

THE UNDERSTORY

Newsletter for Skagit Land Trust Volunteer Land Stewards

Summer 2016

Setbacks and Uncertainties

by Jim Johnson, Cumberland Creek Land Steward

Thoreau's claim that he had traveled widely in Concord has always, to my ear anyway, sounded a bit defensive, as though he was aware of his own inertia. Still, following the hermit's precedent, let me plead that for the past year I've travelled widely in Cumberland. Here are some of the more troubling moments from those circumscribed travels.

We experienced the lowest Wood Duck nesting activity in the nearly ten years since setting out nesting boxes. I suspect mama Wood Duck took one look at the water level in the oxbow pond and thought if it's this low in February or March, it'll be far less hospitable come summer.

After monitoring amphibian egg masses on the same oxbow, and returning for a second session as per protocol, the water level had dropped a foot or more; leaving a grisly bathtub ring of thousands of desiccated egg masses of Northern salamanders, Pacific chorus and Red-legged frogs.

Later, Cumberland Creek began to go subsurface, trapping hundreds of out-migrating Coho smolt in shallow, overly warm, oxygen-depleted pools. Streams going subsurface are, of course, not unheard of around here. Many smaller streams like Cumberland tumble out of the foothills onto the valley floor, meandering some distance over well-drained alluvial solid before reaching the Skagit. Still, bleeding-heart friends Jack and Anne Middleton and I, armed with nets, buckets, and portable aerators borrowed from

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Oxbow pond during a monitoring visit, late spring 2016

Are There Ticks in Our Area?

by *Steffany Raynes and Lin Skavdahl*, Hurn Field Land Stewards

Just recently, Lin came home from a hike up on a hillside above Marblemount with ticks on both of our dogs. They were deer ticks and we were not up to date on their tick prevention medications so we were pretty concerned. As a result of that unpleasant experience (removing more than a dozen ticks, some firmly embedded) We did quite a bit of research and decided to spread information far and wide, because we think there are some misconceptions about ticks in Western Washington. They are HERE. What isn't clear so far is whether or not the ticks in our area carry diseases such as Lyme's Disease. It is probably safe to say we are NOT safe from the possibility our local ticks carry disease. It is smart to protect yourself (and your animals) when you are out and about.

So, a few general tips to share:

- ◆ Spring is not too early in the year to encounter ticks.
- ◆ Brushy, grassy, sunny terrain seems to be the most common tick locale.
- ◆ Protection for humans can be as simple as wearing long pants and sleeves made of tightly woven fabric, and tucking your pants in your boots. Repellent sprays are effective (on humans and animals), but read the directions and make sure you are using a *repellent*.
- ◆ There are some products available for dogs that kill the ticks after they have attached. We use something that is also effective for killing fleas. BUT these deterrents do not keep you from having to remove the ticks.

Washington Department of Health has great information including a picture gallery to help identify any ticks you remove. It also tells you the proper way to remove a tick, which I thought was useful (don't twist them out - use sharp tweezers and pull straight out).

<http://www.doh.wa.gov/CommunityandEnvironment/Pests/Ticks>

If you are out walking in brush or high grass, it is a really good idea when you get home to remove clothes outside, shower and check yourself carefully for ticks. Wearing light colored clothing makes ticks easier to spot. Or, look for them BEFORE you get in your car whenever possible.

- ◆ **If you encounter a tick infestation on Trust property let someone in the SLT office know so others can be alerted. And, keep spreading the word!**



L) Reading the Washington Landscape R) khq.com



Looking east, directly across from Hamilton

“To know fully even one field or one land is a lifetime’s experience...”

A gap in a hedge, a smooth rock surfacing a narrow lane, a view of a woody meadow, a stream at the junction of four small fields-these are as much as a man can fully experience.”

- Patrick Kavanagh

Do you have a story you would like to share?

Contact Lisa for details on an upcoming edition.

Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group, attempted what was to be an ineffectual and inconsequential smolt “rescue.” After rounding up a fair number of the elusive rascals we looked downstream to the Creek’s mouth where half a dozen Common Mergansers were feasting. So we settled on releasing them upstream in pools likely to persist through the drought. As we gingerly tipped the buckets emptying out our precious cargo three Kingfishers circled above us squawking their approval. I know, I know, all critters gotta make a livin’, and that nothing in nature is ever truly lost or wasted. But, maybe it’s permissible every now and then to play favorites and slightly tip the scales as we did here. This past fall, continuing low stream flows kept spawning Pink salmon in the Skagit and then, when they were able to move into Cumberland Creek, they too were caught in shrinking pools short of ideal spawning gravels.

Things will of course bounce back, though the poor smolt escapement and lack of spawning success may be felt for the next few years. Even so I feel as though in some small way, I’ve looked climate change in the face; it’s no longer distant and abstract, but up close and personal having settled into what has become my backyard over the last ten years. I’ve been travelling in Cumberland for a decade now. If that stewarding milestone should seem monumental to no one but me, it does serve as a reminder of how much I have learned and of how much I have yet to learn. I am confirmed in my ignorance by the Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh when he writes “...to know fully even one field or one land is a lifetime’s experience.”

I should, I suppose, be feeling discouraged, especially so in the light of the added setbacks and uncertainties brought by climate change, but travelling around Cumberland remains one of the best, most rewarding things I can be doing.

Meet our newest Volunteer Land Stewards

Bob Boudinot; South Cascade River Conservation Area and South Cascade TNC Preserve

Bob and Nina Boudinot made Skagit County their home in 1973. Bob is a civil engineering graduate of the University of Iowa. For 32 years he was a co-owner of a local engineering and surveying company. In the later part of his career the focus of his engineering was environmental restoration projects. Bob served on the Skagit Land Trust Board for 10 years. He now stewards two properties on the Cascade River near Marblemount.

Phil Kincare; TNC Preserves Wilcox, Rankin and Dupuis

Phil recently retired from the US Forest Service after 37 years. The last 16 years were in the Skagit Wild and Scenic River Program. "This program brought me in touch with many of the people and organizations that are protecting and restoring habitat in the Skagit Watershed. Looking after some of the upriver properties in the Volunteer Land Steward Program is a good fit because I live upriver and I am familiar with the properties. I'll be looking after The Nature Conservancy's Wilcox, Rankin and Dupuis properties which are on the Suiattle and Sauk Rivers."

Mike Olson; Mud Lake Conservation Area

Mike grew up on the Minnesota prairie and moved to Washington to start a career in forestry. He has worked for various conservation organizations over the years, including Shenandoah National Park, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and Boise National Forest. When Mike isn't working in the woods he enjoys backpacking, climbing mountains, and volunteering for local conservation projects. He is excited to steward the diverse wetlands on the Mud Lake property - hopefully without getting wet!

Welcome to the team Bob, Phil and Mike!

Land Stewards and their Conservation Areas

~Barney Lake - Brenda Cunningham, Tim Manns, and Kendon Light ~~~ Barr Creek - Russ Dalton

~Butler Creek - Jim Owens ~~~ Cumberland Creek-Jim Johnson ~

~ Day Creek Berquist and Day Creek Forest - Stan Zyskowski ~~~ Day Creek Slough- Hal Lee ~

~ Grandy Creek - John Freeman ~~~ Green Road Marsh - Heidi Nichols ~

~ Guemes Mountain-Carolyn and Ed Gastellum, Ian Woofenden and Kit Harma ~

~Hurn Field - Steffany Raynes and Lin Skavdahl ~

~Lyman Slough - Dick Raisler ~~~ March Point - LaVerne and Jim Scheltens ~~~ Minkler Lake - Hal Lee ~

~Mud Lake - Mike Olson ~~~ Presentin Ranch - Ranae and Jim Watson ~

~Samish Island Squires - Anne and Jack Middleton ~~~ Samish Island Ochs - Pete Haase ~

~ South Cascade River and TNC South Cascade - Bob Boudinot~

~Sumner Lake - Tami Thomas and Tom Mayes ~

~The Nature Conservancy Preserves Dupuis, Rankin and Wilcox - Phil Kincare ~

~Tope Ryan - John Day ~~~ Utopia - Kinsey Shilling ~

SOILS FOR SALMON: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOIL AND WATER

by *Callie Martin*, Skagit County Public Works Recycling Coordinator

Soil degradation and water pollution are widely recognized as major environmental problems in the Puget Sound. Healthy soil provides a number of vital functions including the ability to store water and nutrients, regulate the flow of water, and immobilize and degrade pollutants. Compost is the product resulting from harnessed decomposition of organic waste, such as yard and garden debris, fruit and vegetable scraps from your kitchen, soiled paper, wood waste, and manure. This process occurs continually in nature, resulting in sweet, earthy smelling humus teeming with life. One of the most miraculous biological characteristics of compost is the ability it has to build soils that have lost their ability to hold and retain water, and bind pollutants. Just as the retention of forest cover has been recognized as a land use tool for managing water quality and water volume, it is critical that soil structure retention be considered as a tool to rebuild and restore health to the land (Bary 1999). Salmon and other wildlife species rely on clean, fresh water to survive. A large part of ensuring clean water downstream is the conservation and care of healthy soils in the watershed above these habitats.

Compost adds both food for many organisms and an enormous diversity of organisms. Known as the soil foodweb, these organisms provide vital assistance to the health of the soil, such as keeping disease-causing organisms in check, recycling and storing nutrients and making them available to plants, allowing healthy root growth, and providing a highway for air and water to pass through. The more diverse the soil food web the healthier the soil ecosystem. Using compost as a restoration tool benefits soil and water resources in a variety of impressive ways. Compost improves soil structure by enhancing the physical make-up of soil, supplies slow-release nutrients to plants, holds moisture, reduces erosion, immobilizes and degrades pollutants, provides organic matter, and suppresses soil-borne diseases and plant pathogens.

Soils in poor condition from improper management have a reduced ability to function like a healthy native soil. Instead of absorbing water, supplying nutrients, and breaking down toxins, surface water runoff increases, which can contribute to negative impacts on the watershed hydrology and the salmon habitat (Bary 1999).

One way to restore soil functions to disturbed areas is to apply compost to landscapes to improve soil structure (2 to 4 inches of compost per 8 inches of soil, depending on soil type). This practice can significantly improve detention/infiltration and reduce storm runoff from lawn and landscapes areas, especially on the sand, clay, or compacted glacial till soils common to our region.

Bary, Andy, Sego Jackson, Josh Marx, David McDonald, and Holly Westcott. *The Relationship Between Soil and Water-How Soil Amendments and Compost Can Aid in Salmon Recovery*. Seattle: King County Department of Natural Resources, Sept.-Oct. 1999. PDF.



Compost Mania.com



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

PLACE
STAMP
HERE

Upcoming Events

**Land Stewards and Citizen Scientists
Appreciation Celebration and Potluck**

**July 15, 2016 3-6PM
Hillcrest Park, Mount Vernon**

Under the Gazebo

- * Day Creek Slough Invasive Removal - July 2
- * Boys and Girls Club at Lyman Slough July 11, 18, 25 and 29
- * Tope Ryan Invasive Removal - July 20
- * Minkler Lake Invasive Removal - July 28
- * Annual Member's Picnic - July 30

Please join us, and visit a new property!

MOST WANTED PLANT

Have you seen this plant while monitoring?

Yellow Archangel ~ *Lamium galeobdolon*

Write it's location in your next report!!



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

March 31 ~June 30 ~September 30 ~December 31