

SKAGIT WATERSHED COUNCIL

A Community Partnership for Salmon

5 Year ²⁰²⁵ Roadmap.

| August 2025

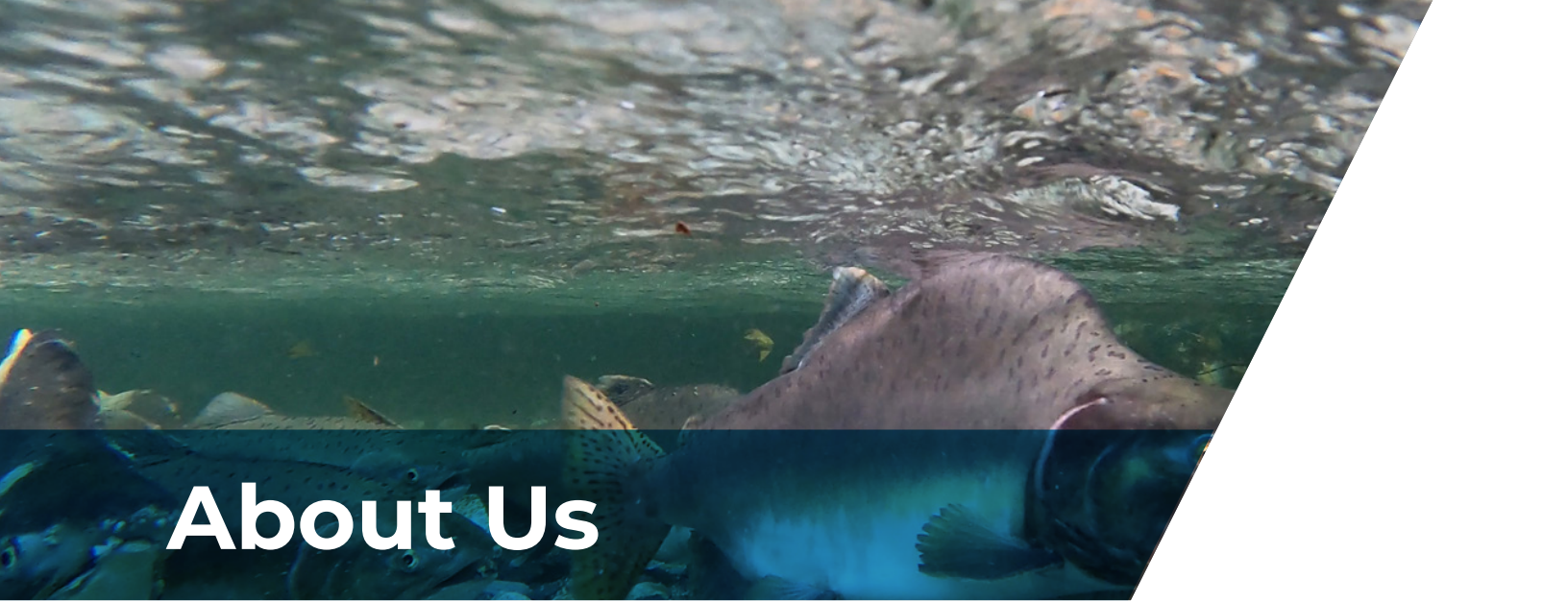
SKAGIT WATERSHED COUNCIL

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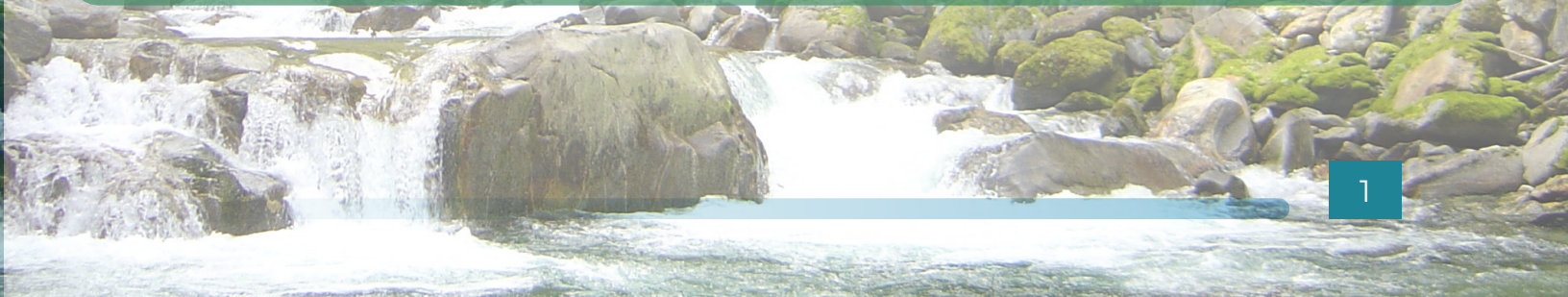




About Us

“Salmon work in the Skagit matters.”

Salmon work in the Skagit matters. The Skagit Watershed is the stronghold of salmon populations in the Salish Sea, the source of more than 50% of Puget Sound’s remaining ESA-listed wild Chinook population. At the first meeting of the Skagit Watershed Council in February of 1997, we brought people together, some of whom had never met before, and we started a conversation about salmon. That conversation continues today, nearly 30 years later, with experts from many backgrounds and many perspectives working together on salmon habitat restoration and protection in the Skagit.



Who We Are

The Skagit Watershed Council is a membership-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit with a mission to restore sustainable fisheries. We administer the Lead Entity Program as well as other programs that support voluntary salmon habitat restoration and protection. The Skagit Lead Entity Program is part of statewide salmon recovery efforts and regional recovery planning under the Salmon Recovery Act (RCW 77.85). The Lead Entity Program implements voluntary salmon habitat restoration and protection as part of broader efforts towards salmon recovery. We have engaged in this work on behalf of the initiating governments (Skagit, Whatcom, and Snohomish Counties, Sauk-Suiattle, Swinomish, Upper Skagit tribes, 4 cities, 4 towns and 2 ports in the watershed) and serve in the Lead Entity capacity by consensus of the initiating



governments. Established to exist outside the political fray, the Skagit Watershed Council was seen as an ideal home for the Lead Entity Program, with our strong science focus and commitment to broad collaboration.



What We Do

Since the Skagit Watershed Council was designated as the Lead Entity for the Skagit and Samish watersheds in 1998, we have been able to implement the Lead Entity Program with broad governmental and non-governmental participation. The Lead Entity process establishes committees to review and rank voluntary salmon restoration and protection project proposals in a citizen-driven evaluation process, making locally informed funding recommendations to the state's Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB).

Our Impact

We have excelled in our work, providing an example to other watersheds of how to effectively realize salmon habitat restoration and protection with SRFB dollars.

Our Approach

In approaching salmon habitat restoration and protection, our strength is in the relationships we have built over the decades. By acting as the local Lead Entity, the Skagit Watershed Council's inclusive, teamwork-driven approach has enabled the Lead Entity Citizen Committee to successfully review and rank 230 projects,

recommending 218 for SRFB funding totaling about \$100 million to restore approximately 2800 acres and protect approximately 2600 acres of habitat.

Projects have been implemented by the following partners:

- Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Upper Skagit Indian Tribe
- Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribe
- Swinomish Indian Tribal Community
- Skagit County
- City of Mt. Vernon
- Town of Hamilton
- Skagit River System Cooperative
- Skagit Conservation District
- Washington Department of Transportation
- Diking District #3
- Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group
- The Nature Conservancy
- Ducks Unlimited
- Western Washington Agricultural Association
- Whatcom Land Trust
- Seattle City Light
- Skagit Land Trust

Our Strategies

We have a Strategic Approach (updated 2022) and a Habitat Protection Strategy (updated 2023) to guide our work in advancing voluntary salmon habitat restoration and protection. These are based on the solid science behind the Habitat Restoration and Protection Strategy published by the Skagit Watershed Council in 1998 and the Skagit Chinook Recovery Plan adopted by the National Marine Fisheries Service in 2005. Additional peer-reviewed science published since then and local strategic multi-stakeholder planning efforts such as the Middle Skagit Initiative (2011), Sauk River Habitat Assessment (2023), Estuary Restoration Stra-



tegic Assessment (2018), Skagit Watershed Riparian Assessment (2017), and Monitoring and Adaptive Management Report (2020) have informed project prioritization.



The monitoring work being done in the watershed, led by Skagit River System Cooperative (SRSC), with the National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, is changing salmon habitat restoration practices and confirming measurable benefits of restoration in estuaries. SRSC is the natural resources arm of the Swinomish and Sauk-Suiattle tribes. Forest practices policy implementation in the Skagit, through working with private timber companies and state and federal forest owners, has resulted in measurable benefits to fish in the spawning grounds.

This great work has been accomplished through and supported by the invaluable expertise of Skagit Watershed Council committee members. They come from a broad swath of organizations and governments that work together to define a science-based path forward to meet the policy objectives laid out by the co-managers in the Skagit Chinook Recovery Plan. This success and respect earned is something for Skagitonians to feel proud about.

Mission

The mission of the Skagit Watershed Council (SWC) is to understand, protect and restore the productivity of healthy ecosystems to support sustainable fisheries.

Strategies employed to achieve the mission:

✓ Facilitate voluntary habitat restoration and protection

✓ Facilitate restoration and protection of habitat-forming landscape processes

✓ Facilitate a collaborative process within the Skagit and Samish Watersheds that supports voluntary habitat restoration and protection efforts

✓ Provide science-based technical guidance

✓ Provide public outreach and education



5-Year Goals, Objectives, and Results



Goals

The SWC Board of Directors chose the following goals as a focus for the next 5 years:

1.

Support effective voluntary salmon habitat restoration and protection projects that have broad community support.

2.

Facilitate the collection and sharing of salmon science relevant to the Skagit and Samish Watersheds to support restoration and protection efforts by practitioners and the broader community.

3.

Engage and educate the Skagit and Samish Watershed communities through new education, outreach, and active involvement opportunities.

4.

Maintain and enhance organizational excellence.

The objectives developed under each goal are informed by the Skagit Watershed Council's current work and an analysis of future potential growth areas. They are grounded in our mission and reflect the organization's core values of science, collaboration, restoration and protection, outreach, and integrity. Results for each objective are identified to ensure that

the organization can evaluate whether it is meeting its objectives and thereby achieving its goals. Goals, objectives, and results developed during the 2024-25 planning process follow. They are numbered for ease of reference. The numbering does not reflect any ranking or prioritization of importance.

Goal 1.

1.

Support effective voluntary salmon habitat restoration and protection projects that have broad community support.

Objective 1.1

Continue to implement an excellent, effective, and transparent lead entity program in accordance with RCW 77.85.

Results:

1.1a

SWC implements the Lead Entity program and funds excellent projects throughout the watershed. SWC funds the best possible salmon restoration and protection activities and projects through a fair process that considers science, community values and priorities, and coordination of efforts.

1.1b

SWC updates technical project planning documents such as the Strategic Approach and Protection Strategy as necessary, including addendums for specific project types as directed by the SWC Board.

1.1c

SWC creates a collaborative space where diverse stakeholders can come together to discuss and shape restoration and protection projects, where questions, feedback, and dissent are welcomed.

Objective 1.2

Create a project pipeline to accelerate the pace of restoration and to facilitate funding for projects throughout the watershed.

Results:

1.2a

Project lists are comprehensive and well vetted.

1.2b

New project funding sources are leveraged to implement larger, more integrated, and more innovative projects.

1.2c

SWC increases community support and landowner participation in voluntary restoration and protection.



1.

Objective 1.3

Explore opportunities to broaden our restoration and protection focus to multiple species and throughout the watersheds while maintaining a strong commitment to and focus on the habitat component of Chinook recovery efforts.

Results:

1.3a

SWC engages in a robust conversation about addressing multi species objectives and decides on actions.

1.3b

SWC identifies ways to support project sponsors in implementing projects outside of the Lead Entity process and with non-SRFB dollars.



Goal 2.

2.

Facilitate the gathering and sharing of salmon science relevant to the Skagit and Samish Watersheds to serve restoration and protection efforts by practitioners and the broader community.

Objective 2.1

Effectively communicate information about salmon history, science, and program work through a variety of methods to diverse and targeted audiences.

Results:

2.1a

SWC continues the Skagit Salmon Science Series with the goal of having meetings at least twice a year.

2.1b

SWC shares scientific findings with the broader community, reaching beyond peer-to-peer learning and members.

2.1c

SWC provides published and peer-reviewed information on the effectiveness and success of salmon restoration and protection projects.



2.

Objective 2.2

Support restoration project development by providing current science and findings that help project sponsors develop high quality projects and funding proposals.

Results:

2.2a

SWC Science Committee facilitates research and monitoring projects that inform restoration methods.

2.2b

SWC effectively supports project sponsors in developing high quality restoration projects and funding proposals based on best available science.

2.2c

Project review criteria are developed and revised as necessary, based on best available science, to ensure high quality restoration projects are advanced.



Objective 2.3

Continue to convene the Skagit Science Committee to collaborate on communicating science and identifying research needs in alignment with the Skagit Chinook Recovery Plan.

Results:

2.3a

The current strategy for monitoring and adaptive management objectives and priorities at the basin scale is refined and revised.

2.3b

Monitoring projects are recommended for the 4 Year Work Plan.



Goal 3.

3.

Engage with the Skagit and Samish watershed communities to educate and involve them in salmon issues and voluntary restoration and protection projects.

Objective 3.1

Build awareness about the SWC mission and strategies.

Results:

3.1a

Effective, consistent communication has mitigated threats to the Lead Entity process.

3.1b

The community knows what SWC is and what it is not.



Objective 3.2

Reimagine a strategic community education, outreach, and engagement program.

Results:

3.2a

SWC updates and executes a strategic communication plan that defines target audiences and identifies effective communication methods and strategies.

3.2b

SWC actively engages in and expands the reach of targeted community outreach and education to foster stronger communication, trust, collaboration, and mutual understanding.

3.2c

SWC actively shares salmon-related stories and habitat restoration and protection successes and challenges through diverse communication channels to the community and SWC members to enhance their understanding of these complex issues.

3.2d

SWC provides a hub/space to collect, connect, and disseminate salmon-focused information.

Goal 4.

4.

Maintain and enhance organizational excellence.

Objective 4.1

Improve our funding base and funding systems to best implement our mission.

Results:

4.1a

SWC secures operating and programmatic funds from diverse sources.

4.1b

SWC advocates for and achieves improvements in salmon restoration funding at the state and regional levels.



Objective 4.2

Enhance organizational effectiveness and transparency.

Results:

4.2a

SWC increases the diversity of community interests and perspectives on committees, LECC, and the board.

4.2b

All board and committee members clearly understand their roles, responsibilities, and decision-making authority.

4.2c

SWC creates and maintains a workspace that is physically and psychologically healthy and supportive for partners and staff.

4.2d

The SWC board is fully engaged and supportive of the SWC structure, mission, and work.

4.

Objective 4.3

Foster a supportive and engaging workplace where staff thrive, feel valued, and are motivated to stay.

Results:

4.3a

SWC hires and retains excellent staff.

4.3b

SWC secures sufficient funding to retain high quality staff.

4.3c

SWC staff are highly satisfied with their employment.





Looking Forward

The Skagit Watershed Council is the hub of salmon habitat restoration and protection in the Skagit and Samish watersheds. We are where science meets community and where results happen. This 5-year roadmap charts the course for future emphasis on community engagement, scientific rigor, and honest conversation. Join us as we continue to restore the Skagit ecosystem for salmon and all Skagitonians.



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