



**Salmon Creek
Watershed Council**
Clark County, Washington

**Winter
2011**

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Great Egret at Sunrise
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Salmon Creek Watershed *Quarterly*

A seasonal look at the state of Salmon Creek, its stakeholders and its watershed council.



When Protectors Turn Pestilent

Volunteers support ongoing restoration efforts in Pleasant Valley Park

On February 4, a small cadre of volunteers descended upon Pleasant Valley Park wielding utility knives in hopes of freeing trees from impending doom.

The trees are part of a restoration project that began in 2003 with a \$5,000 grant from Trout Unlimited and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association. This grant helped secure the equipment and materials necessary to start a multi-phase restoration that included plantings from 2003 to 2010.

Restoration Coordinator for the SCWC, Randall Pearl, said the plants were chosen using established plans of what species work in the selected habitat. In the end, this meant trees such as western red cedar, oregon oak, quaking aspen, and red osier dogwood. These, and many other species, were all donated by Clark Public Utilities and citizens of Clark County.

“The multiple springs flowing through this park make the site unique,” Pearl said, “and the streamside plantings are vital in keeping that spring-fed stretch of water shaded and nutrient rich.”

As for the impending doom threatening these critical trees comes in the

form of plastic sheaths—originally installed to protect the juvenile trees from wildlife threats. Ironically, once the trees grow large enough to fill the tubes, the trunk protectors start to pose the risk of insects, disease and fungus to the trees.

So while removing plastic sheaths from the base of trees may not seem that heroic, it is life or death for the trees. In turn, unhealthy or dying trees could damage the entire restoration effort and all the time and money invested thus far. Hence, the reason for organizing an effort to cut, collect and recycle the plastic protectors.

Thanks to committed volunteers, the job went fast. Volunteers slashed plastic sheaths, packed them to a central area and prepped them for Clark Public Utilities, who later recycled the protectors.

The sprawling pile of protectors at days end marked yet another step in the restoration of Pleasant Valley Park. Pearl said the day went great, and should act as preparation for a forthcoming county-led project that will restore two more acres of riparian habitat and create rearing and spawning areas in the year-round, cold-water side channel.

“So much is being invested into Pleasant Valley Park because it has key elements working in its favor,” Pearl said. “It has riparian habitat, a spring-fed stream, an abundance of wildlife and an enormous amount of potential.”

For more info on stream restoration projects, contact Restoration Coordinator, Randall Pearl via e-mail at Randall.Pearl@SalmonCreekWatershed.org



Left: Volunteer, Lisa Harris, removes zip ties from the tree protectors and piles them for pickup and recycling.

Right: A tree protector is peeled off of a tree located on the spring-fed side channel.

Rescuing Fish, An Ongoing Cycle

Northwest Wild Fish Rescue has a long, successful winter

With a lengthy “to-do” list and nearly 25,000 salmon fry to tend to, one might say it’s been a busy winter for Northwest Wild Fish Rescue.

It’s all part of the commitment Dave Brown and his volunteers make every summer as they net and rescue fry from drying channels throughout Salmon Creek and its tributaries.

A large-scale fish tagging operation was the first item on their winter agenda, and volunteers came from across the county to help. On two afternoons in November, roughly 35 volunteers visited Brown’s site to clip and tag 13,000 parr (1-year-old salmon) from Mill Creek near Dollar’s Corner.

Next in line for Northwest Wild Fish Rescue—releasing. On January 24, Brown began his release program by reintroducing parr into Morgan Creek and the High Valley area of Salmon Creek. The release timeline continues through the spring and will reintroduce all of the 13,000 tagged parr into Salmon Creek and its tributaries.

But the most telling winter task for Northwest Wild Fish Rescue came in a carcass recovery effort. In order to get an idea of how many fish are returning to spawn, Brown and a few volunteers scoured the banks of Mill Creek to retrieve the heads of spawned out salmon. In total, 22 of nearly 100 carcasses collected were equipped with wire tags that identified their release data.



Above: Dave Brown uses a saw to remove the head from a salmon carcass found on the banks of Mill Creek.



Above Left: Volunteers, Geraldine Van Der Haegen and Dave Bloom of NW Marine Technology operate tagging equipment at Dave Brown’s rearing facility.

Above Right: A volunteer reintroduces salmon parr into upper Salmon Creek.

Left: Dave Brown and Brice Crayne rescue salmon fry from drying channels in Mill Creek during late Spring with dip nets.

Brown said the majority of these carcasses were identified as wild fish, which could also be fish from the program. Coupled with the heads that were recovered and identified in ocean fisheries data, Brown is beginning to see tangible success. As the program expands, he hopes the data starts to uncover useful migration patterns.

For now, the increasing number of spawning salmon and steelhead observed in the creeks are success enough. Brown said the numbers of fry and spawning salmon have increased every year of the program. This winter, Brown recorded more than a mile of spawning salmon at the Mill Creek location in Battle Ground.

He said saving wild fish and allowing them to spawn again is important because it helps retain genetic diversity in local fish populations. Apparently, that sentiment is shared by others as well.

Currently, the program has two rearing facilities on the drawing board, is working toward securing a permit to

increase spawning beds in the creek and has received two tons of analog nutrient enhancement feed from an anonymous donor.

Northwest Wild Fish Rescue also donated 200 pounds of the nutrient enhancement feed to the Salmon Creek Watershed Council. The goal is to utilize these analogs in the watershed for the benefit of the fish, and the insects they feed on, by providing nutrients throughout all levels of the watershed ecosystem.

Brown said he knows that it takes a community to accomplish the full-time task of rescuing fish and restoring our streams. Well, that, and a wealth of resources.

Volunteers are needed to help Northwest Wild Fish Rescue in various roles and capacities. Also, if you have fish in your stretch of creek and are concerned about their viability, or if you would just like more info about the program, please contact Dave Brown via e-mail at dwildfish@gmail.com or visit www.NWWildFishRescue.org

Amphibian Census 2011

Citizen Scientists examine Clark County's amphibian population

If you're fortunate, you might spot a Pacific Tree frogs (*Hyla regilla*) leaping away from an oncoming lawnmower or taking refuge in moist debris near an outdoor faucet, but the majority of them go undetected thanks to their near chameleon-like ability to blend in.

Yes, frogs and their familiar croaks are a common sound in the Pacific Northwest, but they have also declined steadily in recent decades as our human footprint has expanded.

Little is known about the status of amphibians in Clark County, but Dr. Peter Ritson is hoping to change that with a large citizen-led amphibian monitoring program in Clark County. Now in its fourth year, the Clark County Community Amphibian Monitoring Project is an ambitious effort to collect long-term presence, and absence, data for the most common frogs and salamanders in the region.

"Our program is leading the conversation with other regional partners to create an interstate amphibian database," Dr. Ritson said.

But rather than attempting to track down camouflaged frogs and submerged salamanders, Ritson is teaching volunteers to count their egg masses in wetlands all over the county.

In January, a three-hour training session teaches volunteers how to search for, identify and count amphibian egg masses with extreme care. During the course participants visit a survey site to learn techniques and search for egg masses laid by amphibians, such as red-legged and chorus frogs, and northwestern and long-toed salamanders.

Afterward, volunteers are encouraged to spend a few hours each weekend in February wading through ponds and wetlands in search of egg masses.

Participants often jump at the chance too. This year, two Salmon Creek Wa-

Right: Citizens attend a training class at WSU Vancouver where they observe specimens and learn specific techniques.

Below Right: A Pacific Tree frog egg mass attached to wetland vegetation will hatch into tadpoles within one to three weeks.

Below Left: A mating stack of Red-legged frogs, where males pile on top of a female that is able to produce 200 to 1,100 eggs per season.



tershed Council members volunteered to help. Randall Pearl participated for his fourth consecutive year, while Shana Sundstrom logged her first year.

"It was such a great way to get out into nature and get hands-on knowledge about some of our local species," Sundstrom said. "Dr. Ritson led a great training session, and the egg-mass surveys I've done since gave me a new appreciation for our wetlands."

The project aims to collect multi-year population data for pond-breeding amphibians and report it to local and regional agencies who make species conservation and land-use management decisions. Beyond measuring amphibian populations, the monitoring also measures the health of wetlands, which provide wildlife habitat, filter pollutants, recharge groundwater and help corral floodwaters.

Additionally, amphibians can also act as an indicator species; their sensitivity

to environmental contaminants and changes in water quality means they can provide early warning signals about declining environmental conditions. By utilizing the amphibian data in this perspective it will ultimately help map threats to our environmental health.

So, with your help, maybe next time frogs start croaking, Dr. Ritson will be able to tell us what they really mean.

For further information, or if you'd like to volunteer with the Clark County Community Amphibian Monitoring Project, please e-mail Dr. Peter Ritson at Clarkfrog@gmail.com. You can also visit the website for more details at www.home.comcast.net/~cportfors



Wildlife Note: Tundra Swans

Tips on local wildlife from biologist and board president, Bianca Streif

As fall frost starts to form across the Northwest, majestic tundra swans (*Cygnus columbianus*) appear overhead --migrating in large family groups.

With wingspans up to 6 feet, these large, white goose-like birds fly overhead in a V pattern with a long outstretched neck. By mid-fall, they've made their way from high tundra breeding grounds in Alaska to preferred wintering areas, such as the lower Salmon Creek watershed.

At night, wintering swans gather in a circle to sleep safely on the water. First, they call out to gather the flock, and then continue through the night with a gentle, musical murmuring. It was Lewis and Clark who first coined the swan's popular name (whistling swan), while being kept up from their noise at night near the Ridgefield refuge.

Often, people confuse tundra swans for the slightly larger trumpeter swan, which actually has a somewhat longer,



Above: A tundra swan in flight with its neck outstretched.

Right: Wading along shorelines, tundra swans often dip their heads to feed on a variety of aquatic plants, seeds, tubers, and invertebrates.



straighter bill, and a deep, French horn-like call.

Tundra swans are also strong, fast swimmers that take to the air by running across the water's surface with wings beating in sync. These graceful birds forage on aquatic plants, seeds, tubers, and invertebrates by dipping their heads underwater.

Primary threats to tundra swans in our area involve a reduction in their winter food sources. This is mainly due

to a loss of wetlands and adjacent ponds, which forces them to forage on grains in agricultural fields. But most harmful is their susceptibility to lead poisoning from the ingestion of lead pellets, where even a few can kill a swan.

To suggest future Wildlife Notes, or for information on specific species in the Salmon Creek watershed, e-mail Bianca.Streif@SalmonCreekWatershed.org

Upcoming Events >>>

TBA >>> Stream Cleanup: For info, contact Steve Fountain via Steven.Fountain@SalmonCreekWatershed.org

March 5th >>> A training session for our ongoing water-typing project. Contact Restoration Coordinator, Randall Pearl via Randall.Pearl@SalmonCreekWatershed.org.

March 10th >>> Monthly meeting featuring a presentation from the Vancouver Lake Watershed Partnership.

April 9th >>> The council and WSU Vancouver pair up for a Cougar Pride Days stream restoration project. For details contact Restoration Coordinator, Randall Pearl, via e-mail at Randall.Pearl@SalmonCreekWatershed.org.

April 14th >>> Monthly meeting featuring a guest speaker yet to be announced.

April 23rd >>> Come visit us at Kline Pond during Clark Public Utility's Earth Day Celebration. Stop by to enjoy our booth at the EcoFair from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

May 12th >>> Monthly meeting featuring a guest speaker yet to be announced.

September 24th >>> Come spend a fun-filled evening with us as we host our first annual fundraiser.

Get *Your* Hands Wet!

Become a fan or volunteer of the Salmon Creek Watershed. You can find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) or visit our [homepage](#) to find opportunities in habitat restoration, stream monitoring, stream survey, cleanup, community outreach and fundraising.

As a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, the council depends on volunteers and donors alike. Tax deductible donations and time support our restoration and educational efforts. We're forever grateful for that support, and encourage everyone to dive in by volunteering or [donating online](#) today.

Come watch a guest speaker, or join the conversation, at our monthly board meeting. The hour-long meetings are held the second Thursday of each month at 5:30 pm in Clark Public Utility's education center located at 8600 NE 117th Avenue, Vancouver, WA 98662.

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www.SalmonCreekWatershed.org