slow smolder to an actively moving, highway and river jumping wildfire threatening the two towns and critical infrastructure. In the history of Seattle City Light's Skagit Hydroelectric operation, there had never been a wildfire of that magnitude. Like all wildfires in the wildland urban interface, this one had its own unique story. Skagit CD decided to interview Cody Watson, Seattle City Light Fire Chief for Newhalem & Diablo, to get an inside perspective on the details of dealing with the fire.

What does your job entail as Seattle City Light's Fire Chief for the towns of Newhalem & Diablo? I imagine that being a fire chief for a utility must require some unique skills.

My position is actually fairly new, having been created almost two years ago. My day to day activities revolve around making sure our emergency teams are ready to respond at a moment's notice. This means I ensure they have the right training and the equipment is operational. Our emergency teams are rockstars; I just do my best to help make sure they can get the job done as safely and easily as possible.

Part of my job has a life safety and preparedness aspect. I make sure that our fire protection and alarms get inspected and our AED's are maintained. I am currently working on emergency evacuation plans for both towns. After last year's fire, we want to make sure we do everything we can to keep residents, visitors, and workers safe.

conditions change is incredible! We watched the Goodell Creek fire smolder for days and then it exploded and jumped Highway 20 and the Skagit River!

I have to admit that prior to the fire, even though I had identified wildfire as a risk, I had no idea how complex and massive the situation would be. It is truly humbling. I never envisioned something that big or that fast so close to our facilities. There were some doubts and disinterest when I brought up the need for wildfire mitigation before the Goodell Creek fire; not so much anymore. Everyone here is very aware of how lucky we were that things didn't turn out worse. Everyone has a greater appreciation of the destructive force of a wildfire, including myself.

Had you done anything ahead of time to address wildfire risk?

Yes. 3 years ago, prior to the fire, we decided to pursue the Firewise Communities/USA program with guidance from the Skagit Conservation District. We implemented some defensible space projects around some critical infrastructure using SCL's vegetation

(Continued on page 2)



Did the Goodell Creek Fire/ Upper Skagit Complex change the way you view wildfire risk to SCL and the surrounding areas?

I definitely have a new appreciation for the raw destructive power that wildfires have. The speed of which

Cody Watson, Seattle City Light Fire Chief for Newhalem & Diablo

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Goodell Creek Fire: *Cody Watson Interview* (Continued)

management crews. The crews learned about defensible space and fire-resistant plants, so they were familiar with those concepts ahead of time, which then made it easier to quickly implement defensible space around additional structures during the fire that hadn't yet been treated.

Coincidentally, SCL had joined the Washington Fire Adapted Communities (WAFAC) Learning Network just a few months before the fire broke out. Members of the WAFAC Learning Network had heard that Diablo was being evacuated and were trying to reach me about Mazama/Winthrop being evacuated at the same time, so that we knew not to evacuate people that direction. Although I didn't get this information until after the fact, I think it is still a great example of how useful these types of organizations can be! Being part of the network has helped us set some framework for how to move forward in recovery and better prepare for the next time. It has also provided support and resources as we work through this process.

We also had started down a path of better networking with our neighboring agency; the National Park Service. The months prior to fire, we had unprecedented inter-agency cooperation and communication. I strongly believe it was these interactions that built trust and understanding which lead to greatly improved operational success during the fire.

In the spring, I was connected with a Seattle Public Utilities employee who is in charge of a wildland initial attack crew that protects the Cedar River Watershed, where Seattle gets its drinking water. This was a very valuable resource I never knew existed! I was in constant communication with them about wildland issues. During the fire, he and one of his engine crews came up and assisted us with infrastructure protection.

Is there anything you are doing at SCL and in the towns of Newhalem and Diablo after the fire to recover and/or be better prepared to respond to the next one?

We just joined the Ready, Set, Go! Program to better prepare residents in the event of an evacuation. Last year we had to

evacuate the town of Diablo because of the Goodell fire and that was something that we had never prepared for. Luckily, Seattle City Light's Incident Management Team (IMT) based out of Seattle really came through and did an extraordinary job at making sure all the residents and workers were safe and had a place to stay. Initially, the plan was to evacuate east to Winthrop but that had to change suddenly when Winthrop was getting evacuated because of another wildfire! The IMT did a great job coming up with a new plan and re-routing the evacuation to Wenatchee. This year we are taking steps to expand the IMT to the Skagit River Hydroelectric Project so we have more of a capacity to handle these large scale incidents.

We are continuing to participate in the Washington Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network. This has been a great learning tool for how other communities are dealing with becoming

fire adapted and sharing with them what has worked for us (or hasn't!). The communities are all over the state and each have their own set of challenges. But, there is something encouraging about sharing your learning experiences with others who are trying to accomplish similar things!

The Firewise projects are still important to us and probably even more so after last year. We are fortunate

that we have very skilled workers here at the Skagit Hydroelectric Project that specialize in vegetation management (i.e. fuel reduction). We have even done some collaborative projects with the National Park Service and North Cascades Institute! It is encouraging to see that other agencies are taking wildfire on the Westside of the state seriously.

My colleague, Dr. Crystal Raymond, in Seattle City Light's Environmental Affairs department is working on a project with the North Cascades National Park and the Forest Service to do some fuels treatment modeling for key in the park and near Seattle City Light's infrastructure. This project is funded through the WAFAC Learning Network. It is important to have some science to guide our work in order to ensure that what we are doing is most effective!



Seattle City Light's company town of Newhalem and Highway 20 in the foreground with smoke from the Goodell Creek Fire on the steep terrain in the background. Photo credit: Unknown source

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“The best friend on Earth of man is the tree. When we use the tree respectfully and economically, we have one of the greatest resources of the Earth.”

– Frank Lloyd Wright



Healthy Forest = Healthy Community

Our forests are amazing places. Aside from their physical beauty, forests provide homes for diverse plant and animal communities. Forests provide timber for construction, fiber for paper, clean water and numerous other products we use every day. Crucially, forests act as the earth's lungs by capturing carbon dioxide from our atmosphere and releasing pure oxygen in its place; they are nature's own built-in climate technology.

Unfortunately, Washington's forests have been under severe stress like many forests across the Western United States. Drought, insects, disease and fire are taking thousands of acres each year. The good news is that forest management can help mitigate this in some areas; however, some areas are best left untouched, as "not all soils can bear all things" and what works in one area may not work in another.

Our forest landscapes are incredibly ecologically diverse and their owners are equally diverse, ranging from government to small forest landowners, from banks to corporations. Private forest landowners across Washington are investing in science based forest management using site specific information to implement management strategies. In Skagit County, forest landowners are implementing good forest practices that benefit the community including replanting trees, controlling soil erosion, and removing hazardous fuels.

As a result of the past 2 seasons of wildfire devastation, partnerships are developing to improve the management of our

Has your job changed as fire chief since the fire occurred? How?

Yes and no. My primary duty is to protect people, property, and environment, so in that sense nothing has changed; however, it is safe to say my priorities have shifted to take into account that wildfire is a very serious and real risk. I dedicate more of my time to wildfire preparedness and planning now that I've experienced the reality of a wildfire in my "backyard".

I have also become a "wildfire awareness" advocate these days. I take on this role both internally and externally to my organization, trying to make people more aware of the threats and consequences of wildfire. When I hear people say that Westside forests are "asbestos forests" because they don't burn, I know more than ever that isn't the case. Under the right conditions our forests burn too, and unfortunately last year we experienced those conditions first hand.



Left: Some additional tips for around the yard/property. This area is referred to as "defensible space", which is the natural and landscaped area around a structure that has been maintained and designed to reduce fire danger.

forests, which in turn contributes both to rural communities and results in healthier forests that are more resilient to wildfire. For example, there are eight forest collaboratives now in Washington State. These collaboratives work within their rural communities on place-based restoration of our national forests, and members include community, non-profit, and agency leaders.

Healthy forests improve economic conditions in rural communities and can be accomplished by promoting forest conservation and investments that support sustainable land use and sound practices. That's why the Skagit CD is working hard to help more forest landowners understand their wildfire risk and how it relates to forest health while focusing on the specifics of each site, as well as educating them about the connection between a healthy functioning forest and a healthy community. Please visit their Forestry and Firewise pages on our website for more information at www.skagitcd.org/forestry and www.skagitcd.org/firewise_cwpp.

HELP FOR WASHINGTON'S PRIVATE FOREST LANDOWNERS

(Excerpted from WSU Extension Forestry website)

There is a fairly new comprehensive resource available for forest landowners: **The Washington State Consulting Forester and Silvicultural Contractor Directory**. This directory was compiled by WSU Extension Forestry staff. The directory includes specific information for each forestry professional and, as well as contact information, a list of services provided, insurance and bonding information, experience, and counties served. All of the information in the directory was provided by the forestry professionals themselves. This directory is searchable by county and service type and is also downloadable.

For more information including a glossary of forestry service terms, and the link to the searchable & downloadable directory, visit www.forestry.wsu.edu/

I'd Rather Be

Doing Forestry

WATERSHED HEALTH UPDATE

Skagit County's **Pollution Identification and Correction Program** has worked hard over the last year to improve water quality in the Samish Bay and Padilla Bay watersheds, and we've made some great progress!

Samish Bay Watershed

Over the last year, Skagit County and its Clean Samish Initiative partners have continued to scour the watershed looking for sources of pollution. We have identified 25 "hotspots" where water quality is poor and are still tracking down sources for many of them. Numerous septic system dye tests by the Skagit County Health Department have identified five new septic system failures since June 2015, and the Health Department is working to fix a number of older problems that persist. The majority of livestock problems remaining in the watershed are related to grazing of livestock on saturated or muddy pastures where manure can easily wash off in the next rain storm and poor manure management.

March through June is the time when the state Department of Health reevaluates whether it is safe to upgrade Samish Bay shellfish beds. We are sad to report that we did not meet the criteria for upgrade this year, but there is excellent news to report as well; We only had one pollution closure this year! In every other year we've had a second closure by early April, but this year we made it through April, May and June with no additional closures. Some of the improvement is most likely due to moderate rains this spring, but dozens of farmers and residents in the Samish have worked hard to reduce their impact.



Samish Bay

Padilla Bay Watershed

This past year, the county has been working to ensure that all septic systems in the town of Bay View, which is dense with older septic systems at risk for failure, are up to date on inspections. 92% of septic systems in that area are now up to date on inspections. In addition, we've done 13 dye tests in the Padilla watershed, 7 of which identified failures. All are either fixed or in the process of being fixed.

In the agricultural realm, we've evaluated over 900 properties in the Padilla watershed, and identified 12 agricultural properties that either are confirmed to be contributing bacteria to waterways, or are at high risk of doing so. The majority of problems have been related to manure storage, grazing on saturated pastures, and livestock having access to water in ditches and streams. All are working toward reducing their risk of pollution, and most are working



Bayview Beach

with the Skagit Conservation District to fix their problems. We've identified 18 "hotspots" where water quality is poor, and are still tracking down sources for many of them.

Weekly water quality samples this summer at the beach at Bay View State Park show a marked improvement over last year. This year, only one of six weekly samples exceeded safe swimming standards. By the July 4 weekend last year, three of six weekly samples exceeded standards. Skagit County and its partners are pleased with the improvements to water quality, and will be working over the next few years to find and fix more sources of pollution.

SKAGIT
WATER WEEKS
AUGUST 27 - SEPTEMBER 30, 2016
Water is Life! Let's Celebrate it!

PRE-REGISTRATION REQUIRED.
FOR EVENT DETAILS,
VISIT THE SCEA WEBSITE
www.skagitcleanwater.org
EMAIL: cwaterskagit@gmail.com



Implementation Highlights

With assistance from our small farm, livestock, and CREP planners, landowners in Skagit County have been working hard to implement best management practices on their properties. These practices are cost-shared through funds available at the District that help pay for labor and materials, as well as maintenance in some cases. Below are photos from projects happening around the county that help reduce pollution potential to our waterways, improve the health and well-being of animals, and support wildlife habitat improvement.



Horses drinking water supplied by a solar powered water pump system. Prior to the installation of the riparian buffer, fencing and the pump system, the horses accessed a creek to obtain drinking water.



Photo of the second solar powered water pump system installed on the same property, but on the other side of the creek.



Before – Photo of manure and used bedding material stored on bare ground and uncovered.



After: Photo of the completed manure storage bin. The landowner will cover the manure pile with a tarp to divert rainwater away from the manure.



Before: A salmon bearing stream with very little planted riparian area.



After: The same creek planted with native vegetation that will provide shade and habitat for salmon and other species as it matures.



EQIP Energy Efficiency

The Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) has been around for a few years but you may not have known that it has funding specifically for energy conservation on agricultural operations. There are two steps to the EQIP energy funding that can help your farm save energy and money. The first step is to complete an EQIP application for an energy audit. If the application is funded, it helps pay for an assessment that will document current energy use and make recommendations for updates that will save energy and pay for themselves over time. With your audit recommendations in hand, the second step is to complete another EQIP application. If funded, this application will help offset the costs of making your agricultural operation more energy efficient, shortening the payback period for you due to Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) cost-share. New lighting and new pumps are common items that farmers have received assistance replacing through this funding opportunity, and other updates available as well. Currently, the NRCS is receiving applications which will be considered for funding after an application deadline is set later this year. If you have questions or are interested in this opportunity please contact your local NRCS office.

NRCS Mount Vernon Office
2021 E College Way Suite 214
Mount Vernon, Wa 98273
360-428-7684 ext. 3

5th Annual Sustainable S

Where local economy and conservation meet

The Skagit Conservation District, Chuckanut Transition, and the Friday Creek Habitat Stewards would like to give special thanks to the Samish watershed residents who opened their gardens for the 5th Annual Sustainable Samish Garden Tour, which was held on Sunday, July 31st. This year's event featured five gardens and farms that demonstrate features of sustainability, conservation, healthy living, and environmental and community responsibility - all brimming with inspiration! Thank you to everyone who attended and to this year's featured gardeners: John and Elaine Leighton, Ann Brooking, Jeff and Jeniffer Tobon (Thoughtful Food Farm), Linda Versage and Walter Brodie (Blanchard Mountain Farm), and the Friday Creek Habitat Stewards and Alger Community Hall (who featured the community inspired demonstration naturescape garden and stream enhancement project on Silver Creek).

John and Elaine Leighton's Garden:



Nestled amongst the trees, John and Elaine Leighton's beautiful rural garden features a flourishing fruit orchard, an organic vegetable growing area, and a beautiful dahlia garden, crafted to be productive in poor soil conditions. Many Skagit County residents know what a challenge clay soils can pose to gardening.

The Leighton's raised bed solution to poor soil conditions has created an attractive option that has resulted in thriving healthy plants, less weeds, and a visually appealing garden landscape in a gorgeous park-like setting.

"What I tried to do," John notes, "is create a backyard garden/orchard that is first of all, productive - but, also attractive and fun! The soil here is awful, thus, I built raised boxes for everything and then enhance the soil with compost, manure, grass clippings, etc. Except for slug bait, our garden is all organic and high yielding."



Elaine's colorful raised beds dahlia garden was in full bloom for the Garden Tour. The dahlia garden creates an oasis for friends and family to enjoy and gather with arbors, benches and a fire pit set amongst the blooms.

Another highlight at the Leighton's is a beautifully designed dry creek bed which offers salmon garden art and a soothing natural garden feature that compliments their rural landscape.



Brooking Stark Wooded Five Acres

Pictured, Ann Brooking of Bow opened her garden to visitors for the 5th Annual Sustainable Samish Garden Tour. Her garden, nestled in a magical woodland setting, is certified through the National Wildlife Federation & WA Dept. of Fish & Wildlife as a "Backyard Wildlife Habitat/Sanctuary." Notes Ann about her garden, " Feng shui, Permaculture, and Sustainability inspire this site's design. Natives incorporated around the house blend in with the surrounding woods. Sustainability includes not biting off more than we can chew. Thought is given as to how much to cultivate and how much to leave natural."



A mix of ornamentals, natives, and pollinator plants grace the house while the remaining acreage has been left native and "wild." Trails throughout the wooded acreage provide retreat for people and wildlife.

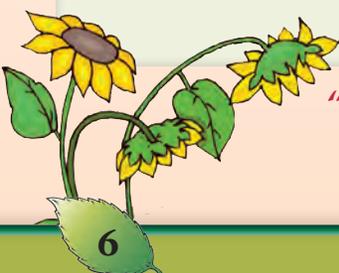
"At night the dog barks, growling as she runs the perimeter. I imagine a large cat in our wildlife corridors and roll over, feeling at peace that wildness endures" - Ann Brooking

Ann's paper bark maple tree was admired by garden tour attendees.

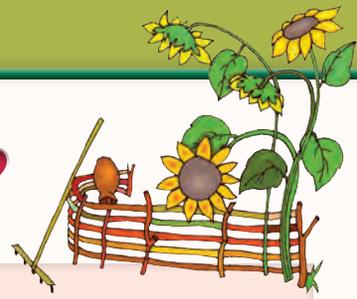


"Sustainability is a way of living that meets the needs of the present without impacting the needs of the future"

- Sustainable Sites Initiative



Amish Garden Tour



Thoughtful Food Farm, Jeff and Jeniffer Tobon

Jeff and Jen Tobon, owners/operators of Thoughtful Food Farm, shared their experiences in raising a diversity of crops and livestock that support each other, mimicking the flow of carbon, nitrogen, and water in a natural ecosystem. Their beautiful 10 acre farm sits just 5 feet above sea level, giving it incredible rich soil that is completely saturated in the winter. A barn fire in 2015 devastated their farm, but they have rebuilt and are stronger than ever.



The Tobon's grow organic vegetables, raise breeding pigs, and raise bottle-fed dairy steers to help supply local families, thereby helping the region to feed itself and promoting the importance of eating seasonally. The Tobon's also shared their strategies for managing water in the

winter, including raised beds, confining animals to protect pastures, runoff management, and weed management (and acceptance!). Pictured, Jeff discusses his goal of establishing an organic garlic business with garden visitors.

These eleven adorable baby piglets were born on Thoughtful Food Farm just in time for the Garden Tour!



Blanchard Mountain Farm, Walter Brodie and Linda Versage

Walter and Linda purchased their beautiful 20-acre farm in Bow three years ago with a vision to restore the tired pastures into a commercial organic produce farm with a farm stand and small guest house and to host occasional farm-related events and educational opportunities. It is amazing what they have accomplished in just three years! They immediately started cover cropping 4 acres to build soil and do weed suppression. After rebuilding the house and putting in a new mound septic system, they moved to the land 2 years ago and continue to add farm infrastructure.



This spring, the couple planted 100's of native plants on the farm to create a new hedgerow and border planting to attract beneficial insects and provide wildlife habitat and wind breaks. A mix of colorful drought tolerant natives & ornamental landscape beds were planted around the house.

"While our farm is still a work in progress, we are excited to help feed the local community and to share our land and experience of creating a new organic farm with others," – Linda Versage



Alger Hall Naturescape Demonstration Garden:

Established in 2013 by Alger neighbors and volunteers, with support from the Friday Creek Habitat Stewards, Skagit Conservation District, and a Rose Foundation Grant, this beautiful sustainable garden is all about community! Visitors had the opportunity to see pairings of native plants and naturescape techniques that home gardens can apply to their own yards to invite wildlife, lower maintenance, reduce pesticide use, protect neighborhood streams and support local ecology. The community-driven stream enhancement project on Silver Creek was also a highlight at this site.



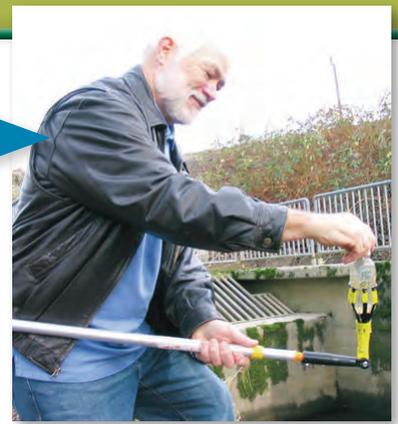
COMMUNITY STEWARDSHIP

Volunteer Highlights from the 2015-2016 Stream Team Season

Thank you to all the dedicated volunteers who ventured outside, rain (mostly!) or shine, to gather samples from our creeks and rivers, and worked hard in the lab to process water samples so we can continue to monitor the health of our watersheds in Skagit County!

16 YEARS OF SERVICE

Alec McDougall –
16-year
**STREAM
TEAM VETERAN!**



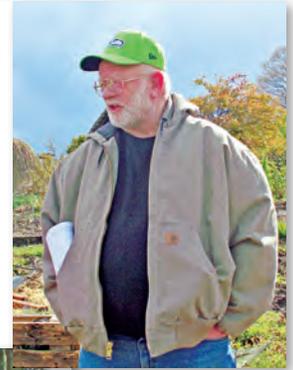
**5 YEARS
OF
STREAM
TEAM
SERVICE**

Rich Brown



Sarah Huntington

**10 YEARS
OF
STREAM
TEAM
SERVICE**



Scott Adams

Robert Pare



Terri Dix, Maria Magaña and Gena DiLabio, (aka, The Salmon Sisters or The Sunshine Team)

Jim Roberts



STREAM TEAM CELEBRATION

Stream Team and Storm Team volunteers gathered at Padilla Bay Reserve for the end of the sampling season celebration. 63 volunteers were recognized for their year(s) of valuable service to the community and celebrated with a delicious potluck and entertainment by the talented Salmon Sisters and the oh so charismatic Glen "Alex" Alexander of Padilla Bay Research Reserve!

Right – Our Stream and Storm Team volunteers sure know how to put together a delicious potluck!

Below – Everyone, big and small, enjoyed the oysters and clams graciously donated and prepared by Blau Oyster and Taylor Shellfish Farms at the event!



2016 STORM TEAM

This year the Storm Team focused their efforts in the Friday Creek watershed.



Storm Team volunteers pictured here from left to right: Robert Pare, Rich Brown, George Viverette, Alec McDougall, and Sandy McDougall. Not pictured: Lin Folsom, Jim Fukuyama, Danielle Galbraith, Gil Ormbrek, and Tom Schmidt.

For a list of all Stream & Storm Team volunteers for the 2015-2016 sampling season, visit our Stream Team webpage at http://skagitcd.org/stream_team

Thank you 2016 Marine Biotoxin Volunteers!

"Oysters come and walk with us... A pleasant walk, a pleasant talk along the briny beach..."

– The Walrus and the Carpenter, Lewis Carroll

The Skagit Conservation District, Skagit County Public Health, and the Washington State Dept. of Health would like to give special thanks to the 24 community volunteers participating in the Marine Biotoxin Volunteer program this year: **Glenda Alm, Barb Cameron, Ann Childs, Chuck Davis, Andrea Doll, Amy Fenlon, Jim Fukuyama, Lenora Hanson, Donna Helgeson, Dick Kent, Kimberly McCary, Henry Nyland, Shirley Nyland, Gil Ormbrek, John Patton, Sally Peyou, Sharon Riggs, Jon Stables, Vicky Stables, Steve Thornton, Pat Wedul, Strand Wedul, Dave Young and Pat Young.** It is through their active participation that we are able to protect the health of community residents and visitors. The goal of the Marine Biotoxin Volunteer Program is to provide an early public health warning of shellfish toxicity by routinely assessing our local recreational shellfish harvesting beaches for the presence of Paralytic Shellfish Poison (PSP) and Diarrhetic Shellfish Poison (DSP).

Local shellfish are gathered at low tide every other week by our local Marine Biotoxin volunteers at 9 recreational shellfish areas and then taken to the County Health Department where they are shipped off to the State Department of Health's lab in Seattle to be tested. The State Department of Health tests the shellfish then immediately gets any necessary warnings on the Marine Biotoxin Hotline to keep the public informed.

How can I protect my family from paralytic shellfish poisoning?

Before harvesting any kind of shellfish, call the **Marine Biotoxin Hotline at 1-800-562-5632** or visit the web page at: www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/sf/biotoxin.htm to find out what recreational areas are closed due to PSP or DSP. Do not expect beaches to be marked with a sign.

For information about the Marine Biotoxin Volunteer Monitoring program, contact Kristi Carpenter, Skagit Conservation District @ **428-4313** or email **Kristi@skagitcd.org**

Right: Marine Biotoxin volunteer Sally Peyou holds a sign warning of the danger of toxic clams. It is recommended that anyone collecting shellfish for consumption should also call the Marine Biotoxin Hotline even if signage has not been posted.



Left: Marine Biotoxin volunteer Strand Wedul hams it up to show how to identify a bent nose clam during the annual training at March Point.



Above: SCD staff, Kristi Carpenter, holds a horse clam collected as a sample on the beach at Cap Sante with Marine Biotoxin volunteers Lenora Hanson, Kimberly McCary, and Amy Fenlon. Samples are sent to the State Dept. of Health's lab in Seattle to be tested for PSP and DSP.

Now accepting Fall 2016 Watershed Masters registrations until September 23rd!

Watershed Masters is a volunteer training program for those interested in increasing their knowledge about local watersheds, water quality, and stream ecology. Participants attend 8 fun and informative evening sessions and 3 Saturday field trips. For more information and to register, please contact Kristi Carpenter at **360-428-4313** or email **kristi@skagitcd.org**

2016 BACKYARD CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP SHORT COURSE

Thank you 2016 Class Participants!

The Skagit Conservation District, in partnership with Skagit County, and the Cities of Anacortes, Burlington, Mount Vernon, and Sedro-Woolley, would like to extend special thanks to the participants of the 2016 Backyard Conservation Stewardship Short Course! We commend this enthusiastic class of 54 community residents for completing the program and for their personal commitments to make changes in their own backyards that will benefit the environment now and in the future by providing habitat for wildlife and landscaping for a purpose - to improve air, water, and soil quality. Thank you for your stewardship and involvement in making our neighborhoods, our community, and our world, a better place to live.



2016 Backyard Conservation Stewardship class participants rotated through a series of stations to learn about a variety of different plants at an evening class tour held at Azusa Farm and Garden. Pictured: Owner/Operator Everett Chu showcases and discusses rain garden plants.



Frank and Rose Orr's beautiful rain garden project was one of the featured stops for the 2016 Backyard Conservation class field tour of certified backyard wildlife habitats, which was held in Anacortes this spring.

The Backyard Conservation Stewardship Short Course is an annual six week program offered by the Skagit Conservation District each spring. Participants learn the principles of how to create beautiful landscapes that benefit humans, animals, stream health and the environment... one backyard at a time. For more information contact Kristi Carpenter at **(360) 428-4313** or email **kristi@skagitcd.org**



Pictured, a group of class participants touring the Naturescape Garden and Native Plant Demonstration Garden located at the Discovery Garden on Memorial Highway during a Saturday field day.

“In the long run, the fate of each community still lies in the hands of the people who live there.”

– Margaret Mead

2016 Backyard Conservation Class Participants Form a “Green Gardening” Club



Judi Roger's straw bale garden was one of the highlights of the new sustainable garden groups July meeting, which included a stroll through Judi's garden. Judi noted that oat or wheat straw works best for this gardening method. Pictured, left to right: Amy Fenlon, Diane Melvin, Mary Wahlgren, Barbara Baker-Hobbs, Judi Rogers, Kathryn Lindsay, Rebecca Otero, and Kimberly Cauvel (SV Herald).

A group of 2016 Backyard Conservation Stewardship Class graduates made front page news in the Tuesday, July 19th edition of the Skagit Valley Herald! This grassroots community group has formed a new “green gardening” club to provide support to each other’s gardening efforts, expand their love of gardening, and to promote sustainable landscaping in our community – they are still working on their name. In a nutshell, sustainable landscaping means gardening with a purpose. Sustainable landscaping eliminates or greatly reduces the wasteful and excessive use of fossil fuels or water in the landscape, promotes to, as great an extent possible, a diverse and rich community of plants with multiple layering in the ground plane and above, uses native or locally adapted non-invasive plants, makes use of local rainfall and runoff and absorbs

it in place, and considers the need for providing habitat for native animal life, including the insects that provide the building blocks and foodstuffs for birds, mammals, and other animals that depend upon them.

The new club is being chaired by Amy Fenlon with meetings currently being held at the Bay View Methodist Church. The meetings are fun and begin with a potluck social (an opportunity to sample fresh fruit/veggies from each other’s gardens), followed by a short business meeting and a presentation or field tour. A meeting held on July 12th included a tour of member Judi Rogers’ straw bale garden. Judi decided to give this method a try as it can help older gardeners reduce amount of pressure they put on their knees during gardening – and no weeding needed. Her straw bale garden flourished! After the gardening season, the straw bales will become



compost. For others interested in the straw bale gardening method, Judi recommended a book by Joel Karsen, “Straw Bale Gardens Complete.”

For information or to be included on the email list announcements for upcoming meetings, contact Amy Fenlon at amyfenlon@hotmail.com.

2016 Skagit Conservation Youth Tour



At left: U.S. Forest Service staff act out the effects of the "Impact Monster" to demonstrate the wrong way to camp and teach proper camping practices to students.

This year's annual Skagit Conservation Youth Tour welcomed 750 fifth and sixth grade students from 28 Skagit County classrooms to Pomona Grange Park on Friday Creek May 10th and 11th. Sunny weather welcomed students who participated in hand-on activities offered by local resource professionals. Stations included: forest protection, the salmon life cycle, bivalves, soils, "Leave No Trace" camping practices, and forest regeneration. Classes that participated in the "Zero Waste" recycling lunch activity reduced landfill waste by 77%!!

THANK YOU!!!

- **Sierra Pacific Foundation** – bus transportation funding for students to attend the tour.
- **North Puget Sound Chapter -Society of American Foresters** – event sponsorship
- **Skagit County** – continued program support
- **Department of Natural Resources, Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group, Taylor Shellfish Farms, Natural Resources Conservation Service, US Forest Service, Skagit County Compost/Recycler Program, and Sierra Pacific Industries, Inc.** – station hosts



Scout Leaves His Mark

This past May, Keith Templeton, a senior at Mount Vernon High School, installed over 100 storm drain markers in the Maddox Creek and Section Street neighborhoods of Mount Vernon. He coordinated the project and recruited teams of fellow scouts and parents to help implement his plan. Keith is a member of the Mount Baker Council, Troop 4100, and selected the marking project as a step toward earning his Eagle Scout ranking.

The Skagit Conservation District would like to thank Keith for his hard work in completing this project!!

For further information about how you can plan such a project or install markers in your neighborhood, please call Cindy Pierce at (360) 428-4313. Marking projects are available in the cities of Burlington, Mount Vernon, and rural Skagit County areas. All materials are available free of charge and assistance is available.



Keith supervises his crew as they apply a storm drain label.



The Skagit Conservation District distributed 500 seedlings to Skagit County youth in honor of Arbor Day!

2016 POSTER CONTEST "WE ALL NEED TREES"

The Skagit Conservation District hosted its annual Natural Resources Conservation Poster Contest in honor of Soil and Water Stewardship Week, which was April 24 to May 1, 2016.

Each year, the National Association of Conservation Districts creates a theme based on an annual rotation of five natural resource topics. The theme for 2016 is "We All Need Trees." The contest was open to Skagit County students, grades kindergarten through twelfth with over 100 poster entries.

This year's overall winner was **William Baird**, an 8th grader at Concrete Middle School. William was also the Category 7-9th Grade Winner. He was awarded a \$50 Tri-Dee gift card, his framed artwork, and an award plaque. The runner-up winner was **Milo Robertson**,

a kindergartner at Summersun Montessori. Milo was also the Category K-1 Grade Winner and was awarded a plaque and \$25 Tri-Dee gift card.

Logan Mounts, a second grader at Little Mountain Elementary, was the Category 2-3rd Grade Winner, **Michelle Vargas**, a fifth grader at Jefferson Elementary, was the Category 4-6th Grade Winner, and **Bethany Werda**, a Concrete High School tenth grader, was the Category 10-12th Grade Winner. Each Category winners received a potted Douglas fir seedling, a tree identification book, and an award certificate. Laminated bookmarks were created featuring their artwork. All contest participants received participation certificates, as well as "We



during a televised presentation with the Commissioners and Blossom the Treeture™ at the annual Soil and Water Stewardship Proclamation that was held at the Skagit County Commissioners Hearing Room on April 18, 2016.

We want to give a special thank you to our 2016 poster contest judges:

Samantha Chang – Silviculturist, US Forest Service, **Dawn Harju** – Friday Creek Habitat Stewards, **Megan Penney** – Forester, WA Department of Natural Resources, and **Jill Weber** – Skagit Conservation Education Alliance board, Friday Creek Habitat Stewards.

All Need Trees" activity booklets and bookmarks.

The award winning students and their families were recognized

LEFT: Poster contest winners with the Skagit County Commissioners during the Soil and Water Stewardship Proclamation.



Stormwater Classroom Presentations

During the 2015-16 school year, the Skagit Conservation District visited 37 Skagit County classrooms educating over 900 students about stormwater pollution within their watersheds.

Using the EnviroScape® watershed model, which is a scaled-down, tabletop version of the "Skagit" watershed, the students learned about the important relationship they share with their local water bodies and the impact that human actions have on them. The hands-on model gives a visual example of what a watershed may look like and the accompanying demonstration shows how various land uses and their associated non-point source pollution can affect water quality, especially after a rain storm.

These presentations provide a unique, interactive learning experience, enabling students to make the connection between the way we live and the health of our local waterways. They are able to see how the combined affects of non-point source pollution from many small sources can have a large impact on the quality of our shared water resources. Students discover how they can protect the environment by taking small, local actions and gain knowledge about stormwater runoff, water pollution, water quality, watersheds, and stewardship.



"WE ALL LIVE
DOWNSTREAM!"



Students "make it rain" on the watershed model during a presentation

Skagit Conservation District welcomes new Administrative Assistant

Hello, my name is Sheri Sager. I am the new Administrative Assistant for the Skagit Conservation District. I was born and raised in Skagit County, (rural Big Lake to be exact); I enjoy the rural environment and being so close to mountains, lakes, rivers and ocean. I moved to the Bellevue metropolis in the 80's; and was thrilled when I had the opportunity to move back to Mount Vernon early 90's when I purchased my first (and current) home. My work background includes many years with local utilities offices: telephone and power companies; as well as a decade with the State of Washington,



Department of Social and Health Services and Skagit Valley College. I love living in Skagit County and am very happy to be working so close to home. I look forward to supporting the SCD with my extensive experience as an Administrative Assistant

I look forward to learning more about the Conservation Districts and serving Skagit County residents and what our many projects include as I support this team in protecting our great area, serving landowners helping to protect their landscapes, rivers, streams and enhancing our natural resources.



After Almost 18 YEARS OF SERVICE TO THE SKAGIT CD, Cora Has Retired!

After almost 18 years at the Skagit Conservation District, leaving is bittersweet. I am looking forward to sleeping past 5:30 a.m. trying to get healthier since I will no longer have to sit in front of a computer all day long, and traveling with my husband to explore our great country and reconnect with friends along the way. However, I will miss my colleagues, Board Supervisors, our cooperators, our volunteers, and contacts at other agencies that have been a big part of my life for so long and have been a pleasure to work with.

Adieu, Cora! We will miss you tons! Thank you for all your years of loyalty, and have some extra fun for us!

Skagit CD Welcomes Eben Twaddle to our Board of Supervisors

This March Eben Twaddle was voted in as the newest Skagit Conservation District Board member. Eben owns and operates a construction company, a topsoil business and raises beef cattle on his property on Prairie Road.



Farewell to Janet McRae

Skagit CD Board member and past chair, Janet McRae has decided to step down from the board. Skagit CD thanks Janet for her 22 years of volunteer service to the District and the Skagit County community. The board and staff wish her well!

Skagit Conservation District

Offering free technical, financial, and educational resources for landowners,

INCLUDING:

- Livestock/Small Farm Planning
- Youth Education
- Forestry Planning
- Native Plant Sales
- Community Wildfire Preparedness Planning
- Conservation Easements
- Engineering Services
- Adult Education/Volunteer Programs

Skagit Conservation District

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SKAGIT CONSERVATION DISTRICT NEWS



We wish to thank the businesses and individuals who help to sponsor this publication of the Skagit Conservation District News.

Skagit Conservation News sponsorships cost \$50 a year for business names or \$100 for business cards and are seen by over 4,000 readers twice a year.

To become a conservation newsletter sponsor, please contact Sheri at 360-428-4313.

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SCD Board meetings are held at 2021 E. College Way
on the fourth Tuesday of every month at 7:00 a.m. and are open to the public.
Please call (360) 428-4313 to verify meeting dates.

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