



Visitors enjoy a snowy guided hike led by Skagit River Bald Eagle Interpretive Center Coordinator, Anissa Smith.

Final Report

Winter 2016-2017

Prepared by Anissa Smith, Skagit River Bald Eagle Interpretive Center Coordinator
With Contributions by Cora Thomas, SRBEAT Board President
Submitted March 3, 2017

Acknowledgements

The Skagit River Bald Eagle Awareness Team (SRBEAT) Board of Directors wish to acknowledge those individuals who contributed funds, time, and effort to the vital functions of the Skagit River Bald Eagle Interpretive Center (SRBEIC) this season. Thank you for your commitment to our mission and for honoring the eagles in our midst. We could not fly without you.

Numerous donors generously provided the needed funds to operate the SRBEIC this season. Contributors included Skagit County, City of Burlington, Cascadian Farm (General Mills), Skagit River Guide Service, Columbia Bank, Skagit Casino Resort, Adventures NW, Deanna Ensley, and Don Smith. We also received significant donations from the visiting public; we greatly appreciate these wonderful votes of support for our advocacy work.

We'd like to express our gratitude for the many contributions of our partners who make the functioning of our facility possible. Partners include Skagit County Parks & Recreation, US Forest Service, North Cascades National Park Complex, WA State Parks, Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group, US Department of Fish and Wildlife, North Cascades Institute, and the Concrete Chamber of Commerce.

Skagit County Parks and Recreation continue to provide us with a facility in Howard Miller Steelhead Park – the ideal location for our work. Park Rangers Rusty Regan and Kyle Peninger were critical to our operation with maintenance, courteous service, and other support.

The Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest staff support significantly enhanced our efforts. Forest Service staff expertise bolstered our educational offerings by leading our guided nature hikes. The Skagit Eagle Watchers volunteer group provided “in the field” information and promoted our programs.

Volunteers are the heart of our organization. Ember LaBounty managed our Nature Store, providing an opportunity for Skagit Valley artisans to display their work. Board Treasurer and Sponsor Coordinator Judy Hemenway worked tirelessly behind the scenes to raise essential funds for SRBEAT's important mission. Board Secretary Leatha Sullivan volunteered her time at the Center and in our Nature Store. Board President Cora Thomas orchestrated a marketing and rebranding campaign, volunteer recruitment campaign, and volunteered at the SRBEIC. SRBEIC Coordinator Anissa Smith focused her energy on providing a high quality educational experience for all to enjoy. We would like to recognize our hard-working volunteers: Cheryl Tarquinio, Dennis Thomas, Chris Brewer, Lyn Bishop, Carole Webb, Morty Webb, Doug Timmins, Inna Ryazanova, and Mike Brondi.

Additional individuals contributed skills to guarantee successful operation and marketing of the SRBEIC: Don Smith: Lead Graphic Designer (poster, brochure, t-shirt); Alex Aiken: Website Redesign, Website Manager, and Technical Support; Salem Levesque: Graphics Assistant and Technical Support.

Thanks to our guest speakers who donated their time and expertise:

Craig Romano, Guidebook Author

Amos Almy, Rockport State Park Interpretive Specialist

Kevin Ebi, Author and Nature Photographer

Steve Glenn, Skagit Valley College Environmental Studies Instructor

Taylor Schmuki, WA Conservation Corps Restoration, Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group

John Scurlock, Author and Aerial Photographer

Pete Haase, Coordinator of Skagit Citizen Forage Fish Survey Team

Mike Larrabee, North Cascades National Park Physical Science Technician

Richard Brocksmith, Executive Director, Skagit Watershed Council

Jack Oelfke, Chief of Natural and Cultural Resources, North Cascades National Park, and
Friends of the North Cascades Grizzly Bear Coalition

Guided nature hikes were led by USFS Field Ranger Matthew Riggen and SRBEIC Coordinator Anissa Smith. Craig Romano led a hike in conjunction with his presentation. Pete Haase conducted an interactive demonstration. Graham Taylor and fellow representatives of Friends of the North Cascades Grizzly Bear Coalition led informational table presentations about the reintroduction of Grizzly Bears to the North Cascades. Thank you to everyone who helped engage our visitors and teach about this special place. We appreciate your efforts.

Executive Summary

The Skagit River Bald Eagle Interpretive Center, open since 1997, educates people about, generates appreciation for, and encourages restoration of the Skagit River ecosystem. To accomplish this mission, the Skagit River Bald Eagle Awareness Team (SRBEAT) opens the Skagit River Bald Eagle Interpretive Center (SRBEIC) in Rockport, Washington on weekends in December and January and continuously the week between Christmas and New Year's Day. SRBEAT also provides special programming during the week for schools and other community groups.

This season the SRBEIC welcomed 2,939 visitors between 12/03/2016 and 01/29/2017. Of those, 2,247 people were voluntarily registered in the Guest Register. At the end of the season, our Guest Register showed that visitors came from 17 different states! Our Washington state visitors hailed from 16 counties. Visitors reported staying overnight in hotels and motels in Burlington, Mount Vernon, La Conner, Sedro-Woolley and Concrete.

The SRBEIC offered 10 free, formal presentations for the public covering a variety of subjects including wildlife biology and ecology, glaciers and climate change, habitat restoration projects and fisheries sustainability in the Skagit watershed, and viability of grizzly bear reintroduction into nearby terrain. These formal presentations drew 246 visitors, which shows growth over last season by 60 persons. 15 free guided nature hikes focused on eagles, salmon, and their interconnected relationships within the Skagit River watershed. The guided nature hikes brought 441 participants into the Interpretive Center.

During December and January, nine schools and 225 students and staff members participated in educational programming offered by the SRBEIC. We create individualized programs to meet the curriculum standards for each class. Students engage in interactive activities to reinforce the lesson plans in an outdoor setting. Our SRBEIC Coordinator is in charge of tailoring and presenting these programs. The overarching theme of each program is ecological relationships as seen through the lenses of migratory eagles and salmon in the Skagit. The US Forest Service use the Interpretive Center to help teach 161 students about eagles and salmon as part of the *Every Kid in a Park* initiative. A total of 386 students and staff members utilized the SRBEIC for educational purposes this winter.

Volunteers are the heart of our nonprofit organization. Our dedicated team volunteered 541 hours to the SRBEIC this winter! Outreach for volunteers takes place in summer and fall and a training session is held in November or December to prepare volunteers for their 2-month period at the SRBEIC.

Much effort goes into marketing the SRBEIC, its mission, and programs. We were fortunate to have articles run in Skagit Valley Herald, Bellingham Herald, Concrete Herald, Everett Herald, Seattle Times, and Cascadia Weekly. Adventures NW Magazine featured a short article announcing our 20th Anniversary Season. Even Sunset Magazine mentioned SRBEIC and our programs in a travel feature. Our website and Facebook page were updated by staff daily with current information. A list of our events was provided to the Concrete Chamber to be advertised

as part of the Skagit Eagle Festival. The Skagit Eagle Festival itself was widely publicized in local and Seattle newspapers.

The 2016-2017 eagle season has been a resounding success! Through valuable partnerships, a dedicated Board and volunteers, critical donors, and an engaged public audience, we are continuing to educate people about, generate an appreciation for, and encourage restoration of the Skagit River ecosystem.



USFS Field Ranger Matthew Rigger takes questions from an excited class of 4th graders as part of the SRBEIC's efforts to assist the USFS Every Kid in a Park program.

Introduction

The Skagit River Bald Eagle Interpretive Center (SRBEIC) is an educational facility located in Rockport, Washington, which is supported by partners, sponsors, private donations, and the work of volunteers and staff. Oversight for the SRBEIC is provided by the Board of Directors of the Skagit River Bald Eagle Awareness Team (SRBEAT), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

The primary mission of SRBEAT is to educate the public about, inspire an appreciation for, and encourage restoration of the unique and scenic Skagit River ecosystem. This is accomplished through a variety of program offerings and visitor information.

The most basic function of the SRBEIC is to provide visitors with information about eagles and safety issues when viewing eagles in the area.

Board and Staff

SRBEAT board members staff crucial volunteer positions in the SRBEIC. Board members and officers provide coverage to keep the SRBEIC open as well as manage the overall operation of the organization. Their admirable dedication is critical to the future of the SRBEIC.

SRBEIC Coordinator Anissa Smith returned for the 2016-2017 season. Her position oversees the operation of the facility, scheduling of programs and events, and volunteer coordination. She is responsible for development and preparation of educational curriculum for our K-12 and homeschool programs as well as our community group programs.

Partners and Sponsors

The SRBEIC is dependent upon the financial support of sponsors, grants, and donations. Partners help provide and donate tools and equipment, educational materials, and the facility. During the last 20 years, the ties between the following agencies and the SRBEIC have been strengthened through a mutual desire to educate and inspire the public about the Skagit River watershed:

2016-17 Sponsors:

Cascadian Farm (General Mills)
City of Burlington
Columbia Bank
Deanna Ensley
Skagit Casino Resort
Skagit County
Skagit River Guide Service

In-Kind Donors:

Adventures NW Magazine
Bob Patterson
Don Smith

2016-17 Partners:

Concrete Chamber of Commerce
Skagit County Parks & Recreation
Skagit County Fisheries Enhancement Group
Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest
North Cascades National Park Complex
North Cascades Institute
Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife
Washington State Parks

The support of our sponsors, donors, and partners make our advocacy work possible.

Visitation

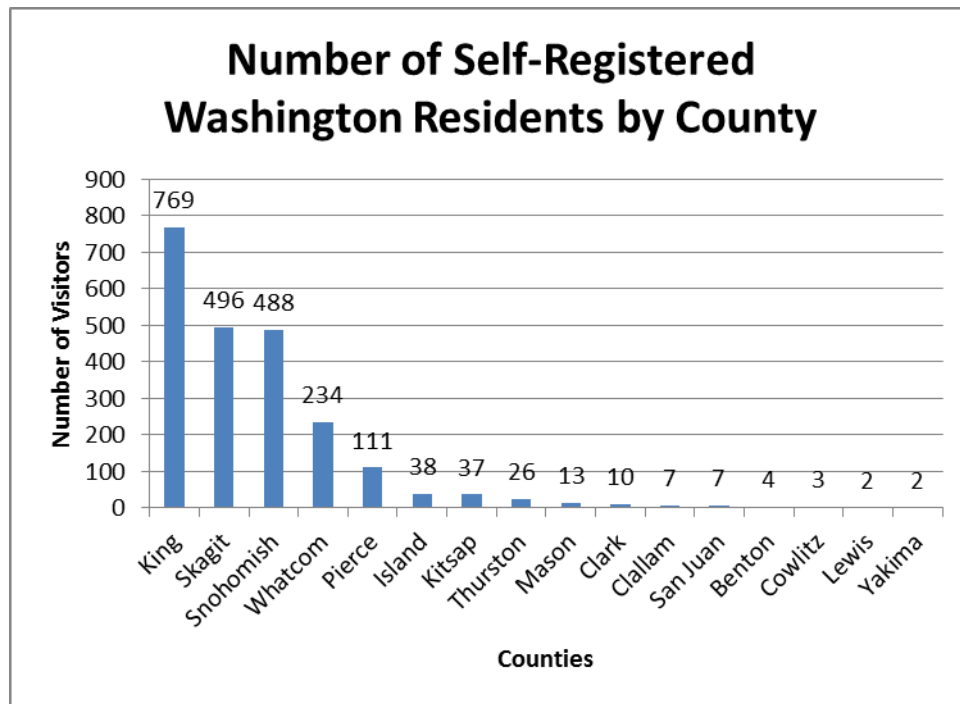
This season the SRBEIC was open to visitors on weekends from 12/03/16 and 01/29/17 and daily December 26 through January 1. The SRBEIC was opened on specific days for school and

community groups between 12/16/16 and 01/27/17. Visitors were tallied and asked to sign our guest register. The total number of visitors tallied for the season was 2,939 in 34 days.

Date	Type of Group	# of Visitors
12/03/16	Public	20
12/04/16	Public	43
12/05/16	School Group	57
12/06/16	School Group	57
12/10/16	Public	43
12/11/16	Public	58
12/13/16	School Group	47
12/16/16	School Group	52
12/17/16	Public	74
12/18/16	Public	38
12/26/16	Public	56
12/27/16	Public	52
12/28/16	Public	85
12/29/16	Public	60
12/30/16	Public	101
12/31/16	Public	114
01/01/17	Public	37
01/05/17	School Group	27
01/06/17	School Group	14
01/07/17	Public	218
01/08/17	Public	135
01/12/17	School Group	35
01/13/17	School Group	30
01/14/17	Public	236
01/15/17	Public	276
01/19/17	Community Group	15
01/20/17	School Group	37
01/21/17	Public	169
01/22/17	Public	212
01/23/17	School Group	19
01/24/17	School Group	11
01/27/17	Community Group	12
01/28/17	Public	279
01/29/17	Public	220
School Group Attendance Total		386
Community Group Attendance Total		27
Public Visitor Attendance Total		2526
TOTAL		2939

Of the 2,939 visitors, 2,247 were registered in our Guest Register. Based on that information, Washington visitors came from 16 counties. We saw nearly 7% more visitors from Whatcom

County this season compared to last season. We also measured an increase of 3% for our Pierce County visitors over last season's data. See chart below for visitors by county totals.



Visitors also came from 17 states: New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Illinois, Texas, Colorado, Idaho, Arizona, New Mexico, California, and Oregon. Chile, Korea, Australia, and Germany were also represented.

Overall, we saw a slight decrease in visitation compared to the 2015-2016 season. Weather played a major role in that decrease. We recorded less people through our doors on days when it snowed and the road conditions were poor. The Christmas holiday fell on a weekend and led to 2 less days that we were open this season. We also noticed a marked drop in visitation on the day the *Women's March* was held in Seattle and Bellingham. If it were not for those events, our numbers indicate that we would be on track to at least match last season's record visitation numbers.

Information and Education

Visitor interaction is a main function of the SRBEIC. We aim to provide eagle and wildlife viewing information and Skagit watershed educational opportunities for our visitors. Our staff and volunteers create a professional and congenial environment when welcoming visitors to the area. We receive many information requests each week consisting of inquiries about eagle viewing sites, eagle counts, program opportunities, and Skagit Eagle Festival activities. The diverse offerings of our partners are significant in drawing people to the area and enhancing the visitor experience throughout our operating season.

One of the key pieces of information we share with the public is the weekly eagle count provided by the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest and North Cascades National Park Complex. We post the weekly eagle count at the SRBEIC, on our website, and Facebook page.

Speaker Series and Guided Nature Hikes

We educate people about the Skagit River ecosystem via guided nature hikes and speaker presentations. Guided nature hikes are led by a US Forest Service Field Ranger or our SRBEIC Coordinator. Both guides share their expertise about eagles, salmon, and the Skagit on a guided hike that takes visitors .75 miles to the confluence of the Skagit and Sauk rivers. Guests are delighted to look for eagles and other wildlife during the 90-minute venture. The guided nature hikes are offered every Saturday and Sunday at 11am. These hikes are very popular and brought 441 visitors to the SRBEIC this season. USFS staff led 11 guided hikes and the SRBEIC Coordinator led 4.

Speaker presentations take place at 1pm on Saturdays and some Sundays at the SRBEIC. A schedule of speakers is posted inside the SRBEIC, on our website, and Facebook. This season we had 10 guest speakers who gave special presentations covering a variety of subjects such as wildlife biology, glaciology and climate change, habitat restoration projects along the Skagit, hiking, recreation, and volunteer opportunities, and sustainability of forage fish and grizzly bear reintroduction. We had 246 people attend our speaker presentations this year, proof of the program’s popularity with the public.

K-12 & Home School Program, Community Group Tours

We advertise our educational programs on our website. The SRBEIC Coordinator conducts outreach to invite schools that have previously attended and works to develop new partnerships with school districts and home school programs both near and far.

School Programs 2016-2017

Date	School Group	Grade Level	# Attendees
12/16/16	Clear Lake Elementary	6 th	22
12/16/16	Clear Lake Elementary	5 th	30
01/05/17	Seattle Homeschool Co-op	3 rd – 10 th	27
01/06/17	Seattle Homeschool Co-op	K – 4 th	14
01/12/17	Lake Stevens Zion Elementary	K	35
01/13/17	St. Bernadette Catholic School	5 th	30
01/20/17	Darrington Elementary	K	37
01/23/17	Seattle Homeschool Co-op	Pre-K – 4 th	19
01/24/17	Mary Purcell Elementary	2 nd – 5 th	11
TOTAL			225

We also facilitated educational programming for 161 participants of the US Forest Service’s *Every Kid in a Park* initiative. In total, we had 386 participants for our school groups.

Our educational programs focus on the sciences. We engage students in hands-on learning, immersing groups in an outdoor classroom where we focus on eagles, salmon, riparian and forest

habitat, and their interconnected relationships. Students have the ability to explore and apply learned concepts while searching for wildlife in Howard Miller Steelhead Park. We have accommodated K-12 classes as well as classes with special needs students. Our curriculum is tailored to the learning standards of each class. Community groups are also treated to this individualistic teaching style.



SRBEIC Coordinator, Anissa Smith, teaches a class gathered around our replica bald eagle nest.

Nature Store

A popular feature in our facility is our Nature Store, managed by volunteer Ember LaBounty. The store highlights Skagit Valley artisan's wares and helps raise funds for SRBEAT. The Nature Store brought in approximately \$2,200 for SRBEAT this season. SRBEAT features unique items that allow visitors to share a connection with the Skagit Valley while supporting local communities. Artisans benefit from free advertising of their items in our store and donate 25% or more of their profits to SRBEAT in support of our mission. 2016-17 Contributors include: John Burmaster, Sue Coccia, Concrete Heritage Museum, Kevin Ebi, Bob Kincaid, Lois Landgrebe, Rose Oliver, Helen Ovenell, Bob Patterson, Nicola Pearson, Steve Philbrick, John Scurlock, Don Smith, Nyal Thomas, Carole Webb, Andrea Weiser.

Marketing and Public Relations

Marketing the SRBEIC is a key focus and effort throughout the year. Our Board President also serves as the Public Relations Manager. Much effort goes into marketing the SRBEIC, its mission, and programs. We were fortunate to have articles run in Skagit Valley Herald, Bellingham Herald, Concrete Herald, Everett Herald, Seattle Times, and Cascadia Weekly. Adventures NW magazine announced our 20th Anniversary Season in a print and online article. Sunset Magazine featured SRBEIC and our programs as a travel destination in their December 2016 issue. These articles focused on the scenic and educational aspects of the programs that the SRBEIC offers and announcements of our 20th Anniversary Celebration. They resulted in increased visitorship to our facility as well as increased traffic on our website.

Sample Articles, 2016-2017 Season:

Cascadia Weekly

http://www.cascadiaweekly.com/cw/currents/masters_of_their_domain

Skagit Valley Herald

https://www.goskagit.com/news/local_news/skagit-river-bald-eagle-interpretive-center-celebrates-years/article_e88cb412-7ee1-53cd-beaf-005e3247c421.html

Adventures NW Magazine

<http://www.adventuresnw.com/srbeic-flying-high-after-20-years/>

Our staff updated our website and Facebook page daily with current information. A list of our events was provided to the Concrete Chamber to be advertised as part of the Skagit Eagle Festival. The Skagit Eagle Festival itself was widely publicized in local and Seattle newspapers.

Our website, skagiteagle.org, experienced a major redesign this season. We focused time on improving its format for better accessibility as well as updating the information it provides. The new website launched in October 2016 and as of February 2017 has approximately 10,000 unique users. The site is now formatted so that there is a mobile version for ease of use.

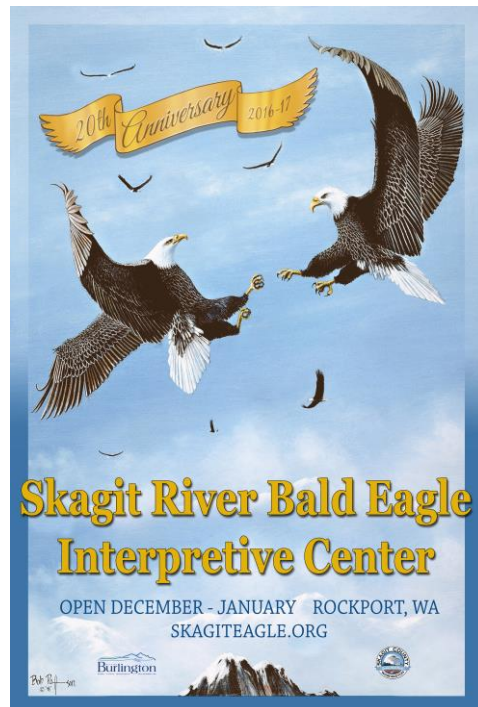
Our Facebook page continues to be a popular and interactive source of communication between the SRBEIC and our visitors. During the last two seasons we have built a following of over 860 individuals. Our followers engage in our posts, sharing and commenting on posts. The most popular post this season was our link to the winners of our 20/20 Photo Contest. That post reached 2,434 people and was shared 141 times. We monitor the effectiveness of our Facebook posts via the “Insights” tool and have found that our posts regularly reach thousands of users. We update our page throughout the year to pique the interest of those who are vested in the continuation of our mission and build upon our strong base of followers. In the off-season our posts focus on environmental education pieces, outreach events attended, and volunteer opportunities.

SRBEAT hired Skagit/Whatcom Kid Insider, well-known and respected organizations that are hubs of information for families in and around Skagit and Whatcom County. Both organizations helped advertise the SRBEIC by sharing and creating Facebook posts and placement of online ads and articles. We expanded our partnership with Skagit Kid Insider this season to strengthen advertising in Pierce County. We saw an increase of 3% for Pierce County visitors compared to last season’s numbers. We attribute this increase to the targeted advertising for that area.

20th Year Anniversary

The 2016-17 Season marked the 20th Anniversary of SRBEAT. We continue to provide a vital service to the Upper Skagit Region, educating the public about the importance of Skagit River ecosystem stewardship, with an emphasis on migratory bald eagles, spawning salmon, and the interconnectedness of our fragile environment. Our efforts to promote safe and responsible viewing practices has led to a safer environment for visitors, local residents, and eagles.

Celebratory events included a special edition 20th Anniversary poster with art by La Conner artist Bob Patterson. The poster was featured inside the SRBEIC and was available for purchase in the Nature Store. SRBEAT hosted its first photo contest, the 20/20 Photo Contest to recognize our 20 years of service to the community. The grand prize winner, Troy Duong, won an eagle float tour for two sponsored by Skagit River Guide Service, worth \$150. Nineteen runner-up photo entries were featured on our website and Facebook page. The SRBEIC also hosted speaker presentation on Sundays in January in recognition of SRBEAT's 20th Anniversary.



20th Anniversary Special Edition Poster, 2016-17, Art by Bob Patterson

Rebranding Campaign

In recognition of our 20th Anniversary, the Board President spearheaded a rebranding campaign. It consisted of a newly designed, more accessible website made possible by the assistance of our website manager Alex Aiken. New brochures, posters, and t-shirts were created with the assistance of our graphic designer Don Smith. An official logo was also created to reflect the modern sensibilities of the organization. The intent was to improve outreach to our visitor base, encourage organization visibility, and allow ease of information accessibility and clearer messaging, in addition to celebrating our 20th season. Based on visitor comments our rebranding efforts have been effective and our organization and goals continue to remain relevant.

Season Improvements and Opportunities for Future Years

The 2016-17 was a season of growth and improvement thanks to efforts from Board members, staff, and volunteers. Our volunteer base grew to its largest size in recent years as a result of expanded volunteer recruitment efforts by the Board President. The planning and execution of the rebranding campaign was a success and included the creation of an improved website to encourage a wider visitor base. Logistical and aesthetic changes inside the facility improved visitor and partner experience. Strategic placement of the projector screen, signage, and guest register resulted in better flow within the facility. Updated technology equipment in our Nature Store facilitated easier sales transactions. An expanded online marketing campaign included adding a donation option through our website.

Immediate goals include development of a one to three-year Strategic Plan to enhance and focus resources. Long term goals include continued volunteer recruitment and retention, board member recruitment, expanded fundraising campaign, improved signage on roadways, adding professional staff to develop and implement programs, offering new interpretive displays, expanding partnerships with local and regional organizations, expanding school program curriculum, and dependent on funding and personnel hosting educational programs during the “off-season,” February through November.

The SRBEAT activities are limited by funding. Growth in funding would provide needed resources for increased learning opportunities. A designated sponsorship coordinator and grant writer would benefit the Board. That position would be solely responsible for obtaining funds to further the mission of SRBEAT. A continued fundraising campaign is another option to increase SRBEAT funds for the SRBEIC and its programs.

Appropriate equipment is needed to provide professional presentations for the public. The SRBEIC could benefit from an updated digital projector capable of advancing slides remotely, a speaker-system to help project the audio portion of our formal presentations, and a complete iPad POS system. Updated and interactive interpretive displays would benefit the educational experience of our visitors.

With strategic planning and strong partner collaborations, the organization can develop a clear path to achieve goals and sustain future growth.



Grand Prize Winner, 20/20 Photo Contest Winner: "Show of Force," Skagit River, Troy M. Duong