

West Side (Fish) Story

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What do you think about when you're out on the water or standing on the beach? As someone who has worked on natural resource issues for close to 20 years and salmon recovery for the last five, I find myself thinking about the mosaic of habitats along our shores and the many species that make up and use these habitats.

Whidbey Watershed Stewards and friends had a great chance to explore this subject on a recent boat trip with the organization Service-Education-Adventure (SEA) and Brent Trim from Wild Fish Conservancy.

The Conservancy's West Whidbey Nearshore Fish Use Assessment revealed a high diversity of fish species on the west side of Whidbey, with the highest number of species netted at sites between Bush Point and Ebey's Landing.

A total of 58 species from nine ecological guilds were brought to hand during the study. The South Whidbey State Park sites had a total of 39 species. The extreme north and south sites had considerably fewer species; as few as eight species were identified at Cultus Bay.

The Maxwellton Beach site had a total of 12 species, and 18 species were identi-



WWS Board members, staff and friends explored the west side of Whidbey Island to learn about fish distribution.

fied at Deer Lagoon. The study identified six species of salmonids and five types of forage fish.

Analysis of the coded wire tags in hatchery Chinook collected during the study showed that over 85 percent of hatchery Chinook came from the Samish, Skagit, Stillaguamish and Snohomish Rivers.

Smaller numbers of hatchery fish came from as far north as the Fraser and as far south as the Skokomish. Almost all Chinook captured in this study were smolt or larger.

Sampling sites at the outlets of coastal marshes had higher catch densities relative to nearby beach sites. It's believed that this is because these outfalls contain large amounts of salmon prey, especially invertebrates.

These outfalls may also create localized areas of low-

ered salinity, especially important for the young fish. Coastal lagoons, such as Cultus Bay, function as nurseries for juvenile salmon and many other species.

The two-year study answered many of the initial questions about how salmon are using the west side of Whidbey. One of the issues that is still of key interest is the origin of the chum that use West Whidbey habitats.

During the study, Wild Fish Conservancy collected fin clip samples from the chum that can be used to determine whether or not they belong to the Hood Canal summer runs.

More information on the study can be found at www.wildfishconservancy.org. Our thanks to Brent for helping us understand the results.

Many thanks to Scott Ashworth, Chris Burt and Susie Richards for their donation of the Indigo, the primary program vessel for the SEA program, for this trip.

Learn more about them at www.serviceeducationadventure.org.

WWS Education Boosters

This year we have received some special donations to support the Outdoor Classroom and other educational work.

The first was being designated for contributions in memory of Mark Anderson, a trail steward at the Outdoor Classroom property for many years and a good friend of the environment. His family and friends donated over \$2,800, which will help fund the fall season and some special needs.

Another welcome donation was from Nancy Nordhoff, to assist with the extra costs involved in hiring an Education/Outreach Coordinator and the search for a new lead teacher.

Finally, we are grateful to Rotary of South Whidbey for its ongoing support since their initial fundraising push to build the Outdoor Classroom.

Their most recent donation of \$1,000 will allow us to purchase field gear for students, teaching aids for a new environmental science curriculum, and protection from the rain at the Outdoor Classroom.

Whidbey Watershed Stewards operates on a very small budget with minimal overhead, and we count on community donations and memberships to make it all work. Thank you to all our donors, large and small, for your continued support!

A Salmon Enchanted Afternoon

Join WWS for its annual fundraiser on Saturday, Sept. 20 from noon to 3 pm for food, lively music and a pie auction for dessert. We'll recognize volunteers and dedicate the Outdoor Classroom deck. Visit www.whidbeywatersheds.org.