



Large crowd enjoying guided nature walk led by USFS field ranger Matt Riggen

Final Report

Winter 2017-2018

Prepared by Catherine Wessels, Skagit River Bald Eagle Interpretive Center Coordinator
with contributions by Judy Hemenway, SRBEAT Board President, Pro Tem
Submitted March 3, 2017

Acknowledgements

The Skagit River Bald Eagle Awareness Team (SRBEAT) Board of Directors wishes to acknowledge those individuals who contributed funds, time, and effort to 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), Puget Sound Energy, Skagit River Eagle Tours/Guide Service, Columbia Bank, Skagit Casino Resort, Adventures NW, Skagit Valley Food Co-op, Eagle Haven Winery, EarthArt International, 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, Skagit Watershed Council, US Department of Fish and Wildlife, North Cascades Institute, and the Concrete Chamber of Commerce.

Skagit County Parks and Recreation continues to provide us with a facility in Howard Miller Steelhead Park – the ideal location for our work. Park Rangers Rusty Regan and Shelby O'Malley 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 many of our guided nature hikes. The Skagit Eagle Watchers volunteer group provided “in the field” information, promoted our programs, and joined SRBEIC volunteers in a season opening potluck social at Howard Miller.

Volunteers are the heart of our organization. Ember LaBounty managed our Nature Store and computer point-of-sale system, providing an opportunity for Skagit Valley artisans to display and market their work, and also volunteered at the Center. Judy Hemenway worked tirelessly behind the scenes in her three roles as President Pro Tempore, Board Treasurer, and Sponsor Coordinator. Besides leading Board meetings, fundraising, and media marketing, she was a regular Center volunteer! Board Secretary Leatha Sullivan recorded Board minutes and also volunteered her time at the Center. Catherine Wessels, Center Coordinator recruited new speakers, helped promote the Center on social media, worked with volunteers and the public, and provided enjoyable educational opportunities for visitors and groups. Our hard-working volunteers: Cheryl Tarquinio, Chris Brewer, Cherie Donovan-Smith, Robert Pare, Carole Webb, and Morty Webb cheerfully greeted and engaged visitors and helped them learn about eagles, salmon, and the other plants and animals of the Upper Skagit ecosystem.

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 Manager, and Technical Support; Stephanie Lynn: Social Media Marketing and Technical Support.

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

- **Craig Romano**, Guidebook Author
Hiking in the Bellingham, Mount Vernon and Anacortes Areas
- **Richard Brocksmith**, Executive Director, Skagit Watershed Council
Salmon and Trout of the Skagit River: Distribution, Abundance Trends, and Habitat Recovery
- **Brandon Helmstetter**, Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest Climbing Ranger:
Mount Baker Mountain Goats: a Climbing Ranger's Perspective
- **Amos Almy**, Rockport State Park Interpretive Specialist
How Old Growth Brings New Life: the Story of the Forests (cancelled due to Rockport power outage/Center closure)
- **Steve Glenn**, Skagit Valley College Environmental Conservation Instructor
Winter Birds of the Upper Skagit Region
- **Sue Madsen**, Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group Restoration Ecologist
Salmon Habitat Restoration Projects in Howard Miller Steelhead Park
- **John Scurlock**, Author and Aerial Photographer
Mountains & Glaciers: Aerial Photography Across Western North America
- **Jenna Friebe**, WA Department Fish and Wildlife Hydrologist and Project Manager
Salmon Recovery Efforts in the Skagit River Delta: Recent Successes and Next Steps
- **Jennifer Sevigny**, Wildlife Biologist, Stillaguamish Tribe Wildlife Program
North Cascades Elk Herd: Monitoring and Management
- **Pete Haase**, Coordinator of Skagit Citizen Forage Fish Survey Team
Forage Fish Around Skagit County
- **Mike Larrabee**, North Cascades National Park Physical Science Technician
Glaciers of the North Cascades (cancelled due to federal government shut-down)
- **Terri Wild**, WA native plants botanist
Native Plants of the Upper Skagit
- **Chris Brewer**, North Cascades Audubon Society
Winter Birds of Skagit County

Guided nature hikes were led by USFS Field Ranger Matthew Riggen, SRBEIC Coordinator Catherine Wessels, and volunteer Robert Pare. Craig Romano, Steve Glenn, Sue Madsen, and Terri Wild led hikes in conjunction with their presentations. Pete Haase conducted an interactive demonstration of forage fish egg mass collection. Brandon Helmstetter shared a taxidermied mountain goat head with audience members. Jennifer Sevigny brought an elk radio collar and antenna. Thanks to everyone who helped educate and 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 during 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 2,692 visitors between 12/03/2017 and 01/28/2018. Of those, 1,732 people voluntarily registered in the Guest Register. At the end of the season, our Guest Register showed that visitors came from 21 different states, with our Washington State visitors originating from 15 counties. Visitors reported staying overnight in hotels, motels, and campgrounds in Burlington, Mount Vernon, La Conner, Sedro-Woolley, Rockport, and Concrete.

The SRBEIC offered 13 free, educational 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, native plants, and winter birding. Unfortunately, two of the presentations had to be cancelled due to a Rockport power failure and the government shut-down. These presentations drew 254 visitors. Fourteen free guided nature hikes focused on eagles, salmon, and their interconnected relationships within the Skagit River watershed. The guided nature hikes brought 356 participants into the Interpretive Center, with record attendance of 65 and 70 on January 13th and 14th, which also corresponded to peak visitors counts of 325 and 458, respectively.

During December and January, eight schools and 227 students and staff members participated in SRBEIC educational programming. We create individualized programs to meet the curriculum standards for each class. Students engaged 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 theme of each program is ecological relationships as seen through the lenses of migratory eagles and salmon in the Skagit. The US Forest Service partnered with the Interpretive Center to help teach 167 elementary students about eagles and salmon as part of the *Every Kid in a Park* initiative, with students coming from Darrington and Mount Vernon schools. The North Cascades Institute also partnered with the IC, bringing 15 high school students for a visit as part of their Youth Ambassadors program. A total of 394 students and staff members utilized the SRBEIC for educational purposes this winter.

Volunteers are the heart of our nonprofit organization. Our dedicated team volunteered 587 hours to the SRBEIC this winter! Outreach for volunteers takes place in summer and fall and a training session is held in November to prepare volunteers for their 2-month period at the SRBEIC. This year, a joint season-opening potluck was held for SRBEIC and Eagle Watcher volunteers at the Howard Miller Community Hall on December 3rd, providing an opportunity for both groups to get acquainted and socialize.

Much effort goes into marketing the SRBEIC, its mission, and programs. We had articles in the Skagit Valley Herald, Concrete Herald, Seattle Times, Cascadia Weekly, and Adventures NW Magazine. Our website and Facebook page were updated daily with current information. Our paid social media marketing with Stephanie Lynn (Skagit Kid and Whatcom Kid Insider) helped increase our presence on the web and increased our weekend attendance in January. A list of our events was provided to the Concrete Chamber and Economic Development Council of Skagit County to be advertised as part of the Skagit Eagle Festival and Winter Birding Festival, respectively. The Skagit Eagle Festival itself was widely publicized in local and Seattle newspapers.

The 2017-2018 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 Catherine Wessels oversaw the operation of the facility, scheduling of programs and events, and volunteer coordination. She was responsible for development and preparation of educational curriculum for our K-12 and homeschool programs as well as our community group programs, and also assisted with Facebook promotion and publicity.

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 21 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:

2017-18 Sponsors:

City of Burlington
Cascadian Farm (General Mills)
Columbia Bank
Eagle Haven Winery
Skagit Casino Resort
Skagit County
Skagit Valley Food Co-op
Skagit River Guide Service

In-Kind Donors:

Adventures NW Magazine
Bob Patterson
Don Smith

2017-18 Partners:

Burlington and Concrete Chambers 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

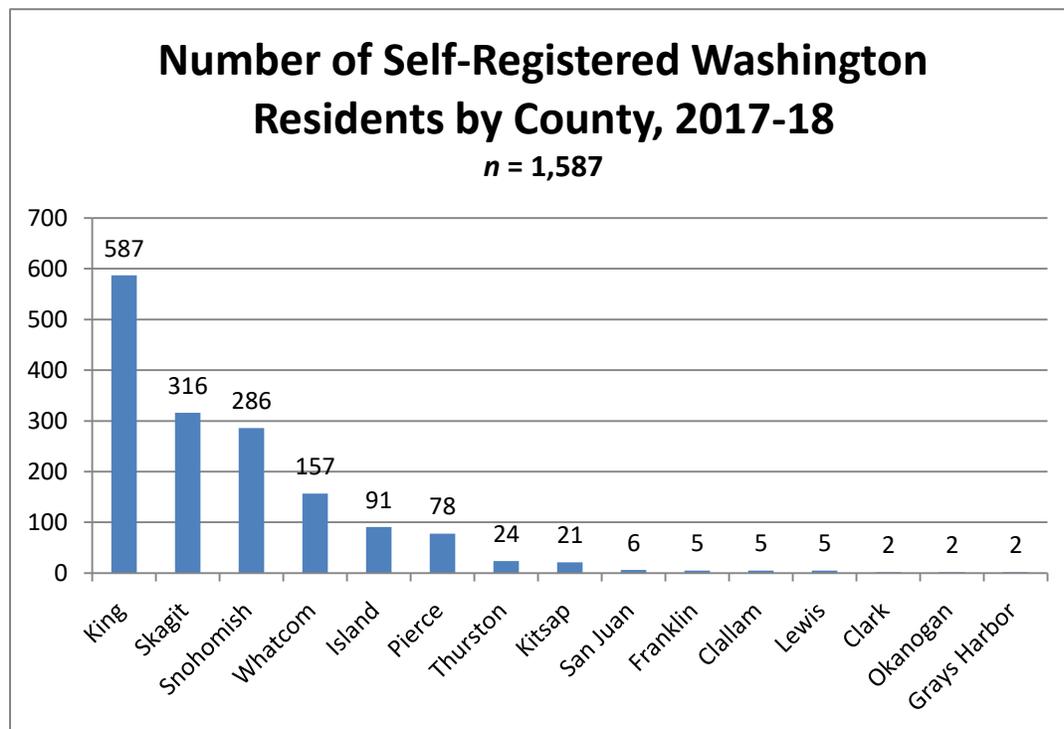
The support of our sponsors, donors, and partners make our advocacy work possible.

Visitation

This season, the SRBEIC was open weekends from 12/02/17 through 01/28/18 and daily December 26 through January 1st, as well as on specific days for school and community groups. Visitors were tallied and asked to sign our guest register. The total number of all visitors tallied for the season was 2,692 in 31 days (3 less days than in 2016-17).

Date	Type of Group	# of Visitors
12/02/17	Public	15
12/03/17	Public	21
12/05/17	School Group	56
12/09/17	Public	U
12/10/17	Public	23
12/13/17	School Group	55
12/14/17	School Group	56
12/16/17	Public	40
12/17/17	Public	23
12/23/17	Public	44
12/26/17	Public	34
12/27/17	Public	38
12/28/17	Public	42
12/29/17	Public	49
12/31/17	Public	129
01/01/18	Public	101
01/05/18	School Group	25
01/06/18	Public	188
01/07/18	Public	94
01/09/18	School Group	8
01/11/18	School Group	65
01/13/18	Public	325
01/14/18	Public	459
01/17/18	School Group	43
01/18/18	School Group	28
01/19/18	School Group	22
01/20/18	Public	223
01/21/18	Public	77
01/22/18	School Group	14
01/26/18	School Group	22
01/27/18	Public	227
01/28/18	Public	128
School Group Attendance Total		394
Public Visitor Attendance Total		2,298
TOTAL		2,692

Of the 2,692 visitors, 1,722 self-registered in our Guest Register. Based on that information, Washington visitors came from 16 counties. We had 91 visitors from Island County this season, compared to 38 last year, nearly 2.5 times more. The chart below has visitors by county totals.



A total of 108 visitors also came from 21 states. California (40), Colorado (8), Hawaii (7), Minnesota (7), Michigan (7), and New Mexico (5) were most represented, with four or fewer visitors from Utah, Georgia, Oregon, Ohio, Alaska, Florida, Nevada, Wisconsin, District of Columbia, Illinois, Virginia, Kansas, Massachusetts, Texas, Tennessee, and Maine. Canada, Korea, and India were also represented.

Overall, we saw a slight decrease in visitation compared to the 2016-2017 season, with December consistently having lower daily attendance. However, we had record attendance on January 13th and 14th, when sunny, warm weather brought many people outdoors. As might be expected, we recorded less people through our doors on days when it was cold and rained steadily. Christmas Eve through Christmas Day, we were closed, leading to one less weekend being open this season. Due to a power failure on Saturday, December 30th, we also lost half of a weekend. We noticed a drop in visitation the weekend of January 20 and 21, which coincided with the federal government shutdown as well as the *Women's March* held in Seattle and Bellingham. If it were not for those events, it is likely we would have been on track to at least match last season's 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. We post the weekly eagle count at the SRBEIC, on our website and Facebook page, as well as on a whiteboard sign at the Center.

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, our SRBEIC Coordinator, as well as some of the featured speakers. Guides share their expertise about eagles, salmon, and the Skagit on a guided hike that takes visitors three-quarters of a mile 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 11 am. The popularity of these hikes was featured in a January 2018 Skagit Valley Herald article. This season, 351 visitors participated in 14 guided hikes.

Speaker presentations take place at 1pm on Saturdays and Sundays at the SRBEIC. A schedule of speakers is posted inside the SRBEIC, on our website, and Facebook. This season we had 11 guest speakers covering a variety of subjects such as North Cascades mountain goats and elk, aerial photography of glaciers, salmon recovery and habitat restoration projects along the Skagit, hiking and recreation, forage fish, native plants, and winter birds. We had 246 people attend our speaker presentations this year, proof of the program’s popularity with the public. Speaker presentations were enhanced by our new microphone and speaker system.

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 2017-2018

Date	School Group	Grade Level	# Attendees
1/05/18	Whidbey Island Homeschool	1 st – 6 th	25
1/09/18	Sedro-Woolley Purcell Elementary Lifeskills	Pre-K–2 nd	8
01/11/18	Arlington Pioneer Elementary	2 nd – 3 rd	65
01/17/18	Stillaguamish Learning Center (homeschool)	3 rd – 5 th	43
01/18/18	Lake Stevens Zion Elementary	K	28
01/19/18	Sedro-Woolley High School Lifeskills	Pre-K–5 th	22
01/24/18	Sedro-Woolley Cascade Lifeskills	Pre-K – 5 th	14
01/25/18	St. Bernadette Catholic School	5 th	26
TOTAL			227

We also facilitated educational programming for 167 participants of the US Forest Service's *Every Kid in a Park* initiative. In total, we had 394 participants for our school groups.

Our educational programs focus on natural science. 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, such as this year's Seattle Chapter of the Sierra Club, are also offered individualized programming.



SRBEIC Coordinator Catherine Wessels teaches a class about lichens

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 \$5,000 for SRBEAT this season, almost 50% more than the previous year. 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. 2017-18 Contributors include: John Burmaster, Sue Coccia, Concrete Heritage Museum, Kevin Ebi, Julie Erickson, Bob Kincaid, Lois Landgrebe, Bryce Mann, 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 served 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. They resulted in increased visitors to our facility as well as increased traffic on our website and Facebook page.

Skagit Valley Herald Jan. 14, 2018

Crowd turns out to see the eagles

https://www.goskagit.com/news/environment/crowd-turns-out-to-see-the-eagles/article_449b7cb3-5b57-5bf4-8a4c-d1b1752be4dd.html

Our staff updated our website and Facebook page daily with current information. Each week, we posted a Facebook graphic ad promoting the weekend's speakers. 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 Facebook page continues to be a popular and interactive source of communication between the SRBEIC and our visitors. During this last season, we have built a following of over 1,000 individuals. Our followers sharing and comment on our posts. The most popular post this season was our link to the winners of our 20/20-#2 Photo Contest. We monitor the effectiveness of our Facebook posts and have found that our posts regularly reach thousands of users.

SRBEAT continued promotion with 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 Island County. We saw an increase of 130% for Island County visitors compared to last season's numbers. We attribute this increase to the targeted advertising for that area.

Photo Contest

SRBEAT continued its popular 2017 photo contest, started in recognition of our 20 years of service to the community.



This year's grand prize winner, Alan Ross, 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.

**Grand Prize Winner
20/20-#2 Photo Contest
"Winged Victory"
Alan Ross**

Season Improvements and Opportunities for Future Years

The 2017-18 was a season of growth, thanks to efforts from Board members, staff, and volunteers. The improved website continued to encourage a wider visitor base, as did our increased Facebook presence. A new speaker and microphone system and a computer projector remote improved speaker presentation quality. Updated point-of-sales technology equipment in our Nature Store facilitated easier sales transactions.

Immediate goals continue to 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.

Updated and interactive interpretive displays would benefit the educational experience of our visitors and support our schools program.

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