

SKAGIT WATERSHED COUNCIL

A Community Partnership for Salmon

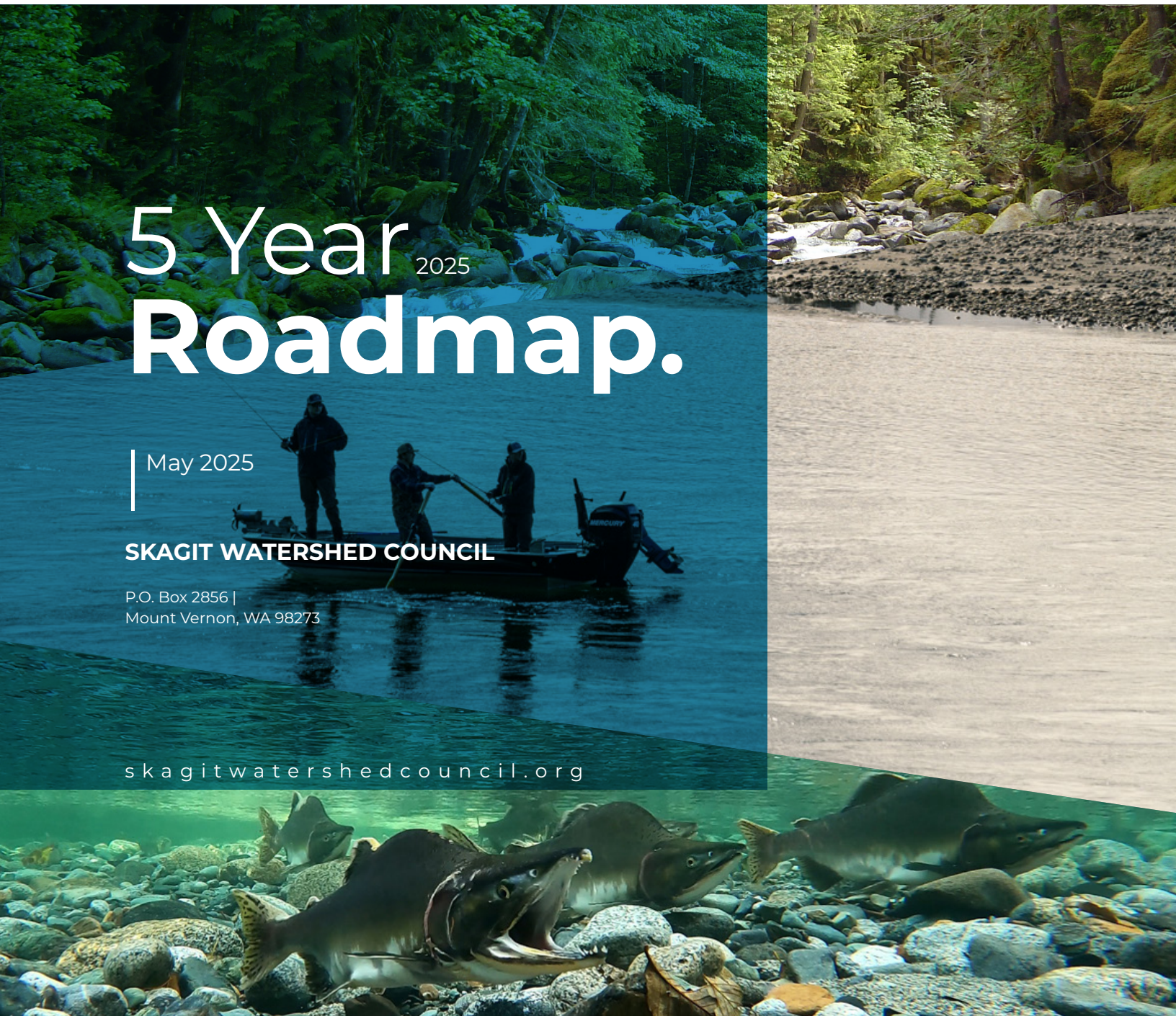
5 Year ²⁰²⁵ Roadmap.

| May 2025

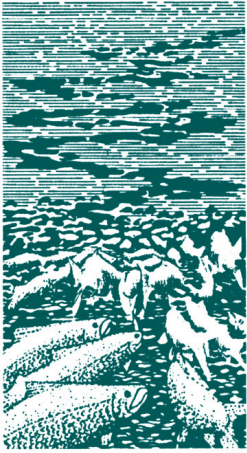
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P.O. Box 2856 |
Mount Vernon, WA 98273

skagitwatershedcouncil.org







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An underwater photograph of several salmon swimming in a river. The water is clear, and the fish are seen from below, showing their silvery scales and fins. The background shows the riverbed with rocks and some aquatic plants.

About Us

“Salmon work in 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, 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 toward restoring sustainable fisheries in the Skagit.

Who We Are

The Skagit Watershed Council is a membership-based 501c3 nonprofit with a mission to restore sustainable fisheries. We administer the Lead Entity Program as well as other programs that support salmon recovery. The Skagit Lead Entity Program is part of statewide salmon recovery efforts and regional recovery planning under the Salmon Recovery Act. 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 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 successfully shepherded voluntary habitat restoration efforts funded by the Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB). The Lead Entity process establishes committees to evaluate and rank 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.

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 Salmon Recovery Funding Board dollars.

“Here’s the impact in fish terms”

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and the Tribal Co-managers have measured ‘escapement’ and found that 3 of the 6 Chinook salmon stocks in the Skagit have gone from declining to increasing¹. Escapement is the number of fish making it back to the spawning grounds.

2 of the 6 stocks are holding steady with no appreciable decline recently¹.

Only 1 stock still declining¹.

¹ Andrew Fowler, WDFW

Our Approach

In approaching salmon recovery, 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, team-work-driven approach has enabled the Lead Entity Citizen Committee to successfully review and rank 230 projects, recommending 218 for SRFB funding totaling \$98 million over 20 years

(averaging \$3.9 million per year). An additional 12 of the 230 reviewed projects were referred out to other funding sources for a total of \$32 million by those different funding sources.

Projects have been implemented by the following partners:

Estuary restoration, specifically, has been linked to a 40% increase in the smolt to adult ratio. This means for the same number of outmigrating juveniles from the estuary, where we would see only 5 adults returning in the year 2000, we now see 7 adults! Estuary restoration is working².

2000

5 adults returning

2025

7 adults returning

- WDFW
- 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 Ag. Assoc.
- Whatcom Land Trust
- Seattle City Light
- Skagit Land Trust

² Mike Lemoine and Correigh Green, SRSC and NOAA.

Our Strategies

Our strategies for advancing voluntary salmon habitat restoration and protection 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 (2005) plus peer-reviewed science published since then. The Skagit Chinook Recovery Plan was adopted in 2005 by the National Marine Fisheries Service for recovering threatened Chinook. The Skagit Watershed Council's Habitat Protection Strategy (2023) is the template being used in other watersheds for habitat protection and is the primary example upon which new, state-wide rules will be based.



The monitoring work being done in the watershed, led by Skagit River System Cooperative (SRSC) and in collaboration with the National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, is changing salmon recovery practices and confirming measurable benefits of restoration in estuaries for returning adult Chinook spawners, with a 40% increase in smolt to adult survival. 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 effort

✓ 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, 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 by prioritizing salmon projects that are then recommended to the Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB) for funding. Fund the best possible salmon recovery 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 resourcing 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 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-Salmon Recovery Funding Board dollars.



2.

Goal 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 information on 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

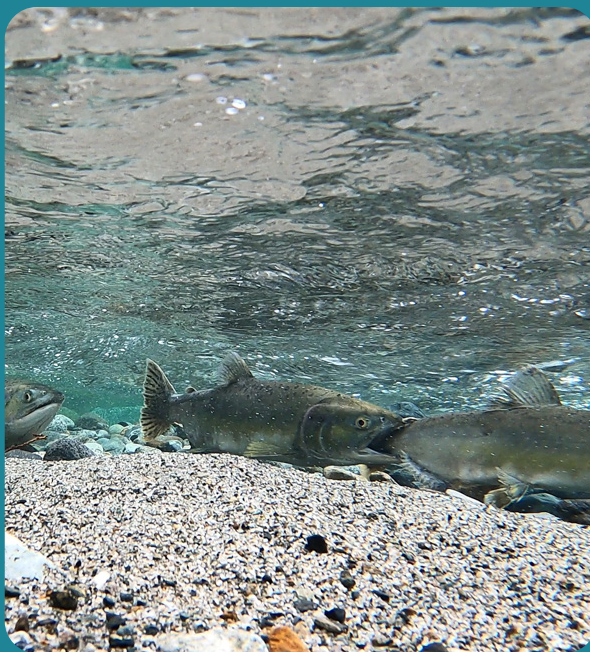
SWC Science Committee facilitates research and monitoring projects that inform restoration methods.

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 reflect best available science.



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, including the 4 Year Work Plan.

2.3b

Project review criteria are developed and revised as necessary to ensure high quality restoration projects are advanced.



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, progress in salmon recovery efforts, and limiting factors, 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 recovery 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 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 recovery in the Skagit and Samish watersheds. We are where science meets community and where results happen. This 5-year road-map 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.

