



FLOODPLAIN STORIES



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Morgan Ruff

Our tiny rav4 was packed to the top for a weekend away in Portland. It was a hot hectic Friday in August. My daughter Tilly was 15 months and we had squished her into her car seat with toys and activities for the drive. She was fussy and crying, agitated by the heat and messiness of leaving town. Within that crowded hot car my early pregnancy brain was in action. Those first few blissful months of foggy brain, emotional roller coasters, I think I might barf all over everyone, mixed with the urgency of work that morning, despite the fact I was trying to start a vacation. I sat crammed in the passenger seat, hovered over a pile of papers that continually slipped off my lap, frantically talking on the phone. We at Tulalip had just realized we were \$800,000 short on funding for our highest priority multi-million dollar estuary restoration project. My husband eased the car out of the parking spot while I hunched over paperwork on my phone...and crunch – backed our car into a very fancy new white with gold trim Mercedes SUV. Ouch, things had just gotten real.

But this is the life of a coordinator. Our project was close to a million dollars short, we had to find the money quickly, and my husband just rammed a luxury SUV with his pregnant wife and 15 month old screaming child. Don't worry, we were all ok.

I work for the Tulalip Tribes and am part of the Snohomish Watershed team charged with coordinating the recovery efforts of our endangered salmon runs. The Snohomish estuary is surrounded by some of our nation's fastest growing cities. But despite this growth, we still have wild populations of endangered Chinook. They swim up our rivers, reproduce, but then the young vulnerable fish don't have a place to rest and grow. The slower river waters have been cut off with levees and dikes. Restoring the nursery ground of insect filled nooks and cranny's in the brackish estuary for our tiny juvenile fish is important to recovering these fish.

It's simple really, the idea is to raise them up in the nursery (estuary), send them on their way into the great unknown of the ocean and hope that the upbringing we've given them helps them not only survive but thrive. It's not unlike the role we play as parents.

With the projects coming online in the estuary we were on track to meet our restoration goals of about 937 football fields (1200 acres) worth of sinuous, mucky, beautiful salmon nursery.

I came onto the team of people working to advance Qwuloolt at the latter parts of the project. Qwuloolt had been underway for over 20 years. Looking back at pictures of the early days of the project, our project manager Kurt Nelson had a lot more dark hair and his babies were just being born. Now his babies were off in college and there's a bright balding spot on the top of his head. I didn't really think I would have much of a role, because after all, when you're so close to construction, what could go wrong? I'm not the project manager. I'm the type person who just knows people. I'm a connection builder. And the type of person who ultimately won't let "I don't think that's possible" stop her and instead asks "how can I"?

One day in August 2014, Kurt approached my desk with a very worried look. After a complicated explanation about technical elements of soil blending, the astronomical costs of winterizing, the constraints of the federal Army corps of engineers, he humbly said, I think we need an extra \$800,000 by the end of fall or else don't know how we'll breach the levee. My reaction, other than just wanting to give him a reassuring hug, was "its ok. We'll find the money, we are not going to delay any further" – and then I wanted to hurl, because, you know, I was pregnant and what crazy person says they can find close to a million dollars in a couple month window. I knew we could do it, because what funder wouldn't want to come to the rescue? Well, it was a bit more complicated than that.

During that hot car ride in August, on our way to Portland the traffic was terrible. My palms were sweaty, I focused through the crying baby and nausea, maybe from the car, maybe from the pregnancy. A trip that should take 3.5-4 hours took 7. And as we slinked through traffic at Lewis McCord air force base I continued my conversation on the phone with the agencies and people who control restoration funding. Kurt, Elizabeth, Jeanette, David, back to Kurt, Heather, Denise, Terry, Jim, and many more. I hashed out the details of the back and forth in a memo....which was then revised like a tennis match volley - back and forth. Different scenarios run, ideas presented and scratched, and finally the most crystal clear beautiful description of our very complicated situation.

When it landed in the lap of the State's salmon recovery funding board, the comments we got were alarming.

"Tulalip has a casino, why don't they just pay for it." "Why use tax payer money to pay for a change in the budget?"

It's a hard answer to give because it's the kind of question that makes me want to shake a person to wake up. We're trying to repair land that was damaged for 150 years by someone else, outside of our reservation boundaries, with partners who were also driving timelines and budgets often beyond our control. At Tulalip we put staff and considerable funds forward, (including \$300K of tribal funds to help meet the shortfall). But should it be the tribe's responsibility be to pay in full for the damage to the treaty reserved resources in perpetuity? Isn't recovering fish a benefit for all people? I mean, who the heck decided to jump start the economy and increase the demand for every single dump truck in the vicinity therefore driving up the costs? These things just happen in the landscape of large restoration projects and are part of the evolution of learning how to manage and adapt to larger scale project budgets.

I often don't know how to describe what I do. After all, Kurt was the one in the hot seat to provide the facts and numbers before the Tribal Board and SRFB. So, what I really did was just talk to people. To explain, reframe, emphasize, strategize, again and again and then encourage Kurt to keep his eye on the prize and to reassure him that I've got his back.

As the exchange continued my belly continued to grow. There were fitful nights when the baby kicked and moved and I would dream about the day the Qwuloolt site was restored. We solved our funding shortfall in

increments through memos and conversations, late nights and early mornings, being creative, and pulling on long standing relationships to make hard decisions.

On the day that we finally broke through the levee the following August of 2015, I left my newborn with a friend. It was the first time I had been separated from her for any period of time. It took hours for the orange excavators, framed against the blue of the sky to dig through the levee. A group of us gathered along the pilot channel, taking pictures, acting goofy, but we quieted as the levee thinned and the final scoop was removed. The waters flooding through that opening felt like the site breathing for the first time. It felt like I was experiencing the birth of a baby. The rush of the breath. The flow of the water. The feeling of relief and accomplishment and joy. The site bubbled alive.

Maybe it was because I had just birthed my baby, but when that water flooded in, I forgot about the pain of fundraising, the nights of worry, and the swollen feet and queezy tummy. I just wanted to do it all over again, just to feel that moment again of pure joy and the water flooding into the site.

Linda Neunzig

What if?

It was early spring when my phone rang, it was a distraught farmer in the Skykomish river valley. Oh, she was angry, she was sad. No one would listen to her, no one cared. Her 100 year old family farm that was passed down to her from her parents was rapidly falling into the Skykomish River. Every time the water went high her farm sloughed off, feet at a time. Last winter it was six times they experience it, each time losing more and more land. And, it wasn't just her farm, it was all of the farms along 3 ½ miles of the Skykomish! I told her I'd be out the next week and I'd like to see the other farms too. As we stood along the banks of the Sky, she showed us the losses, where the shoreline used to be. You could see where the trees had fallen in place as the soil disappeared under its long roots. You saw and heard the sandy loam soils trickle down into the water as we stood there.

We walked the river frontage to the far farm noticing all the areas that had lost land to the mighty Skykomish. That one day, that day changed everything for me. Chris, the owner of the dairy farm downstream stood along the bank of the Sky, he choked up and his eyes filled with tears as he spoke of his future. His land was disappearing so fast, how could he continue as a business? Each acre feeds a cow, each acre lost was a loss of an animal to his business. Would he have a farm to hand down to his children, would he be able to continue with his land disappearing so fast? All of his milk goes to Seattle's Pike Place Market to Beecher's to make their award-winning cheese, would he be able to keep his contract with them if he couldn't produce enough milk? All of the 4H and FFA kids in the valley have come to Chris's farm to use their heifers to learn about showing, feeding, leadership and so much more. Would that opportunity for the youth in the valley continue if he can't keep going? How could we help him? How could we help the other farmers? The river wants to move, it has its own mind.

This area is also vital to the Tulalip Tribes as habitat land, it was their wintering site where they once had a longhouse. This land is special to so many. It would take a team to find the right approach to help Chris and his neighbors and we had the best of them, Terry Williams from Tulalip, Derek Sandison WSDA director, our county surface water experts, a consultant and engineer from NOAA. They all came together to see how we could help these disparate landowners. These farmers know the river, they know their land. I asked each of them as we walked their river front "if they could do anything they wanted to save your land, and anything they wanted to save the salmon what would it be?" No one had ever asked them for their thoughts. As we walked and they all talked about the river I made notes about all the ideas. Once back to the county we all came together again to place each of these ideas on the big map. Then our county river hydrologist and engineer took the ideas and tweaked them just enough into projects that were permissible. We were no longer looking at single spots

and individual properties we were now looking at 31/2 miles of contiguous projects that would be truly impactful. I've made many trips to these farms over the last year and poured over the maps looking for solutions. Each of these farmers have worked to put in habitat projects, they want our salmon to thrive but they also want to be able to farm. I'm a proud member of the Samish Nation but I'm also a farmer passionate about keeping farmland in production and knowing we can provide food security for all of our neighbors. In the U.S. we lose 3 acres of farmland every single minute. Every inch of farmland is important. What if we

could do something different, a new approach to both? There is a farm in the middle of the 3 ½ miles that is for sale, it's already been sub-divided up into six building sites. That farm needs to be saved too, but not from the river but from development, we know pavement is

forever! What if we thought outside of the box, it's what we farmers do on a regular basis? What if we were to purchase that farm and if each farmer were to swap a habitat easement on their riverbanks for good, tillable farmland while preserving that farm forever? Could we mitigate for the lost farmland to the river by providing new farmland? Could it be done? Chris's farm would remain whole, his dairy would continue on to the next generation. Could we create 3 ½ miles of contiguous, protected salmon habitat? What if we thought of solutions in a different light? As a government employee, a member of the Samish nation and as a farmer, my question to you is, what if?

What if?

Puyallup Cohort

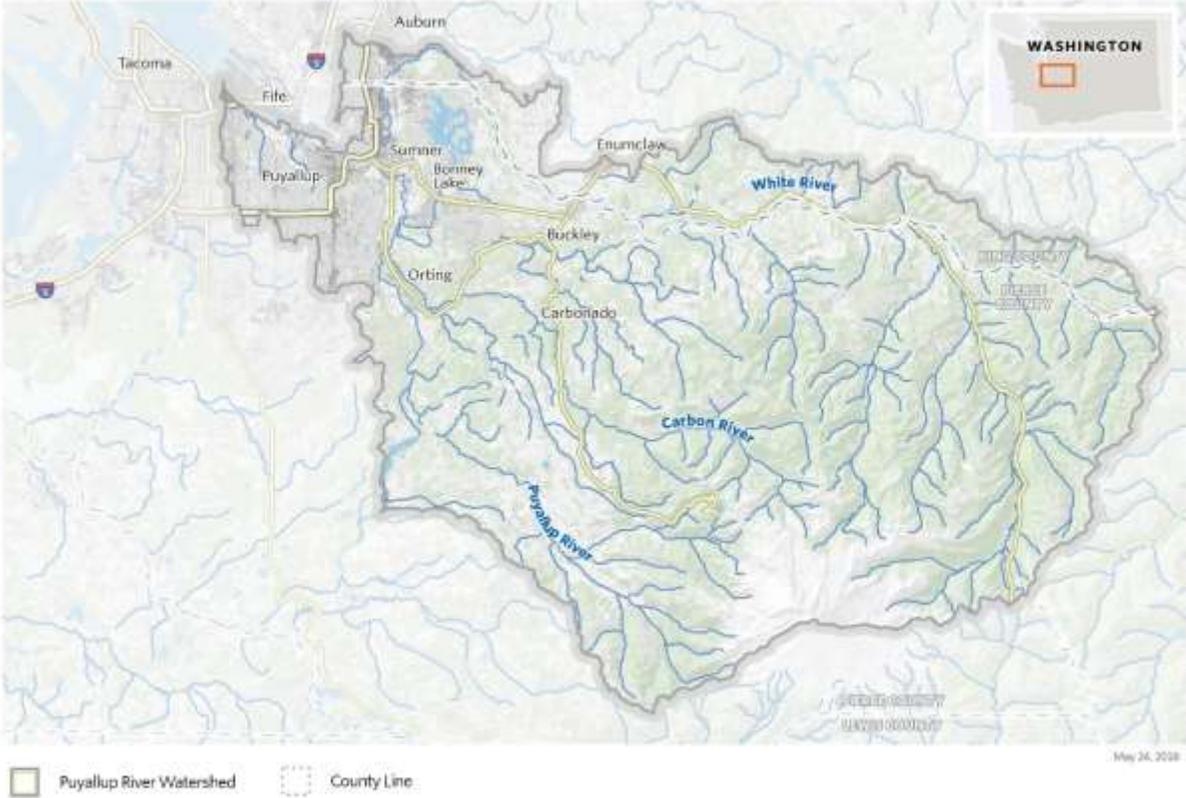
JORDAN JOBE

HAROLD SMELT

KRISTIN WILLIAMSON



Puyallup River Watershed



Jordan Jobe

When I first started working with the farming community in Clear Creek in the Puyallup Watershed, I assumed we'd be able to sort things out, and find a clear and happy path forward within a couple years. I imagined any misunderstandings between farmers, the County, the "fish people", could be resolved over a couple beers, a handful of meetings, and a few hundred thousand dollars' worth of really well-crafted research. What I didn't understand at the beginning was the power of that damn map. If you work in Pierce County's Surface Water Management division, or live anywhere near Clear Creek, you know about the map. I see it when I close my eyes. I've had nightmares about it. I also had no idea about the environment of mistrust that had been brewing for many reasons in this area for years. Back in mid-2015, while trying to come up with ideas for dealing with one of the most frequently flooded areas in the Watershed, the County engineers drew up a proposal for a ring levee at two different alignments. This levee, they said, would allow water to fill the inside, like a bath tub, and protect the infrastructure-homes, roads, barns-on the outside. Their desktop analysis came up with two alternatives-a mustard-yellow, and a bright green line, snaking across the landscape at weird angles, forming a giant, oblong, lumpy ring. Some parcels were destined for protection from rising waters, some destined to be converted to salmon habitat-or rice fields! Or, cranberries? The county wanted to know the best plan. I studied the map in my office before I travelled down south to Clear Creek to meet the farmers for the first time. I tried to envision what this proposed earthen berm might look like on a landscape I'd never seen. It sounded weird, very abstract-probably not too threatening, just needed some adjusting on the map-a complicated but solvable problem. My coworker and I drove up to Early Bird Farm. With an old brown brick farmhouse, rickety but picturesque gates, chickens milling about, and a requisite fluffy farm dog, I wasn't sure what to anticipate. The barn-old, red, and at the heart of the property-it turned out that that mustard yellow proposed levee alignment went straight through the barn. And down the street, to Inch Acres, and Wild Hare Farms, the line marched on through homes and fields. A half mile away at the giant block that encompasses Zestful Gardens, the mustard yellow line lopped off most of the 28 acres of fields, destining them to become habitat-or worse, rice fields. The less aggressive bright green line still clipped off valuable acreage of rows and rows of organic vegetables and free-range chicken pasture on many farms. It was immediately obvious why farmers were so angry and frustrated. The flooding-the same water that keeps their groundwater levels high, allowing for minimal irrigation needs, and strong, vibrantly growing kale and beets-wasn't a problem for these farmers. The map was. Their distrust in the County was extended to me as well-a problem I didn't anticipate.

Our initial goal of landowner engagement was actually pretty straightforward. Thanks to the map, these farmers and residents were extremely engaged. And the next couple of years were less focused on friendly meetings over beers, and more focused on directing those few hundred thousand dollars towards incredibly useful, practical research that documented specific issues impacting agricultural viability in the area. After I very swiftly recognized that I had NO idea how wrong my assumptions had been about the map-I realized that I needed to understand all that I could about how water moved around this landscape, the way this floodplain served to build some of the richest, most fertile soil in the County-and the way this community of farmers stewarded that soil to grow food for County residents. When the County created the map, they saw it as a way to communicate an idea for dealing with very real flood risk-to protect residents from increasingly dangerous floods. They saw a way to create much-needed habitat for dwindling salmon populations. And they sensed that the map might pose a problem for farmers, and genuinely wanted to understand how to

gerrymander the mustard yellow and bright green lines around to better align with agricultural needs. When I first saw the map-before I'd ever been to Clear Creek-I saw seemingly random polygons stretching across green fields and dots of houses. But when farmers saw the map, they saw how the fertile soil was divided away from the rest of the farm, how the sheep pasture was separated from the barn, and how their view of their chickens, hard at work fertilizing next year's veggie crop, would be interrupted by a massive earthen berm, leaving them at risk to become coyote snacks. But that map-that now makes many of us, including County Staff, cringe, has served a really important purpose, too. It's given all of us something to push back on-it's brought really engaged farmers to the table to explain, and then work with my team to document how exactly agriculture will be risked by potential future actions. The County continues to show up, to listen and read and discuss. The farmers continue to explain how they interact with the land. I continue to learn more and more about the complexity of the land shown on that map. And we are all working to build mutual trust and develop a working partnership-we are all learning through this process. The map, to me, now reveals several years of stories and places I've grown to appreciate and love-the Farm Camp where my 6 year old son runs around and plays with chickens in the dirt, eating sun-warmed berries. The stretch of muddy, grass-filled ditch that Pierce Conservation District and I spent months and months prepping and then planting a riparian buffer on, with the same engaged farmers. The field where a farmer pulled out carrots, brushing off dark soil and handing them out to snack on as we talked. The farm where I held my first absurdly cute baby turkey chick-the same farm where I regularly buy a rainbow of eggs with dark orange yolks that were my baby daughter's first food. This area has become a place I've grown to care

about-to advocate for-to better understand. It's much more than a series of lines on a map-it represents a Watershed community, trying to listen and learn from each other.

Harold Smelt

It's funny how the words we use to describe something can tell a far bigger story than we realize. They tell us something about ourselves as well. Back in the early days of Pierce County, agriculture was king and farmers wanted to protect their fields and their livelihoods from the floods of the Puyallup River so "Pierce County River Improvement" was born. Say that slowly. They planned on "improving" the river. There is a fair amount of hubris in that name. Make it straighter! Built levees! Move the water right along! This was just how people thought in that time. There was nothing that couldn't be "improved" by engineers. The tools they had were pretty crude. Our community brought in mule trains and steam shovels to dredge out new channels. The river was straightened into an engineer's dream of perfection. Rocks and brush mats and log walls were all put in place to hold the river in place. In the Clear Creek area, agriculture could continue to thrive in those beautiful brown valley soils and the farmers knew they were safe from the river. Except they weren't. Floods still happened and more investment in the river was needed. If we had learned anything during those early years, I'm not sure what it was because we spent the next 40 years "doubling down" on our earlier investment. By the 1940's our community was thinking in terms of "flood control"; the "river improvement" phase had passed, but we were still confident in our ability to "control" nature and control flooding. If we needed bigger and better levees, at least we had better tools. Now we had "big yellow iron" to build the levees higher. The lower Puyallup river was "paved" as concrete was used to line the levees to prevent any brush or trees from growing and slowing down the river. In the Clear Creek area, the farms continued, but more and more houses were being built. The area was obviously safe. There were all those big levees, right? Except it wasn't; floods kept happening. Over the next 40-50 years, it started to dawn on our community that maybe we weren't as good at "controlling" floods as we thought we were. We learned that when you rely on levees to protect developing areas, you actually increase for risk of flood losses. We learned "There will always be a bigger storm" to threaten properties behind levees. Slowly "flood control" thinking gave way to "flood risk management". Hopefully these new words show that we were starting to respect the power of the river and the limits of our ability to control it. This is where our community's story becomes my story as well. I started working for the County in 1986 and for more than 30 years I have watched how our community's thinking about floods has changed. With the flood hazard management mindset, we started using totally different tools to limit flood losses. Better maps were developed that showed where flood hazards existed. Land use restrictions were put in place. Development standards came about that allowed new homes in flood prone areas but made sure they were built high enough to stay dry when the inevitable flood happened. Some of the most frequently funded homes were purchased, acknowledging that these areas weren't suitable for homes. Projects with multiple benefits, such as habitat, got priority. In the Clear Creek neighborhood, this had a big impact. A community had grown up here. There was a school, a fire station, hundreds of homes, mobile home parks, and yes, still some farmers battling against soggy soils and too much water most of the year. Our community's new approach meant some people couldn't build where they wanted to. Or remodel a flood prone home. What did the new rules mean for their property value? Through acquisition of flood-prone homes, whole neighborhoods were disappearing. At least this time, the

County had gotten it right, right? Except we hadn't. We still had lessons to learn. What about fish? All that river straightening, all that concrete lining, all that sediment removal, had impacted fish. What about agriculture? Farming is slowly fading away from Pierce County. The County realized it needed to again re-think how its rivers and its floodplain areas were being managed. Over the last 5 to 10 years, "flood risk management" has been replaced by "integrated flood plain management". Hopefully those words mean that we're smarter now and are using science based decision making. Now, instead of just worrying about floods and the impacts they have on our community, we know we need to include a broader set of policy drivers into our decision-making processes. Flood risk management needs to be balanced with preservation of fish habitat as well as preservation of the remaining farms in our community and Floodplains for the Future is one effort to make this kind of thinking the "new normal". Some of the most important tools that integrated floodplain management has added to our tool box are collaboration and partnerships. Decisions can no longer be made solely by one party with only one priority. We need to have farmers, and fish people and many, many others at the table to help chart out our future. Maybe this time we'll get it right

Kristin Williamson

I have a story to tell that resonates strongly within me, and drives me forward in the work that I do. But this story is just my story as I am but a small player in this massive story. And this story began a long time ago.....

11,000 years ago, in fact....when the Puget Sound ice sheet retreated from our region for the last time. With the weight of the glacial ice gone, the earth rebounded and the Puyallup River began to emerge. Meltwaters moved the earth to carve the valley in the shadow of Mount Rainier, forming an expansive delta characterized by complex channels, tidal marsh islands, wetland meadows, and forested swamps. Salmon moved backed into the region and evolved anew to meet the special challenges of this post-glacial Puyallup River.

During this time, villages and camps of the First Nation's people of the Puyallup Tribe of Indians dotted the landscape and life in valley survived amidst the dynamic, and sometimes volatile, balance of the wild Puyallup River. Salmon were abundant and vital to all life in the valley- all that walks, crawls, trots, runs, swims and grows.....

In the early 1800s, migrants from the east started to arrive in the Puyallup Valley and word of the vast resources and un-tamed beauty of the Pacific Northwest spread across the lands. Such that, by 1872, the Northern Pacific Railroad had declared its Northwest terminus to be the mouth of the Puyallup River and the City of Tacoma and Commencement Bay found a prominent place on the map.

Development advanced and the once shining, emerald river delta, gave way to concrete, cranes, rail yards, and shipping canals, eventually resulting in a 99.9% loss of tidal wetland area. In less than a century, a large river delta that formed over thousands of years was cleared, filled, drained, paved, and all but completely lost. Salmon runs responded in turn, with staggering declines in numbers of returning fish and by the late 1990s the iconic Northwest resource, whose numbers seemed in exhaustible to the new settlers of the region, had also all but completely disappeared from the valley.

It was not until 1998 that I arrived on the scene of this massive story. A migrant myself from the East, I came from Minnesota in search of leaning and adventure. I landed in Tacoma and immediately fell in love with the City of Destiny- the inheritee of the terminus of Northern Pacific Railroad and all of the development that came with it- the City which now looms large over what was once the expansive tidal marsh lands of the Puyallup River Delta. When I arrived, I was gifted this story and it simultaneously broke my heart and awakened my soul to action. Because, this story, of a great landscape born out of the last ice age, with prehistoric salmon which thrived over centuries, and tenacious river people who lived in a dynamic balance with the seasons, motivated me to insert myself into the legacy of the Puyallup River and adopt it to be my own. The notion that nearly one generation of people could move into a region, decimate the natural environment, and endanger the ability of salmon to continue to exist-- a species which has survived tens of thousands of years, through ice ages, massive floods, and volcanic mud flows- that is a story that was more than I could bear. That is a story that needs to change. So, I quietly vowed to my then 19-year-old self to find a way to be player in the story and to change its ending; to help seek and find a solution to share, balance, and restore the River's resources, and ultimately recovery Puyallup River salmon. I set to work consuming all the information I could on

salmon and rivers and eventually I was lucky enough to land a job working as fish biologist on the Puyallup River.

Today, I am so honored to be a member of a group pushing forward towards a solution, because we believe it is not too late. The Floodplains for the Future Initiative for the Puyallup Watershed employs integrated floodplain management to work collaboratively across interest groups to find a new, modern-day, dynamic balance for life in the Puyallup Valley that includes healthy salmon runs, locally sourced food, and health and safety for the community, while honoring the rich cultural and historical heritage of the region. Funding streams to restore floodplains and rivers are working to empower communities to recover these wild and special places that define our Pacific Northwest landscape. Pierce County has committed to setting back levees, giving the river room, and putting into practice new policies focused, not on management of the river, but on river health and vitality. A large group of us involved in the Floodplains for the Future Initiative are focused on an 500 acre area in the Puyallup delta, where meaningful restoration in the Clear Creek basin can benefit all ages of salmon leaving and returning to the Puyallup River. A place where there is real space to recover some of the wild Puyallup River delta, while still providing viable agriculture for the local community.

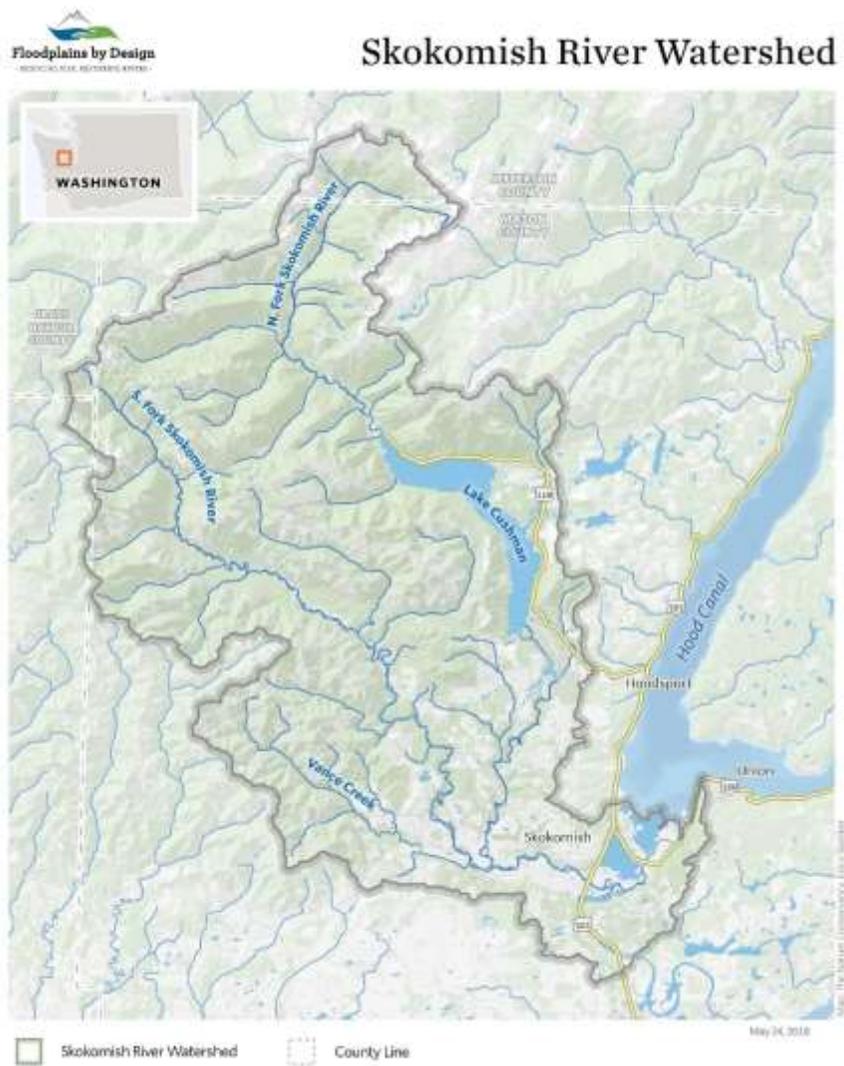
As a member of the collective Floodplains for the Future initiative for the Puyallup, White and Carbons Rivers, I enjoy the benefit of listening to and learning from history. As a group, we seek history's wisdom, strive to learn all we can from it, and work so very hard to not repeat its mistakes. If I could choose to exist in any time and place, I think it would be here and now, because we know so much more than we did 100 years ago and we have such amazing tools to investigate, appreciate, and better understand the natural world around us. This is OUR time of awakening as the modern-day people of the Puyallup River, to make change, and to reverse the wrongs of the past. If we wait another 100 years to make change, the opportunities we have now will be gone- the fish, the farms, the floodplain will be gone. This is our moment and the actions we take today will shape everything that follows. Now all that said....it is not easy...

I know I will never see the full benefits of my work towards salmon recovery in my lifetime; because recovery of river systems and the salmon who rely on them does not operate on the scale of a human lifetime. But bit by bit, we can recover pieces of the landscape that have been lost. Working towards a new dynamic balance for the Puyallup River valley, given the status of salmon and the current human population size, is no small task, and sometimes the planning and negotiation and process towards a future, shared vision can be just as volatile as the old, wild, river itself. So, when burnout and frustrations arise, and they sometimes do, I come back to this story of the Puyallup River. The story which was not just my story, that I have chosen to make part of my own, and I sling that story across my back and take the weight of its 11,000 year old history to put my shoulder to the wheel and drive forward towards a future, a future for the Puyallup River, I can believe in, a future I hope we can all believe in.

Skokomish Cohort

EVAN BAUDER

JASON RAGAN



Evan Bauder

Good afternoon, my name is Evan Bauder. I am the Habitat Program Manager at the Mason Conservation District, and I focus a lot of my work in the Skokomish River watershed.

I had the great pleasure of working with Rich Geiger for about 7 years. Rich worked in the Skokomish for nearly two decades; first as the Mason County Engineer, then as the Mason Conservation District Engineer. Rich was a leader in the Skokomish Watershed stakeholder community.

The Skokomish is beautiful, but also harsh. Most have seen well shot photographs of salmon swimming across the road in the Skokomish, but they haven't seen, or smelled, ditch lines full of dead salmon after being stranded by flood waters, or the fields glittered with red salmon eggs washed away by the flood. Many have driven through the Valley on a beautiful day on the way to visit one of the recreational destinations in the watershed, but they haven't seen the unstoppable transition of lush farmland to open water wetland.

Working in the Skokomish is challenging, but Rich had an amazing personality that helped bridge difficult situations such as conversations about varying land use interests. He was dedicated to his job, and was passionate about helping people in our community by solving complex problems with solutions that could be agreed upon by most. Rich was empathetic, caring, and thoughtful of everyone's position. He wanted to help fish populations recover, farmland to become viable once again, the local economy to flourish, and to see lives of valley residents improve all at the same time.

Rich started as the county engineer in 1997, and flooding conditions in the Skokomish had already become severe. Property buyouts had begun about three years earlier. One property was purchased in November of the same year Rich started, and one month later a major levee failure occurred on the property now owned by Mason County. Rich received notice of the breach, and immediately contacted a local construction contractor in the Valley to deploy an excavator and to help him source materials. Throughout the night Rich orchestrated an emergency repair on the levee. John Bolender, County Commissioner at the time (currently District Manager), was also on site during the repair. John's brother was running the excavator. John recalls that it was pouring down rain and the winds were fierce. The river was sending raging water all around them, and the excavator seemed to be in constant peril. Through the adverse and dangerous conditions Rich successfully led the team to victory. When morning came the levee had been repaired, and many livelihoods had been relieved of this added threat.

Also during Rich's first year with Mason County; the Skokomish Comprehensive Flood Hazard Management Plan was completed. Rich worked hard to implement this plan, but was unsuccessful due to lack of funding and other more complicated policy/political reasons. New ESA listings created new barriers not anticipated during plan development, and this was a period of mistrust between the Skokomish Tribe, Mason County, and Tacoma Public Utilities. Their relationship was challenged due to the complications imposed by Tacoma Public Utilities' effort to relicense the Cushman Dam.

Then, 6 years later another major flow event caused the North Fork to penetrate a different section of the levee system. In this single flood event the confluence between the two forks migrated downstream as the North Fork carved 1.25 miles of new channel. The river blew through undisturbed ground taking full grown trees with it. The power and instability of the river was becoming more and more apparent. As a result, Mason County and the Skokomish Tribe petitioned to the US Army Corps of Engineers to conduct a General Investigation of the Skokomish Watershed. The purpose of this effort was to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the watershed, and develop an overall restoration plan.

Fast-forward a couple more years: the Skokomish Tribe and Tacoma Public Utilities agreed to coordinate on restoration of the Skokomish Estuary. Although they were engaged in the lawsuit over the dam relicensing, they agreed about the importance of moving forward with restoring the estuary. The estuary restoration was completed over a ten year period of time, and during this decade they arrived at a settlement of the Cushman Dam; part in thanks to the trust developed through the estuary restoration efforts. This success relieved barriers to cooperation between partners in the watershed. Maybe it was the sight of fish immediately moving into habitat previously isolated, or that the basketball court on the Skokomish Reservation was relieved of flooding, or the stories told by school children describing their experience visiting the estuary.

Also during this time; the US Forest Service, with input from Skokomish Watershed Stakeholders, developed and implemented a stewardship project that used the proceeds from a timber harvest to reinvest in restoration of the Skokomish. This created a great deal of enthusiasm and excitement amongst stakeholders and led to the formation of a watershed collaborative known as the Skokomish Watershed Action Team (SWAT). SWAT continues to be an all-inclusive collaborative today. Members include landowners, producers, agencies, special interests, industries, etc.

The General Investigation and restoration plan development greatly benefited from the formation of SWAT. Rich was an active leader in SWAT, and helped the group review and comment on project alternatives and design alternatives being considered during the planning process. SWAT was the perfect forum for getting information out to the community, and for getting feedback back from watershed stakeholders.

The Skokomish General Investigation was completed in 2015.

Recently the Skokomish community and stakeholders suffered a major loss in the passing of Rich Geiger, but not before Rich saw the watershed scale restoration plan through to preliminary design, and not before he saw the restoration plan authorized by congress. One of the last big tasks Rich and I worked on together was the 2017 Floodplains by Design Application that would support continuation of this watershed scale effort. Rich and I were in the office, walking back and forth between our desks in stocking feet, getting food delivery from our manager (he promised us beer, but showed up with Dads) and writing our hearts out until very late at night.

Today, the many partners in the Skokomish are carrying forward Rich's compassion and motivation. Things are really coming together for the future of the Skokomish! I believe Rich is still helping us move forward through the tough times. His subtle and compassionate perseverance is paying off as historically unsupportive landowners are becoming the strongest advocates for this large scale and multi-benefit restoration effort.

Jason Ragan

Hello, My name is Jason Ragan and I appreciate this opportunity to tell you my story about the Skokomish watershed. You may have heard of the Skokomish river, the largest freshwater tributary to Hood Canal, and the one famous for salmon crossing the road during flood events. My family first came to the Hood Canal area in 1853, when my Grandfather's great Uncle arrived by steamship in what is now known as Union. My grandfather's relatives were prospectors and homesteaders, my grandparents ran a dairy farm on the same land. My uncle and my dad worked in the forest industry, I work in the shellfish industry, and my kids are showing interest in wildlife management and biology. I live in the Skokomish Valley and I am proud to be the 5th generation of my family to live there while raising the 6th generation.

Growing up in the Skok Valley was amazing. We would ride our bikes, play in the woods and on the river banks. One of the only rules mom had was that we had to wait for the truck traffic to come down from the logging camp before we could be out on the road. One winter, I was sitting in my third-grade classroom at Hood Canal school and the principal came on the intercom system and announced that all Skokomish Valley kids needed to grab their stuff and get on the bus to go home early due to flooding. The bus could not make it all the way to our house. My sister and I were dropped off at the Rose family home, and later that day we were picked up by the local fire department. We got piggy back rides and we rode home in a deuce and a half army truck. This was the first 100-year flood event that I remember. From that time on the flooding has continued to get worse, and more frequent. Eventually my parents sold our home to the county in the FEMA buyout program in the mid 90's.

For my entire life I have been following the story of the Skokomish watershed and learning about land use conflict, and management decisions that have led the watershed to where it is today. The farmland is a fraction of what it is before, once fertile fields are now marsh land, and many homes are gone forever. Every year I watch salmon cross the road, only to smell them rotting in the fields when the flood waters recede. I worked for the farmers that built the dikes, and I know the loggers that built the roads and cut the trees. Some of the loggers that took the logs out of the rivers are the very same people putting the wood back into the streams. All these people are hardworking and passionate about what they think should be done to reduce flooding. We live in a very fertile and productive valley, not only do we have corn, hay, and cattle, but we have a diverse cottage industry in the Skok Valley including a Wasabi farm, and even Olympic Mountain Ice Cream.

I am proud to participate in the restoration process as a member of the SWAT group (Skokomish Watershed Action Team), I currently serve as Chair of the board with the Mason Conservation District and am an active member of the Skokomish Grange. I have made the choice to be involved and keep myself educated about what is going on in the watershed. Some members of my community have not been as involved in recent years, primarily because of the years of conflict, studies, and inaction. I am hopeful that they will get involved again as on the ground work will help to ease the skeptics.

In 2006 I decided to build a home in the upper valley where the flooding is not a major problem, but the road to my house is sometimes impassable. I chose to build the house because this area is home to me,

and a great place to raise my kids. I believe in the restoration process and the work being done by all the stake holders, including the Conservation District, the Skokomish tribe, the Forest Service, and the Army Corp. It has been a longer and slower process than we were told in the beginning, but a lot great work has been done. My worst fear is that this process may stall out in the end like other efforts have done in the past. We have gotten the funding to complete most of the studies, we now need the funding to do the important part, the on the ground work. We are on the verge of doing some amazing environmental restoration work that will also have great benefits to the community and surrounding area. World class recreational opportunities, timberland, and farm land will once again be productive and safe for all to enjoy.

Touchet Cohort

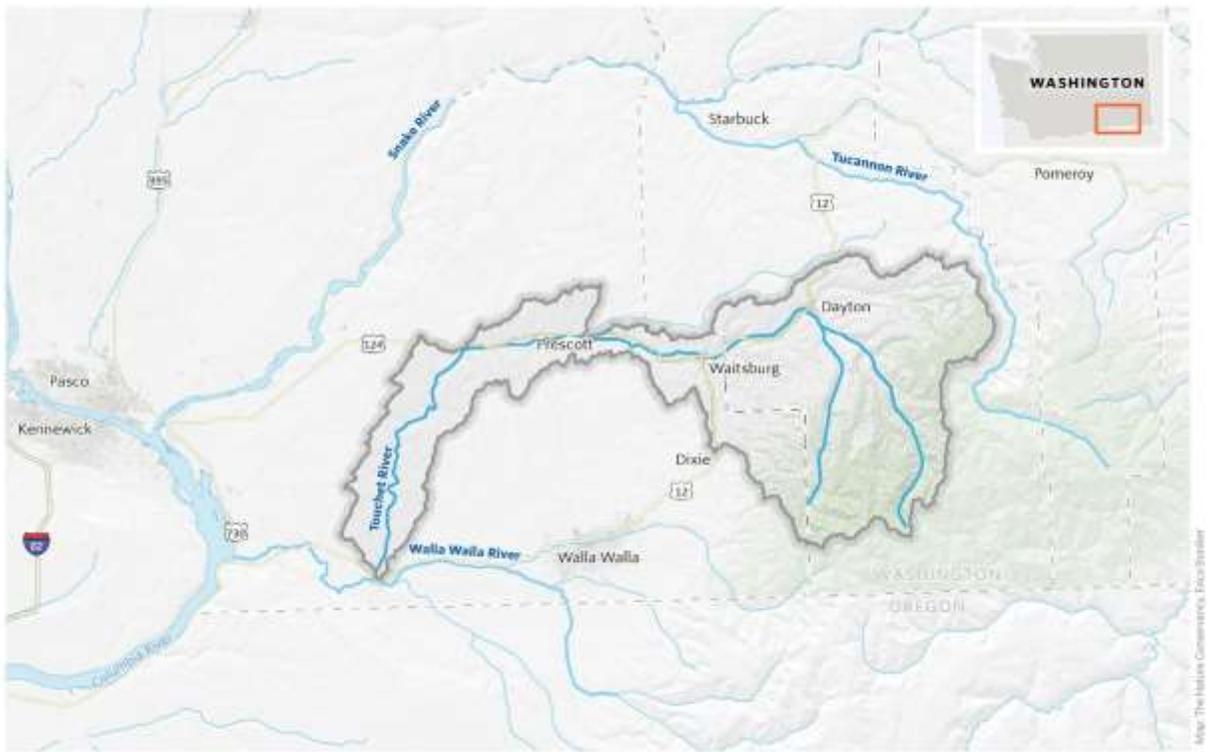
JOHN FOLTZ

JERRY MIDDEL

BILL WARREN



Touchet River Watershed



 Touchet River Watershed  County Line

John Foltz

I want you to imagine yourself walking over soft pine needles, as if in a dream, the fresh scent of organic material that signifies the arrival of spring assaults your nose – it's the dream you keep having in the middle of winter.

You hear the sound of a golden eagle over the dull gurgling of the water flowing off to your left. As you take another deep breath, you notice the smell of apple blossoms in the orchard just beyond the river.

There is no need to imagine this, it isn't a dream. You are on the banks of the Touchet River and the apple blossoms are in full bloom.

You look down at the river and see a patch of clean water rising out of a pool, colorful gravels shimmer in the weak morning light.

Wait?! A flash of silver... there! You didn't notice it at first because its size is completely out of context. A salmon! Not just any salmon, a king, a springer! What could be more Washingtonian than that? Apples and salmon amongst the evergreens! This place is none other than southeastern Washington!

And this could have been how the day had started out... if only I had been a little earlier, and less concerned with work. Indeed, we are on the banks of the Touchet River, and there is a large apple orchard in full bloom.

I'm a project coordinator for the local salmon recovery board, its 2013 and I'm meeting with an orchardist Dr. Abbas Sameh and his wife Judy. We are looking at the river bank, or what's left of it as it's disappeared over the winter and early spring. Dr. Sameh had previously worked to stabilize this bank in the past. Now all that remains is a long length of cable that has some material caught on it.

We look at what Dr. Sameh has in mind to fix the problem. It is a contractor's sketch. Literally on the back of a napkin. It depicts a few logs buried into the bank. We talk through this short term solution and I note that it could work for a little while, depending on river flows. We would likely be doing something similar again in the near future if that is how he wants to proceed.

I had been invited to this meeting by a college to propose an alternative option to the idea drawn on the napkin. Instead of a short term fix, constantly battling this river, I shared an idea of floodplain reconnection as a means to solve their problem for the long term. After continued conversation, they said they would give it some thought and get back to me.

As Judy developed a relationship with me and our project partners, she started to build a confidence and willingness to find a longer term solution. She served as a facilitator, communicator, translator, for and positive influence on her husband. Judy helped push the project forward with a broader vision. They agreed upon a project design that laid the foundation to move forward.

Let's fast forward to 2017. As fate would have it, Dr. and Mrs. Sameh sold their orchard and moved away. What initially seemed like a setback yielded a potential new partner. The new owner, Nolan Empey, is also an orchardist.

Nolan originally set out to raise apples on the entire acreage of his orchard, but through the process of purchasing the property finds that his water right doesn't cover the acreage he had thought.

While Nolan was adjusting to this fact, he also learned that the Umatilla Tribes and the Salmon Recovery Board were planning river restoration project along the North Touchet through his new property.

The Umatilla Tribe, as the project lead, is now working with Nolan and his neighbors to try and find ways to improve both river conditions and provide what the orchardists need. This is currently where the project stands, negotiations are ongoing but Nolan is willing to give up more than 7 acres of apple orchard to the floodplain and the river!

As you can imagine, this is just the preview to a great story currently unfolding. There is still lots of work to do. We currently have a design to implement a large scale project that benefits landowners, river habitat, and reduces flood risk in the town of Dayton just downstream.

When the work gets tough and roadblocks arise, just close your eyes and remember the smell the apple blossoms and the sight of that king salmon, it will give you the energy to push on.

Jerry Middel

River Vision

This journey begins on a miserable cold and wet February day back in 2010. I had just started working for the Umatilla Tribes in the Blue Mountains of se Washington State. On my first trip to the field office where I now live, the neighbor's three pit bulls attacked and wrestled me to the ground. I was the outsider, and they guarded their territory.

The Touchet Valley is the ancestral homeland of the Umatilla Tribes. Yet the Tribes are treated like relative newcomers. I know that sounds strange, and it *is*. Some locals seem suspicious of the Tribes intentions up here, and treat the Tribes like outsiders. To break that cycle, we have to reach out and establish trust. And we do that by getting out into the community and explaining the Tribes' vision of rivers and uplands.

I am the live-in onsite project manager for an 11,000 acre wildlife area. Running the wildlife area is a dream come true and fits my personality like a glove. But that's only half my job. The rest of the time I look for private landowners along the Upper Touchet Rivers willing to work collectively with the Tribes to restore rivers. This part of the job is less like a well fit glove and more like wading into murky waters.

Trying to clear the waters means organizing meetings, tours, and more meetings. That kind of outreach translates into finding folks interested in river work. Then we arranged agreements with folks that owned property on the North Touchet River and wanted to work with the Tribes. Agreements set the stage for grant writing and project planning. Planning led to community involvement which in turn meant meeting more folks. It looked like we were on our way to a successful project. We got the grants and matching support. Then like migrating steelhead struggling to make it up the Columbia River, we had setbacks. The landowners pulled out. Talk about a passage barrier. I gave back the \$450k grant money. It was 2014.

I stood under tall black cottonwoods wondering how we could get a project off the ground. I had to meet someone who was willing to let us on their property to restore the river. I met Bill Warren: apple farmer, rancher, and a lifelong resident of Columbia County. Bill expressed interest in creating fish habitat. I wasted no time obtaining funds to start a design along Bill's and his neighbor's property just upstream. It was winter of 2015.

Snowflakes fell one by one building the snowpack, as we made incremental progress on the designs and landowner negotiations. Meetings and tours led to grant writing and project planning. Once again, success seemed in reach. Then as the snow gave way to the spring song of the chickadee, Bill Warren's upstream neighbor sold his orchard. It was April of 2017.

Someone once told me that if things come easy in life they probably aren't worth it. I felt like knocking that person on the side of the head. Instead I put my nose to the grindstone. I scaled the project back to work on just Bill Warren's land. Seemed logical. But when I submitted the new project design for review, it was rejected for being too limited in scope. Up the proverbial creek without a paddle, I returned the \$500k grant money. It was the summer of 2017.

The dog days of summer dragged on indefinitely that year. But as the fall colors brightened the landscape, I met another landowner who owned a one mile stretch of the North Touchet River immediately upstream from where we had been planning. These ranchers wanted in on the river work. They stepped forward and allowed me to start a river project design. It was the fall of 2017.

Just about the same time, the new apple grower who purchased the orchard upstream of Bill's expressed interest in the project through his one-mile stretch of the river. What if I could bring these three significant land owners together and get a river project going on the entire 3 miles stretch of the North Touchet River? That would be a win for the Tribes, the community and the fish.

What began as an outsider being met with guarded suspicion, has now turned into an exciting opportunity. The murky water cleared, and the pit bulls are nowhere in sight.

Bill Warren

My grandparents came to Southeast Washington in hopes of a better life. After homesteading, they eventually purchased property on the North Touchet upstream of Dayton in the foothills of the Blue Mountains in Southeastern Washington. That land allowed my grandfather to excel at what he knew best; farming. He had a family and my mother was born on that land in 1926 and grew up along the North Touchet River. That river had washed out so many folks in the early days that it had to be tamed. Bulldozers run by men determined to keep that river out of harm's way were the rule of the day. Huge amounts of material were placed to block that river and protect people's homes and farms. But for all the effort of these rugged folks, the river raged and washed away people's homes and dreams.

But you know something; people's dreams are harder to wash away than you might think. It seems like the entire history of this region is about holding back the destructive forces of the river. Year after year, people sweated and toiled to protect what was theirs. And year after year they had to rebound after destructive floods once again took its toll. That was not easy to overcome and eventually my grandparents place was sold. It went through several hands over the decades until one day my parents bought the land that was previously my grandparents. That was a dream come true for my folks, and it is where I make my living today. I am an apple grower, rancher and farmer in the North Touchet Valley.

I have some beautiful North Touchet bottomland. But the river still affects everything I do. We reinforce the dikes, yet the flood waters of the river washes the dike way. It only takes one small weak spot to create a big problem. We tried to give the river more room to move, but it wasn't enough. Sometimes, I wonder how we can do a better job protecting the land. Then I remember talking to an old high school friend I ran into a while back. He was manning a booth at the Ag Expo in Spokane. When I told him about the property my family purchased of the North Touchet. He replied the River needs more space; it needs a place to spread and release the energy that comes from the channel corridor that the Neighbors created upstream. "Click", a light went on in my brain. That made sense. Although my ancestors did what they thought was right, and it was at the time, we are entering a different era. An era when we need to do something different than continually control the rivers' course. Perhaps my grandfather would shake his head in disbelief- in this letting the idea of letting the river run more freely. But he had common sense too, so maybe he wouldn't be so surprised.

And so it began. An odyssey of exploration: Dialogue and discovery with my friend from high school. I had no idea that that would lead me to where I am today. I have been on tours of nearby rivers where similar problems to what we have on the North Touchet have occurred in the past. Today folks are taking a different look at the river. They spoke about the many benefits from giving the river more space. They spoke about cooler, cleaner water and more of it when we need it the most. And how by giving the river space, we can benefit ourselves and people downstream. I met tribal representatives, Bonneville Power Administration representatives, wildlife biologists, engineers and committees of interested people. We started having tours on my land looking at the North Touchet. We have signed commitments with the Tribes to draw up designs. We met with engineers. We helped with the grant

applications. And we have had more tours than you can count. Now we have the Tribes and the local land trust working with us to get conservation easements in place to help us and the river.

It has been a pleasure working with the tribes. They have been sensitive about my concerns and needs as an irrigator and landowner. They have been forthcoming with their goals so that we can have a project that we both believe in and can stand beside each other to address future challenges.

Unfortunately, attempts to get the work funded have suffered disappointments. There were suggestions that the scope of work wasn't big enough, and acknowledgement that reduced funding allocations had increased competitiveness to a score that yields funding.

But times change, attitudes change, ideas change, property ownerships change and of course, climate has always been changing. Our dreams endured through revision and interaction with one another.

My goal is to secure funding for this project on the North Touchet with two other landowners, myself and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation. We have initiated responses to address the concerns of the previous funders, acknowledging and addressing constraints of the designs and the landowners. The tribes have initiated new relations with an additional neighboring landowner, as well as confirming our commitment to recognize the needs of our neighboring landowners keeping firmly in mind the needs of creating habitat for fish, as well as trying to create solutions that may be able to address concerns of the City of Dayton.

Today, I know that my neighbors who share the North Touchet floodplain also share the vision and enthusiasm shared of me and that high school friend decades ago at that booth in an Ag Expo show in Spokane. We have come a long way from the spirit of homesteading my grandparents embraced as we look to move toward a more sustainable future for tomorrow.

Nooksack Cohort

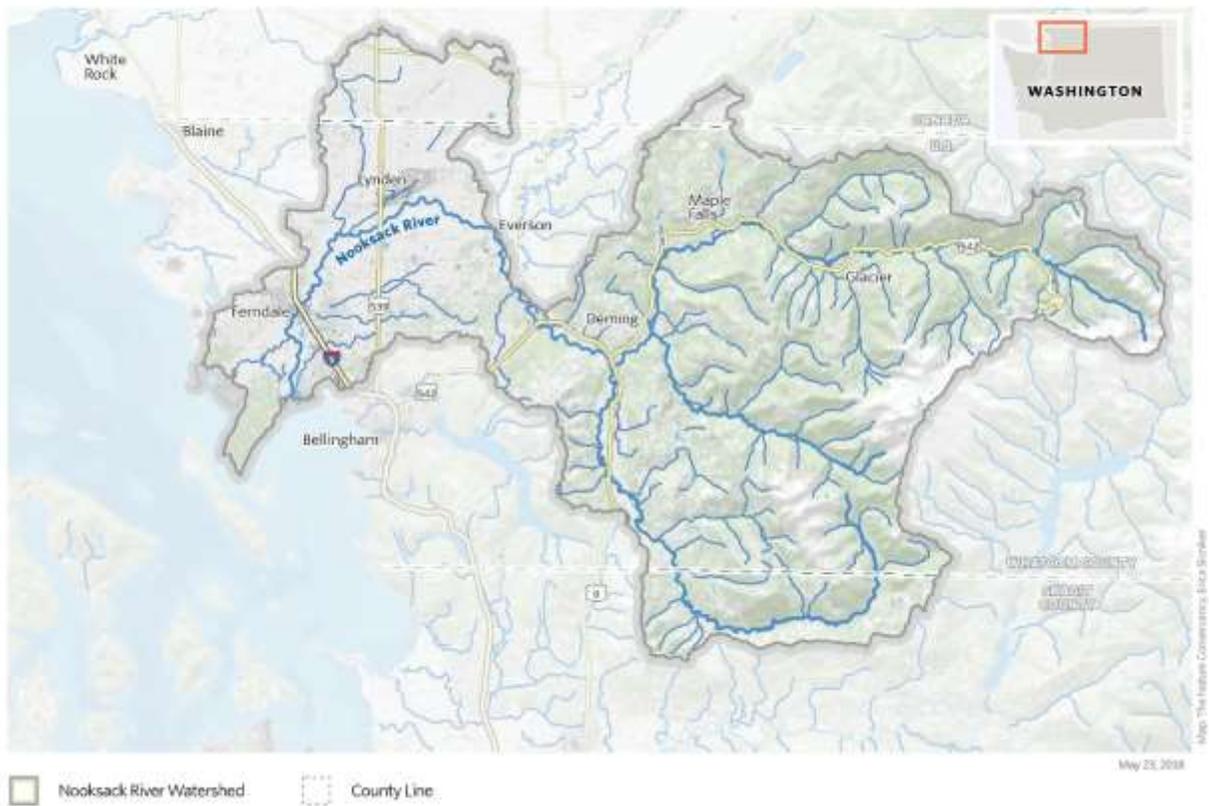
NED CURRENCE

PAULA HARRIS

FRED LIKKEL



Nooksack River Watershed



Ned Currence

I grew up running around barefoot in the Southern Appalachians, but moved to Western WA in 1985 to work for the Forest Service in Darrington. There, I quickly discovered the wonders of fishing for salmon and steelhead, with a special passion for fly-fishing for leaping summer run steelhead. I finished school then moved to the tip of the Olympic Peninsula for a few years where I began my career trying to help recover salmon. By the time I moved back to Puget Sound in 1995, I understood that the salmon resources were continuing to decline, and salmon fishing opportunities – Treaty and Non-Treaty alike – were dwindling.

Then about 20 years ago I began working for salmon recovery in the Nooksack watershed, and I've gradually realized how much of the resource we have lost. I came across a US Fish Commissioner's Report which lists 1895 Nooksack River catches that were sold to the canneries and the fresh fish market. A rough conversion of pounds to individual fish translates the catches to about 55,000 steelhead, 70,000 coho, and 22,500 chinook that were sold. This omits tribal catch, settler catch, marine catches and fish that survived to create the next generation. We had a lot of wild fish and this was prior to the first hatchery.

Today wild steelhead abundances average about 1,800 adults, wild chinook populations are 200-500 adults, and we have a couple thousand or less wild coho. That is 1-3% of the 1895 cannery catches across these species. With good freshwater and marine habitat conditions, populations can rebuild from low abundances because we have good survival from one generation to the next. That is often referred to as population productivity, and with habitat decline, less fish are produced per pair that spawn.

Now I realize there are many reasons contributing to the salmon decline, and a big one, across species, is how we have managed our floodplains over the decades. We have removed the logjams and burned the wood, and cut the stream adjacent forests that could have replenished it. We straightened our rivers and cut off highly productive floodplain side channel and slough habitats. We have converted wetlands that formerly produced coho into agricultural lands. We had hardened our river banks to reduce channel migration and flooding by armoring with rip-rap and levees. We have deficit instream flows too, due to out of stream uses of water. A lot was built with little consideration for fish. Now we add climate change to the mix.

It is over 100 years of floodplain management history, and a lot to overcome. We, collectively, in the Nooksack watershed have begun to forge a path of more balanced floodplain management. Will we be bold enough to plan a future that explicitly includes salmon? We are well along with geomorphology assessments. These help quantify historic conditions and changes that the salmon have responded to. We are doing a habitat assessment that will inform how salmon have responded to these changes and projects that could be beneficial. We're doing good science. But I wonder, will we be bold enough?

We are committed to identifying opportunities to restore habitats, and habitat forming processes where we can. To do so will require willing landowners, substantial funding, and strong leaders to forge a new

floodplain management paradigm. We also need the Army Corps of Engineers to buy into this paradigm. The only real certainty we have is that status quo is inadequate if we want to have salmon to persist for future generations to enjoy. That isn't unique to floodplain management, but it will require improved floodplain management. We're down to 1-3% of former salmon abundances in Nooksack at best, and salmon are a big part of our quality of life. We have an opportunity and we are developing trust and respect. I am cautiously optimistic, but we have work ahead.

Paula Harris

Twenty years ago in August, when I moved to Whatcom County from Seattle, I felt like I was coming home. I grew up in the Lehigh Valley in Pennsylvania, an area with lots of farm fields and dairies similar to Whatcom County. The County was in the process of adopting the Lower Nooksack River Comprehensive Flood Hazard Management plan and as a young engineer I was excited to drive the train and implement the flood plan. The plan includes seven components. So my team and I started systematically taking the steps to implement the plan. We mapped where the river had been historically to better understand where it might want to go again and started trying to understand how sediment coming down from the mountains and glaciers may be affecting flooding. We built a computer model to tell us where the water goes and started using it to design projects to reduce flood damages and risk. For the first time ever, the County bought out properties that were in areas that flooded repeatedly.

We made good progress and I really felt like we were starting to accomplish something in my first 10 years at the County. But by then I started to realize the need to update the plan. Not only was the river changing but I realized the people who owned the land where projects were to be located had not been involved in developing the plan and may not be too excited when we tried to implement it. At this time, local politics, like those nationally, were becoming extremely polarized. It's also about the time I met Fred. He was working with some dairy farmers frustrated by poor drainage that was negatively affecting their farms and income. The farmers wanted the County to start removing gravel again to lower water levels in the river to improve drainage. Needless to say, the tribes and other regulatory agencies were not happy because they knew that science shows that gravel removal destroys fish habitat. Gravel is one of those polarizing issues in Whatcom County. The farmers pressured the County to develop a proposal for a gravel removal project so we could see what the regulatory agencies would require to get any gravel out of the river. Some of the farmers hoped that defining roadblocks to gravel removal would be, the first step to change the laws and remove the roadblocks. One farmer even suggested I might be one of the roadblocks.

And with an election for a new County Executive on the horizon, I worried that I could lose my job and ability to support myself. At one of my Advisory Committee meetings, a citizen started ranting about how I was incompetent, that I should be fired, and that my committee didn't even have my back. The Chair thanked him for his comments and went on with the meeting. I realized then that I needed to do something to keep my perspective... so I decided to go to farm school. I went to Skagit Valley College two nights a week for two semesters, then took Fridays off from the County for 6 months to work as an intern on a farm and earned the first Certificate in Sustainable Agriculture that the college issued. I gained first-hand understanding of how tight the margins are in farming and how bad drainage can affect their bottom line. Perhaps the most important lesson I learned was that I needed to stop trying so hard to drive the train, to get to the answers I wanted. As long as I provide good info to decision-makers, I am doing my job, whether or not they make good decisions with it. My job doesn't define who I am.

That lesson came at the right time, because my team and I were thrown another curve ball. The County depends on federal funding to help repair our levees. After Hurricane Katrina the Corps of Engineers reviewed their policies and notified us that we had two years to resolve 80 issues they identified with our levees to keep getting federal money to repair them. This was a huge problem. The other option was to guide a planning process acceptable to the federal government, which would buy us more time to fix our problems. At first that put the fear of God into me. But then I realized this was my opportunity to get out of the middle man role. For years I'd gone back and forth between the farmers and the resources agencies feeling like I had a target on my chest and back. This process would require the farmers and regulatory agencies to speak directly to each other and relate as humans without me being the messenger. And it did just that. Over 3 years we developed a plan that was broadly supported and more importantly, not opposed. Relationships that formed through that process have lasted. They set the stage to transition from the flood-centric focus on our levees to the more holistic need I had begun to envision more than 10 years ago--to redesign how we "manage" the river and its floodplain to keep people safe, fish alive and farmers farming.

It feels like the stars are aligned right now. Our community is ready to collaborate and come up with a vision and a set of actions that we can all buy into. I truly hope we succeed because every year when I go back to the Lehigh Valley in Pennsylvania and see another field developed into another warehouse, I am faced with what our valley could become if we don't get it right.

Fred Likkel

My name is Fred Likkel, and I currently serve as the Executive Director for Whatcom Family Farmers. Although I no longer am involved in a farm, farming does run deep in my blood. I was born and raised on a dairy farm in Whatcom County, with generations further back than I can count involved in this wonderful community. Like most kids, I grew up taking this privilege for granted, not really understanding what a wonderful privilege this was. I also didn't understand the complex challenges it faced, both from forces within the greater agriculture community, and the unique pressures of farming in Western Washington.

A couple of life experiences changed my viewpoints, made me become more aware of some of these challenges, and some of the challenges ag created for others. First, I had the privilege of taking a biology course as a senior in high school led by a wonderful teacher passionate about exploring how our world and our actions in it affect our environment. Back then the issue was acid rain, and small experiments showed me how we needed to be better stewards of our environment.

Upon returning home from college the dream of dairy farming also hit crude reality. Financial pressures combined with my Dad's bout and eventual succumbing to cancer made it clear this was not to be my path. Instead, I embarked on a path of serving agriculture through serving the farmers themselves. First, through the feed and nutrition of dairy cows, then to starting an environmental consulting firm helping farmers, and finally as the executive director of an agricultural advocacy group, Whatcom Family Farmers.

I wish I could say this journey has all been a bed of roses, but sadly this isn't so. As I said earlier, our farms face unique challenges. Farming itself in all our country faces the difficulty of existing in an environment where "he who produces it the cheapest wins." This means economies of scale and specialization, which while it may be the most efficient way to produce food often leads to larger and fewer farms. This does not match well with the Western Washington landscape with our small valleys and diverse landscapes. It also doesn't match up well with preserving that unique community identity I grew up with.

In the Puget Sound, we face additional pressures from a rapidly expanding population. Our land is being swallowed by this development, to the tune of 60% farmland loss in Western Washington. While many urbanites claim they like farming, when faced with the sights, sounds, and smells they too often complain. These complaints can lead to regulations not based in science, but rather on politicians and bureaucrats eager to please voters

Now, another tension has emerged to put further strain on farms. Many salmon species are endangered, and in the past several years farms have become the target of some groups ire, claiming they do more harm than good. Imagine with me: you are struggling to make a living, awash in debt (farming is expensive!) got the finger from a rushing urbanite while driving out to the field this morning

and been accused of killing fish. Farmers, by nature, tend to be more introverted, and this pressure too often leaves them feeling that “farming isn’t fun anymore”

My role is to help preserve farming in this unique corner of Western Washington, but to be honest, too often this feels like a battle I’m losing.

I won’t lie here. The road ahead for agriculture in Western Washington is hard. The challenges I talked about earlier aren’t going away and may very well be getting more difficult. But, if farming is going to survive it has to learn how to do a couple of things:

1. Farmers need to learn how to tell their story. The vast majority of the farmers I work with care very passionately about caring for their land and animals. They would rather not have more houses, and love to help salmon, providing it doesn’t mean their farm goes away!
2. Farmers need to work collaboratively. By their very nature farmers are independent. They like the idea of running their own business, and don’t like others sticking their nose in their business! Farmers need to understand that we live in a growing community that understands us less and less, and we need to engage the community, not run from it.

So, how does that look? Despite what many think, farms can be a huge help for salmon. The streams that provide water and habitat run through many of our farms. The soil that can filter out the pollutants that can kill fish we provide and control. There is definitely a place for us to work together! We have begun to engage the local tribal communities through our current FLIP process, much as we did with the SWIFF process, and this has led to some very encouraging exchanges. The farmers actually asked fisheries experts to come and teach them more about how salmon live, what’s been happening to their habitat, and want to know how they can help. While we have a long way to go, I am encouraged.

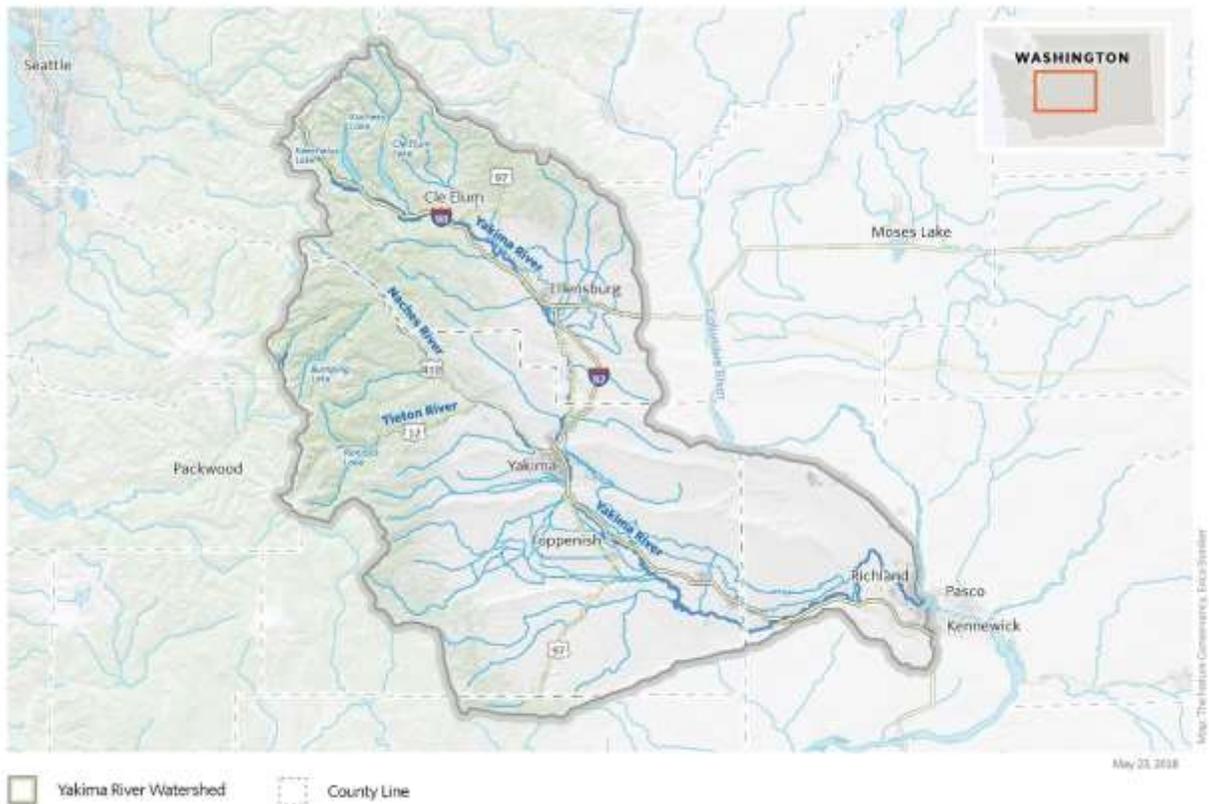
Yakima Cohort

PETER DYKSTRA

URBAN EBERHART



Yakima River Watershed



Map: The Inland Community, EcoSolutions

Peter Dykstra

My name is Peter Dykstra. I am a water rights and land conservation lawyer and work on those issues in the Yakima River Basin in Central Washington. First, a confession: I am a “206er”. I live in Seattle with my family and my office is in Seattle; 206 is our area code. “206er” has a certain, less than desirable, reputation on the other side of the mountains. Although the Cascade Curtain isn’t what it once was, it is still rare to find people from Seattle working in the Yakima Basin, certainly not as much as I do. Why then do I drive a couple hundred miles at least twice a week to work in such a place?

Once upon a time, the Yakima Basin was pretty much a farming community. If you owned land in the valleys and along the rivers, basically anywhere close to water, you used that land, with the water from the reservoirs and rivers to grow hay. For over 100 years, farming families throughout the Yakima have cared for this land, made a good living from the land, and raised the next generation of family members who carried on that legacy.

In recent years, farming has become more challenging for many, especially those farmers who owned marginal farm ground along the rivers and stream of the Upper Yakima Basin. Recurring flooding of the farming ground caused catastrophic losses of crops. Massive spring runoff sent loads of debris crashing into the fences and tore out the infrastructure needed to bring water to the farm to irrigate the crops. Changing regulations created consternation about what farmers could do on their land. Pressure to grow homes instead of crops from the growing cities nearby increased the challenges of maintaining the land as a farm. Many in the next generation of the farming families began moving away and aren’t coming home to keep farming. These farmers are constantly contacted by developers about selling their land for development. Many of families need the money for retirement; their land is their nest egg.

I am not your typical lawyer. I don’t spend my days in court, arguing with some “other side” or trying to place blame for a problem on one party or another. I like to solve problems, particularly problems that involve our water and land. It so happens that I am lucky enough to be a lawyer for two organizations that work to offer another way: The Trust for Public Land and Trout Unlimited. TPL and TU are conservation groups who work with willing landowners to purchase their land and water rights at fair market value but put those assets into public ownership for habitat and other benefits. Together with these two great organizations, I work to find a way to pay farming families what their land and water is worth, even to a home developer, but have the land be used for floodplain restoration and the water left in the rivers and streams for fish.

Because of that work, in one part of the Yakima Basin, known as the Ringer Loop, I am helping TPL and TU work with several farming families and many partners in the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan to purchase several hundred acres farmland and water rights from the farming families that are ready to sell. Together these partners are working to cobble together nearly \$10 million from multiple funding sources to buy these farms and restore their floodplain functions.

Because of that, I get to help farming families find a pathway to make the decision to sell their farm without sacrificing their financial needs or compromising their hope that land will grow something better than more homes, all while protecting land for future generations to enjoy as open space and wildlife habitat.

Together with groups like TPL and TU, I work in the Yakima Basin because I am working to build a better future and a resilient community in the face of ongoing change. And maybe just maybe I am one 206er helping to pull back the Cascade Curtain just a bit further.

Urban Eberhart

Introduction

Hello, I am Urban Eberhart. I grew up farming and irrigating in the Badger Pocket area of the Kittitas Valley. I manage the Kittitas Reclamation District and represent irrigated agricultural interests on the Yakima River Basin Water Enhancement Project Workgroup. I am here to tell you a story about the river that is the life of our area.

Setting Up for Survival – A River Basin Endures

A long time ago, but just a moment in the memories of earth, the land walked through the seasons with steady strides in a place now known as the Yakama. In winter, a thick blanket of snow and ice lay across the mountain ranges and covered the valleys below. The warmth of spring and summer melted the snow little by little. Water soaked into the flat places and trickled down rocky cliffs, waking seeds and dormant roots, bringing meadows into bloom, nourishing animals, and gladdening the hearts of people. And so it happened year after year. Mountains held their snow pack into summer with the promise of cool water for when the sun shone long and hot across the arid land. Cold water flowed steadily through streams and ever larger rivers. Fish journeyed to the ocean and then finally back to the headwaters to spawn, as it was in their nature to do.

One day, it so happened that people arrived with a great desire for more water to support farms and families new to the land. Forests were cut and cleared; rivers were dammed, with little consideration for how fish would find their way to and from their homes at the furthest edges of lakes and streams. When the rains came, instead of soaking in, it swept off the steep, treeless slopes taking with it everything in its path. Roots lost their grip. Meadows were ripped open in great gaping bites. The ground baked. Streambeds lay empty or carried water too warm for the fish, who had thrived there for so long.

When the winter snows and summer rains failed to appear, people started to fight over what water was left. No matter how hard they fought with each other, there was never enough to go around.

It so happened that one day a small group got together. They were seasoned adversaries and equally matched. They told each other, "We're not getting anywhere. We're doing a great job of tripping each other up. But nothing is being accomplished." They concluded the problem could not be solved by continuing to fight. A plan was needed for everyone's survival – families, farms, fish, and forests. It was all connected. The first meeting was difficult, as mistrust and wariness had long prevailed. Yet, each of the former adversaries were heartened and returned to their people in order to gain support for this new approach.

They were able to gather together a much larger group and called it -- the YRBWEP workgroup. Over time trust grew. Anger and bitterness seeped away as the entire team tackled each of the concerns with respect and civility and shared meals. Team members, now friends, could be relied upon to care about more than just their own narrow interests. The group made a plan to create fish passage at creeks and dams, cool the overheated waterways, repair damaged forests and eroded streams, and create more water storage for

all. It took many years and many steps to move along this new path. Envoys were sent to seek outside help with their tasks and soon word of their efforts spread to other lands.

The group now shares the story of the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan, bringing hope to others who face similar troubles. And all the while those from generations before and those who have yet to be born wait patiently for the fish to come back. It has begun. Forests grow, meadows heal, wildlife returns, and farms flourish.

The End

□ 2018 Urban Eberhart and Sophia Eberhart

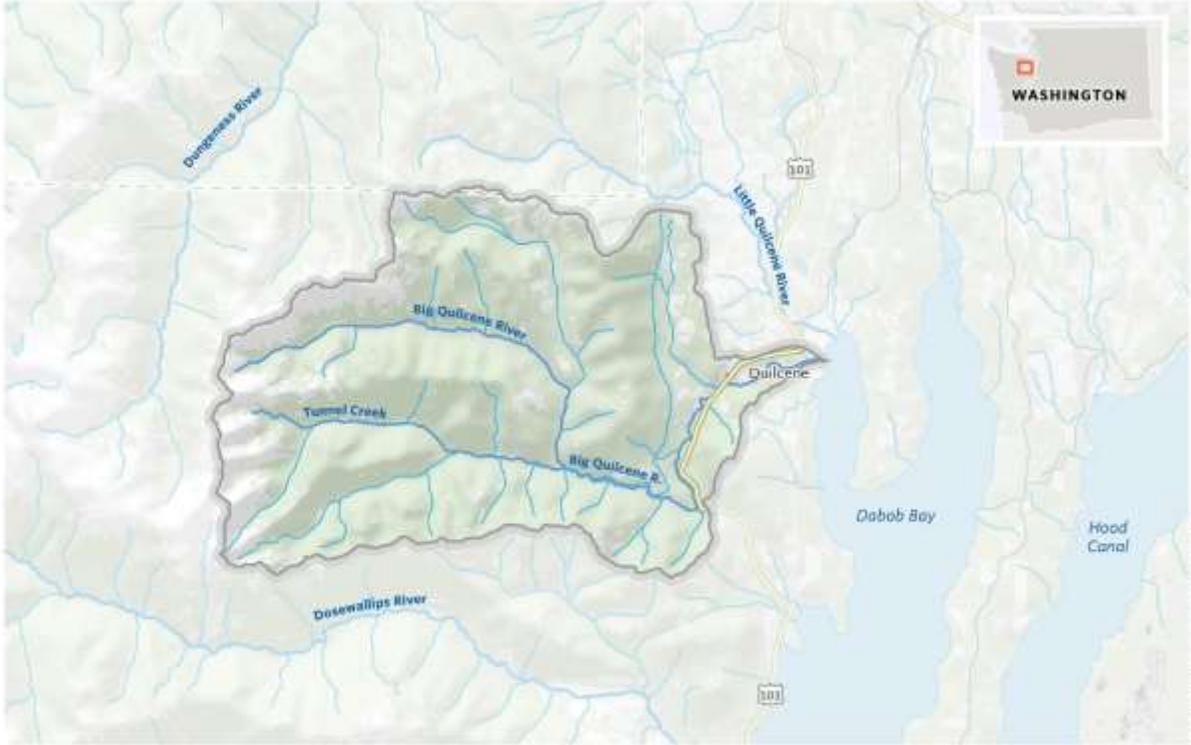
Permission granted to The Nature Conservancy to share the story

Quilcene Cohort

TAMI POKORNY



Big Quilcene River Watershed



□ Big Quilcene River Watershed □ County Line

May 23, 2018

Tami Pokorny

If you had one word to describe the Big Quilcene River, what would it be? In our house, when our son Erik was a young teenager, that one word was “coho”. The river, the fish, and several of the people he met while fishing were mentors to him. I don’t know what he would have done with his free time if he hadn’t struck up a relationship with the Big Quilcene – it seemed to feed his soul in such a profound and vital way. When my husband and I weren’t available to give him a ride from home – a 15-mile round trip— he’d ride his bike. The motivation was the freedom he felt, I suppose, and that every evening or weekend at the river was unpredictable. How many fish would run up? Would he catch any? Who he would meet? It’s no surprise that a kid who loves to fish will see the local river as a source of wonder just as summer is turning to fall and the coho are anxious to go upstream. He soon knew every bend and pool in the fishable reach.

Whether or not fish can be seen above the Linger Longer Bridge is often the subject of speculation and investigation when the first big leaf maple leaves begin turning yellow. As each summer day passes, the Big Quilcene carries less and less water and by August it’s easy to spot salmon in the shallows. At this point in the year the river wouldn’t exist but for the inflow of ground water, running at about twenty-six cubic feet per second, or about a bathtub of water every four seconds. A few coho take a chance on these low flows, but most wait for the scent of a new rainy season. Their hesitation makes space for a surge of summer chum during a week or so in late August when they dominate the channel, digging and spawning and irritating the coho hunters. Soon though, the chum pulse is over, and the first fall rains call in coho in larger numbers. They fill the federal hatchery with eggs or land themselves in grateful freezers near and far.

By contrast, November’s Big Quilcene River is straight up lonely. The parking lot at Riverside Park is almost always empty, and the traffic on Muncie St. is once again quiet. November storms can send a hundred times as much water through the channel as in summer – occasionally, much, much more. Families living nearby monitor the stream gage and the weather forecast, set out sandbags, raise important items off the floor, or gather loose furniture from the yard. They talk to each other and plan in case the road closes or they need to leave in a hurry.

What word or words apply to the river’s fierce wintery attitude, all inflated, rushing and shoving? “Salmon” says the Big Quilcene, but fish are nowhere to be seen. At high flows the river is inhospitable to fish and humans alike as it races east filling the space between two levies leaving nowhere for a fish to rest or hide. Like most wild things, the Big Quilcene doesn’t care much for confinement. Each passing flood drops a layer of sediment onto the riverbed and elevates it by a tiny step. The river strains for a view of the floodplain and longs to dance the river’s dance beneath the firs and cedars. “Will you set me free?” it seems to ask. “We’ll see,” says the neighborhood. It all depends.

The river led my son to Alaska where he fished for pink salmon and halibut during three summers of high school. He just graduated from community college and is planning to go sailing before university classes. It'll surely be a success if he comes back safe having learned half as much from the winds and waves as he did while fishing the Big Quilcene River.

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TNC/Dungeness Cohort

CATHY LEAR

JENNY BAKER



Dungeness River Watershed



Cathy Lear

The Biologist and the Fish Bowl

Imagine, years ago, that it's summer on the Lower Dungeness River. Walk with me through the salt marsh, past the tidal channels, to the Bay. On the way back we stroll through the 80-acre pasture (dodging the cow patties), visit grazing cows, and watch eagles on the wing while we peek at the snow-capped Olympic Mountains. The river's murmur assures us that all is well with the world.

Winter tells a different tale:

Water burst through the levee again. For the 8th time in 7 years it went through Gil's place. This time it flooded his buildings, The water dropped mud everywhere, even onto his vintage Harleys and Cadillacs. It polluted his well and wrecked his septic system. The house was red-tagged and he had to move into an apartment in town.

I was new to the Dungeness River, in a way. I'd surveyed the river earlier in my career, searching almost in vain for Chinook redds. I felt bereft, and a little disoriented about the disappearance of Chinook. But the people who lived on the river? In my world, they were a backdrop to the drama of declining salmon runs.

As I looked at this place where levees choked both sides of the river and fish had such a small chance of surviving the sluiceway flows, it was obvious to me that the impediments to a freely flowing river needed to be removed, and habitat restored. If doing so helped people too, cool.

A group of agencies, the County, and the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe applied for funding to solve the flooding and fish problems near the mouth of the river. We received a grant to buy properties from those who were willing to sell. We would remove the houses, wells, septic, and other impediments to the river. That way, when the river burst through the levee, nothing would hinder its progress and no people or property would be in danger.

Published in the local daily newspaper, news of the grant award, generated an uproar in the riverside community. People converged upon the County courthouse demanding that the Commissioners explain why the County was taking their private property (it wasn't). Letters, editorials, and op-eds appeared in the paper, alternately blasting and praising the buyout effort. Newspaper columnists opined about the decline of salmon, individual freedoms, and Western civilization. Fortunately, all of the partners held fast in the onslaught. In fact, it may have strengthened our resolve.

Our inquiries to those in the small community who might wish to sell and move were met with replies that ranged from 'Maybe' to 'Not just No, but Hell No!' At one meeting with the community, I walked up the entrance steps and passed two big guys who did not smile or say "hello", and who just happened to be packing some handsome pistols. At the same meeting, though, people asked why the County did not help them in their dire straits and stop the flooding. They also asked a lot of questions about the buyout process, and why 'I' was doing it the way 'I' was doing it (state process!). I felt quite battered at that moment. I looked at them all looking at me, waiting for answers because I was from The Government.

“I’m not a real estate person. I’m a fish biologist. But we have flooding and we have fish problems and someone had to do this and at the moment that someone is me,” I said. The atmosphere in the room changed. I think at that moment I stopped being The Government and started being The Biologist, doing my best to solve a problem - certainly trying to take away people’s land.

Land is close to people’s hearts, and talking to someone about selling their property to ‘the government’ – particularly in those early days – was a delicate undertaking. In a small community, accessed by a private road controlled by a property owners’ association run by people who oppose your project, how do you talk to each family in a way that respects their privacy, even though we are all in a fishbowl? We could not really figure out how to speak to people privately, and felt that in some ways we were barricaded from the community.

We decided to send letters, and meet people at their invitation. One day we met with Gil, who was tired of digging himself out after each flood. We walked up on the levee behind his oft-flooded house. One of his neighbors, a bully with a penchant for using intimidation to get his way and who adamantly opposed to the project, confronted us.

“I represent the people who live here, and we want nothing to do with your so-called project. No one wants to sell,” he declared.

“You don’t represent me. I do want to sell,” replied Gil, to our stunned surprise.

Logjam broken. People began to quietly contact us, to talk about possibilities. Some people talked about how they loved to see the birds and the mountains, to hear the river (they did not love the flooding, but they adapted to it). Some people talked about the serenity they felt. Some people talked about their retirement dreams. Some people had been touched by tragedy and wanted to leave the area and its memories. Some people were mostly interested in the money they might make. Some people wondered if they might be able to move and start a new, different kind of life.

Some sold. Some didn’t. Some didn’t, and then did. Some are yet to be ready. But now, when the river flows unhindered and harmlessly through the places where Gil’s house, and Denny’s house, and other houses had stood, through a field no longer thick with cow patties, those who remain know what we are aiming for, and what our constraints were. They think the project is OK, that the river deserves some room to move, and the Bay deserves water free of cow patty runoff. They look forward to the day that fish would return to the river in numbers that their grandparents remembered. I look forward to that day, too.