

THE UNDERSTORY

Newsletter for Skagit Land Trust Volunteer Land Stewards

Spring/Summer 2017

Cumberland Creek Adventures

by Douglas McPeak, Assistant Senior Patrol Leader of Boy Scout Troop 4100

On March 11th my fellow scouts of Troop 4100 and I did a service project on Skagit Land Trust's Cumberland Creek Conservation Area. The service project consisted of planting some 400 willows and cottonwood trees to control the species of invasive grass around an oxbow pond, building trail, and clearing trail of fallen trees.

We began on that rainy Saturday by getting up early (7:30, early for a teenager on the weekend) and drove to the property. Met by the wonderful Land Trust staff and volunteer (Lisa Miller and Jim Johnson) at the trailhead, we carried the 400 trees (little more than sticks) and all our tools to the service site and began to plant them. The process was as simple as punching a hole in the ground, putting the tree in and stomping the ground around them so that they were firmly planted. Attention was paid to the spacing so as to not choke out the other planted trees. Throughout this we had the informative narrative of Lisa and Jim teaching us about the ecosystems surrounding the oxbow we were working by and explaining the life cycle of the frogs whose eggs were ever-present.

I noticed that even the easily distractible younger scouts seemed to be getting a greater respect for the complexity and delicacy of the ecosystem in our backyard. It showed them how a little work can keep the ecosystem balanced and looking even better than when we arrived, allowing future generations to enjoy the same beauty we do. After this project was finished we moved on to the task of making a short connecting trail to allow parallel trails to be eliminated, lightening the human footprint on this exquisite piece of land. The trimming saw and machete were favorite tools among the younger scouts and were delegated with proper supervision. This allowed them to have fun while doing something productive, something I like to call productive destruction. Throughout the activity Jim and Lisa kept us well informed as to which species were native and how to identify them. This helped us imagine the uninfluenced forests of

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Photo of Cumberland Peninsula, by Bob Carey Leader of Boy Scout Troop 4100

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SKAGIT LAND TRUST
Saving Land for Tomorrow

Conservation Classroom at Lyman Slough

by Richard Raisler, Lyman Slough Land Steward

A new and exciting outdoor Conservation Classroom has been implemented by Stewardship and Outreach Associate Lisa Miller, AmeriCorps Member Hannah Williams and Lyman Elementary School administration and teachers. The “Classroom” is Skagit Land Trust’s Lyman Slough property located next to the town of Lyman. 50 energetic fifth grade and kindergarten students collaborate in observing and recording nature with the aid of work books and adult supervision. Hannah and Lisa have been leading the classes with the goal of the schools teachers soon taking the lead so that these Conservation Classrooms become part of their permanent curriculum. Vocabulary skills taught during the visit include words like native, non-native, invasive, and non-invasive. Examples of these plants are ever present at Lyman Slough. Concepts discussed include the cooperative synergy of the Skagit River, the five species of Pacific Salmon, and native plants of the riparian zone.

Lyman Slough has several logistical advantages for hosting Conservation Classroom activities; it is located within a five minute walk of the school, has easy access from the Cascade Trail, a flowing side channel of the Skagit River (once a backwater slough, provides exposure to the dynamic, ever changing Skagit River), safe areas for exploration with lots of “bugs and critters”, a city park with bathrooms, covered picnic area, and parking is close by. It would be hard to find a site more suitable for an outdoor classroom.

As a land steward I participate in Lyman’s Conservation Classroom as a “grandfather” might while visiting his grandchildren; observing the enthusiasm, joy, and curiosity of these young conservationists, answering and asking questions, and being aware of what their young eyes and minds see. *It is a joy.*



All photos are kindergarten and 5th grade partners.



yesterday and how we might take steps towards achieving that today, reinforcing the reason we were planting the willow and cottonwood trees.

After this we were all ready for a break, so we decided to enjoy the rainy views of the Upper Skagit while strolling along the banks. Along the way we decided to use the trimming saw to allow those not as spry as our group to get along. We began to compete, seeing who could saw through the trees fastest, again allowing for productive destruction. Despite the views being limited they were still pretty. We headed back to the cars and on the way discussed which part we were going to show our families first when we came again, not questioning whether we would or would not be back for a visit. We left knowing more about our beautiful ecosystem and how to protect it.

P.S. The experience was greatly improved by ending with hot chocolate.



Above: Troop 4100
hard at work near
oxbow pond

Left: Shadow at the
oxbow - the troop
mascot!

Do you have a story you would like to share? Contact Lisa for details on an upcoming edition.

Meet our Newest Volunteer Land Steward & Land Steward Aides

Janet Cray; Barney Lake Conservation Area Steward

Janet grew up in a military family, moving around the country quite a bit but for the past 23 years has established deep roots within the community from her home near Barney Lake in Mount Vernon. She has been a professional wetland scientist for over 10 years and has always wanted to get to know more about Barney Lake. Her favorite part of her job is slogging through wetlands looking for amphibian egg masses. In 2015, she volunteered with SLT to help with amphibian surveys at Barney Lake, and then in 2016 she became one of the land stewards for Barney Lake and the newly acquired Bell properties.

Tim Colton; Land Steward Aide

Tim was born and raised in Cedar Rapids, IA, and attended the University of Iowa, where he received a B.S. in Civil/Environmental Engineering. His faith and religion lead him out to Seattle after college, where he discovered permaculture, the wonders of the PNW, and met his wife Kirsten. He spent the past five years seeking to gain a better understanding of different food production systems, particularly those successful here in the Puget Sound. He enjoys volunteering with SLT because of his love for the outdoors, fostering natural beauty, strengthening our local food system, and investing in his future.

Kirsten Colton; Land Steward Aide

Kirsten grew up in Seattle and is a new transplant to the Skagit Valley, with her husband Tim. Little did she know how much she would love rural life as a city person. She runs a freelance editing business specialized in cookbooks, guidebooks, and outdoor adventure narratives. In her free time, she enjoys gardening, cooking and baking, and hiking.

Tyler Closson; Land Steward Aide

Tyler joined SLT as a volunteer by helping several of the land stewards tackle projects like bucking fallen trees and moving animal carcasses out of view. After working long weeks with the ferry system (and the sometimes monotonous tasks that come with that job) Tyler enjoys volunteering with SLT for the reward of seeing what huge differences can be made in just a few hours with a handful of dedicated people.

Bengt Miller; Land Steward Aide

Bengt began his restoration career right out of college as the first Skagit Fisheries' AmeriCorps/WCC individual placement, performing in-stream monitoring during the summer of 1999. He moved to Maine to do another year with AmeriCorps. Upon returning back to the Northwest he attended the Bellingham Technical College, where he learned about land surveying, mapping and GIS. Since February of 2009 he has been employed by SFEG as a Watershed Restoration Technician. He loves the outdoor aspect of his job and finds the work fulfilling. Outside of work he can usually be found wherever there is an Ultimate Frisbee game.

Welcome to the team Janet, Tim & Kirsten, Tyler, & Bengt

Land Stewards and their Conservation Areas

Barney Lake - Brenda Cunningham, Tim Manns, & Janet Cray

Barr Creek - Russ Dalton

Big Lake Wetlands - Heidi & Matt Hixson

Butler Creek - Jim Owens

Cumberland Creek - Jim Johnson

Day Creek & Day Creek Forest - Stan Zyskowski

Day Creek Kosbab - Jim Fukuyama

Day Creek Slough & Minkler Lake - Hal Lee

Fidalgo Bay Carstens - Dennis Clark & Lynne Jordan

Grandy Creek - John Freeman

Green Road Marsh - Heidi Nichols

Guemes Mountain - Carolyn & Ed Gastellum, Ian

Woofenden & Kit Harma

Hurn Field - Steffany Raynes & Lin Skavdahl

Lyman Slough - Richard Raisler

March Point - LaVerne & Jim Scheltens

Mud Lake - Mike Olson

Pressentin Ranch - Ranae & Jim Watson

Samish River Ochs - Pete Haase

Cascade River South 1 & 2 - Bob Boudinot

Sumner Lake - Tami Thomas & Tom Mayes

Suiattle River, TNC Dupuis & Rankin - Phil Kincare

Tope Ryan - John Day

Utopia - Kinsey Shilling

Monitoring for Amphibians

by Heidi Nichols, Green Road Marsh Land Steward and 2017 Amphibian Program Coordinator

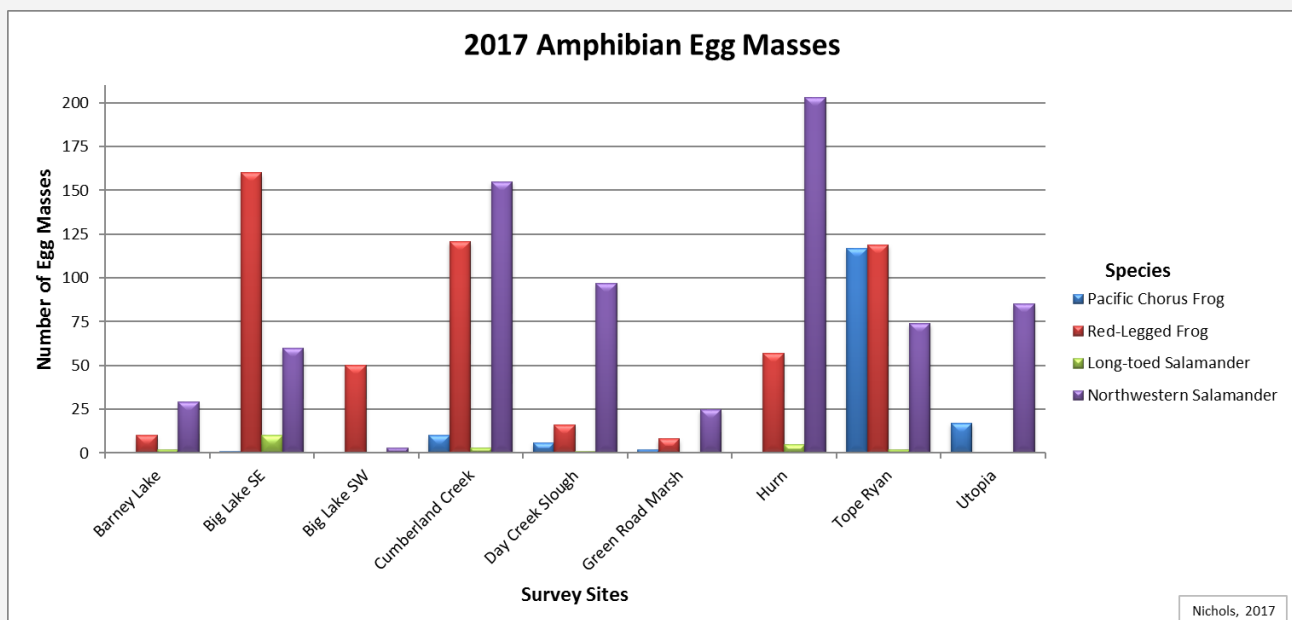
Many scientific reports have documented declines in amphibian populations, highlighting the need for data on potential causes and how their status could be improved in the United States. Amphibians are excellent indicators of environmental health. Due to their moist, permeable skins they are vulnerable to changes in water availability and quality. The life history of frogs, toads, and salamanders also makes them vulnerable to changes in the environment. Many species migrate between aquatic sites (for breeding) and terrestrial sites (for foraging and over-wintering), making them susceptible to habitat changes and micro-climate variation. Managing lands for amphibian populations also benefits other wildlife, as they are a mid-trophic food source for many predators and reduce excessive richness of nutrients by consuming zooplankton and algae.

Skagit Land Trust (SLT) began monitoring amphibians on their wetlands in 2012 through a partnership with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and the US Forest Service. WDFW and USFS staff provided amphibian identification training to volunteers in an effort to locate Oregon spotted frogs (*Rana pretiosa*), which were listed as Endangered in Washington in 1997 by the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission. In March 2017, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) asked to re-survey some of SLT properties for presence of the frogs and potential suitable habitat for possible re-introduction of the species. Though we have not located the Oregon Spotted frog on SLT land, we are much more familiar with the amphibians our lands support. Eight sites were surveyed in 2017; five other sites have been surveyed since 2012.

The SLT amphibian monitoring program is accomplished with the help of new and past citizen science volunteers and Land Stewards. Amphibian identification training, adapted from the Whatcom Amphibian Monitoring Project, was conducted on February 4, 2017 to teach and refresh the materials and methods used to conduct amphibian egg mass surveys. This year 23 citizen science volunteers and land stewards gave 155.5 hours of their time and energy for this program.

Weather conditions during 2017 monitoring included colder and wetter average temperatures and precipitation than previous years, which had earlier warm spring temperatures. From October 2016 through April 2017, Skagit County received a minimum of 12" in the valley and 72" in the mountains of rain. The cold temperatures led to a later breeding season and highly turbid water made it difficult to find egg masses. These factors contributed to lower egg mass counts this year compared to previous years.

I would like to say **thank you** to all of our volunteers and land stewards for your hard work and dedication,. You helped make this program a success.





P.O. Box 1017
Mount Vernon, WA 98273
360.428.7878

PLACE
STAMP
HERE

Upcoming Stewardship Events

**1st Saturday & 3rd Friday of every month
from 9am to noon!**

- 1st Saturday Stewardship - Minkler Lake - June 3
- TNC's Smith Conservation Area - June 10
- 3rd Friday Stewardship - Day Creek Slough - June 16
- * Volunteer Appreciation & Outreach Picnic -
Howard Miller State Park - June 17
- 1st Saturday Stewardship - Butler Creek - July 1
- 3rd Saturday Stewardship - Guemes Mtn - July 21
- SLT Annual Picnic - Northern State Rec Area - July 23
- 1st Saturday Stewardship - TBD - Aug. 5
- 3rd Friday Stewardship - Cumberland Creek - Aug. 18

Please RSVP & join us to visit a new property!

Don't forget to send your Quarterly Monitoring Reports to Lisa

Due March 31 ~June 30 ~September 30 ~December 31

**Check out our newest
conservation stats, achieved
with your support!**

Acres Protected

Conservation Easements (36): 3,568 acres
Trust-Owned Lands (29): 2,739 acres
Trust-Assisted Projects (27): 1,498 acres
TOTAL acres protected: 7,805

Conservation Values Protected

Forested Habitat: 5,490 acres
Agricultural Lands: 781 acres
Lakes and Wetlands: 790 acres
Intertidal Habitat: 541 ft.
River Shoreline: 38.3 miles
Saltwater Shoreline: 13,920 ft.

Thank you.