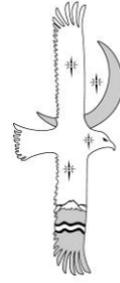




# Skagit River Bald Eagle Interpretive Center



This season's photo contest winner: "Tight Formation" by Greg Walker

## **Final Report** **2018-2019 Eagle Season**

Prepared by Holli Watne with contributions by Fred Wilson and Judy Hemenway

Submitted February 2019

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## Acknowledgements

The Skagit River Bald Eagle Interpretive Center (SRBEIC) requires help to fly. The staff and Board wish to acknowledge those who contributed their time, money and/or energy to the vital functioning of the SRBEIC this season.

**Donors:** Thank you for generously providing the needed funds to operate the SRBEIC:

- Cascadian Farm (General Mills)
- City of Burlington
- Columbia Bank
- Don Smith
- Eagle Haven Winery
- Jim Stout
- Skagit County
- Skagit River Eagle Tours/Guide Service
- Skagit Valley Food Co-op
- The public

**In-kind Donors:** Thank you for donating your goods/services to our cause:

- 5 B's Bakery
- EarthArt International
- Adventures NW

**Partners:** Thank you for making the functioning of our facility possible:

- Burlington Chamber of Commerce
- Concrete Chamber of Commerce
- North Cascades Institute
- North Cascades National Park Complex
- Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Park Complex
- Skagit County Parks and Recreation
- Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group
- Skagit Watershed Council
- US Forest Service
- WA State Parks
- WA Department of Fish and Wildlife

**Volunteers:** Thank you for the over 700 hours of in-kind hours service you gave the center:

- Carole Webb
- Cheryl Tarquinio
- Dana Ledford
- Deborah Money
- Ember LaBounty
- Eric Spandl
- Fred Wilson
- Jenna Cassells
- Judy Hemenway
- Laura Stevenson
- Leatha Sullivan
- Melissa Wender
- Morty Webb
- Ryan Wender

**Presenters:** Thank you for offering your time to share your knowledge at our center:

- Andrea Reiter, Skagit Watershed Council - salmon distribution and recovery efforts
- Craig Romano, author - local hikes
- Dana Ledford, naturalist - wildlife photography
- David Parent, Useless Bay Animal Clinic- wildlife veterinarian stories
- Emily Wirtz, Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribe - bald eagle research
- Fred Wilson, SRBEIC- bald eagles
- Gina Roberti, North Cascades Institute - geology
- Holli Watne, SRBEIC - insects, biodiversity, garden ecology, and naturalist trivia game
- John Scurlock, author - aerial photography
- Kat McCarroll, Padilla Bay Estuary Reserve - nature journaling
- Lucy Degrace, Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group - salmon restoration
- Mike Larrabee, North Cascades National Park - glaciers
- Pete Hasse, citizen scientist - forage fish
- Terri Wilde, botanist - local plants
- Steve Glenn, Skagit Valley College - bald eagles

We greatly appreciate all of your commitment to our mission and your support of the eagles in our midst!

## Executive Summary

The Skagit River Bald Eagle Interpretive Center (SRBEIC), opened in 1997 and educates people about, generates appreciation for, and encourages restoration of the Skagit River ecosystem. Located in Rockport, Washington, SRBEIC is open to the public on select days in December and January. It was open to the public for a total of 22 days in the 2018-19 season.

We welcomed a total of 2,943 visitors (500 private group visitors and 2,443 public visitors). About 77% of our public visitors signed our guest register. These visitors represented 3 countries, 24 US states and 17 Washington counties. Despite the confusion generated by a U.S. Government shutdown and a two day closure due to a storm related power outage we had 326 more visitors than last season.

The SRBEIC hosts by experts in a wide variety of topics relating to the Skagit River watershed and, in addition, weekend guided hikes focusing on local natural history. We also offer programming for private groups (schools and Senior Centers) tailored to the needs of each group. Program participation for the 2018-19 season can be found in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Program Participation at the SRBEIC during the 2018-19 season

|                       | #  | Participants |
|-----------------------|----|--------------|
| <b>Presentations</b>  | 18 | 534          |
| <b>Guided Hikes</b>   | 15 | 336          |
| <b>Private Groups</b> | 10 | 500          |

The contributions of our partners, sponsors, volunteers, donors, and the public made the 2018-2019 eagle season a great success! Marketing has also been an important part of our success. Social media marketing with Stephanie Lynn (Skagit Kid Insider and Whatcom Kid Insider) increased our presence on the web and our weekend attendance. Several newspapers featured articles about our center. Program announcements were regularly updated in newspapers, on our website and Facebook pages, and as part of the Skagit Eagle Festival.

## Introduction

The Skagit River Bald Eagle Interpretive Center (SRBEIC) is an educational facility located in Rockport, Washington. It has been operational since 1997, with the support of partners, sponsors, grants, 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 when viewing eagles along the roadside. The center is operational on select days during December and January. In total, the center was open for 22 days this season.

## Board and Staff

SRBEAT board members carry out crucial volunteer positions in the interpretive center. They provide coverage while the SRBEIC is open and manage the overall operation of the organization. Their dedication is critical to the future of the SRBEIC.

For the 2018-2019 season, Holli Watne was employed as the center's coordinator. Holli was responsible for overseeing and scheduling programs/events and volunteer coordination. She also ran private outings, lead several unique public presentations, and assisted with the center's online presence and marketing.

## Partners, Sponsors, and Donors

The SRBEIC is could not survive without the support of it partners, sponsors, and donors. A full list of these agencies and individuals can be found in our acknowledgments, starting on page three.



Wayne Watne (WA Department of Fish and Wildlife) teaches our volunteers about Chum Salmon

## Visitation

**Table 2:** Totals of Visitor counts for the SRBEIC in the 2018-19 Season.

|                                    | Visitors |
|------------------------------------|----------|
| <b>School/Senior Program Total</b> | 500      |
| <b>Weekend Total</b>               | 1921     |
| <b>Holiday Total</b>               | 522      |
| <b>Grand Total</b>                 | 2943     |

This season the SRBEIC was open to the public on weekends between December 1st, 2018 and January 27th, 2019. Additionally, the center was open for Christmas break (December 26<sup>th</sup> to January 1<sup>st</sup>) and on Martin Luther King Jr. Day (Jan 21st). Visitors were counted by our volunteers and asked to sign a guest register. The total number of visitors tallied for the season was 2,943. Table 2, includes the totals of visitors by category.

### Private Groups

During our season the SRBEIC offers educational programming to schools and other groups. These are usually scheduled during the week when the center is closed to the public. They are coordinated either by center's coordinator, or by one of our partners. This year we hosted four field trips coordinated through the Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group and two field trips coordinated through the US Forest Service's Every Kid In a Park (EKIP) initiative. We also coordinated three field trips for area school children and one trip for an adult group. These group visits resulted in 500 visitors, including 395 elementary school students. Two additional EKIP trips were cancelled as a result of the government shutdown. They had been expected to bring 150 more visitors to the center. A complete list of these trips can be found in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Daily Visitor Counts for the SRBEIC in the 2018-19 Season.

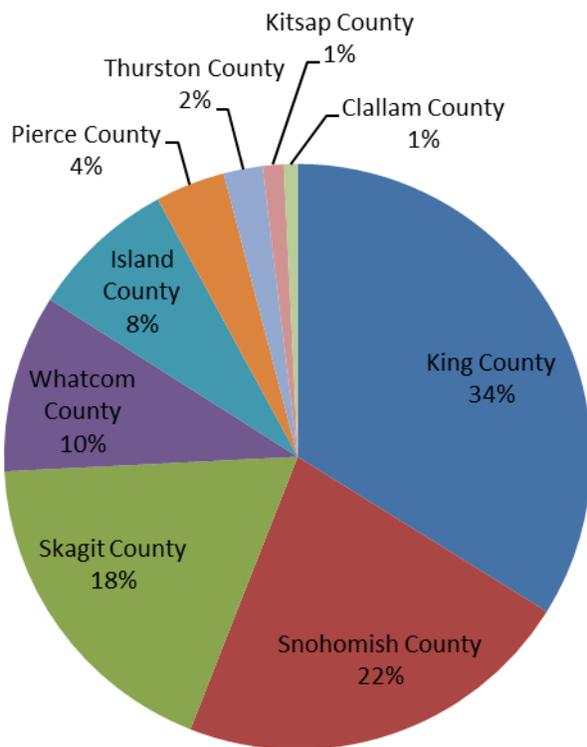
| Date      | Note  | Visitors |
|-----------|---|----------|
| 11/27/18  | School group w/ SFEG - Jefferson Elementary                 | 51       |
| 11/29/18  | School group w/ SFEG- Lincoln Elementary                    | 85       |
| 12/1/18   | Saturday - open to public                                   | 21       |
| 12/2/18   | Sunday - open to public                                     | 31       |
| 12/4/18   | School group w/ SFEG - Evergreen Elementary                 | 90       |
| 12/7/18   | School group - Clear Lake Elementary, Visions program       | 34       |
| 12/8/18   | Saturday - open to public                                   | 55       |
| 12/9/18   | Sunday - open to public                                     | 22       |
| 12/11/18  | School group w/ SFEG - Immaculate Conception RS             | 47       |
| 12/12/18  | School group w/ Forest Service (EKIP) - Madison Elementary  | 64       |
| 12/13/18  | School group w/ Forest Service (EKIP) - Madison Elementary  | 65       |
| 12/15/18  | Saturday - open to public                                   | 56       |
| 12/16/18  | Sunday - open to public                                     | 23       |
| 12/17/18  | School Group - Lake Stevens Zion Elementary                 | 30       |
| 12/22/18  | Center Closed due to power outage                           | 0        |
| 12/23/18  | Center Closed due to power outage                           | 0        |
| 12/26/18  | Christmas break - open to the public*                       | 10       |
| 12/27/18  | Christmas break - open to the public*                       | 65       |
| 12/28/18  | Christmas break - open to the public*                       | 56       |
| 12/29/18  | Saturday - open to public*                                  | 36       |
| 12/30/18  | Sunday - open to public*                                    | 101      |
| 12/31/18  | Christmas break - open to the public*                       | 105      |
| 1/1/2019  | Christmas break - open to the public*                       | 57       |
| 1/5/2019  | Saturday - open to public                                   | 290      |
| 1/6/2019  | Sunday - open to public                                     | 105      |
| 1/8/2019  | Private group - Issaquah Sr. Center                         | 15       |
| 1/12/2019 | Saturday - open to public                                   | 300      |
| 1/13/2019 | Sunday - open to public                                     | 283      |
| 1/16/2019 | EKIP - Canceled due to government shutdown*                 | 0        |
| 1/17/2019 | EKIP - Canceled due to government shutdown*                 | 0        |
| 1/19/2019 | Saturday - open to public                                   | 191      |
| 1/20/2019 | Sunday - open to public                                     | 180      |
| 1/21/2019 | MLK Jr Day - open to public                                 | 122      |
| 1/22/2019 | School group - Mary Purcell Elementary, Life Skill Students | 19       |
| 1/26/2019 | Saturday - open to public                                   | 202      |
| 1/27/2019 | Sunday - open to public                                     | 132      |

Table 3 breaks down our visitor count for every day the center was operational this season. Visitor counts with an asterisk (\*) were strongly impacted by the confusion resulting from the US government shutdown (December 22, 2018 to January 25, 2019). Two of the Every Kid In a

Park (EKIP) school groups were also canceled. These field trips would have brought in roughly an additional 150 visitors this season. The government shutdown also resulted in low visitation numbers during the Christmas break. The Skagit Eagle Watchers program (run through the US Forest Service) was canceled when the shutdown went into effect. The SRBEIC works closely with this program and the general public assumed incorrectly that we were also shut down. It took the center about a week of active marketing to return visitation numbers to near historical normal levels.

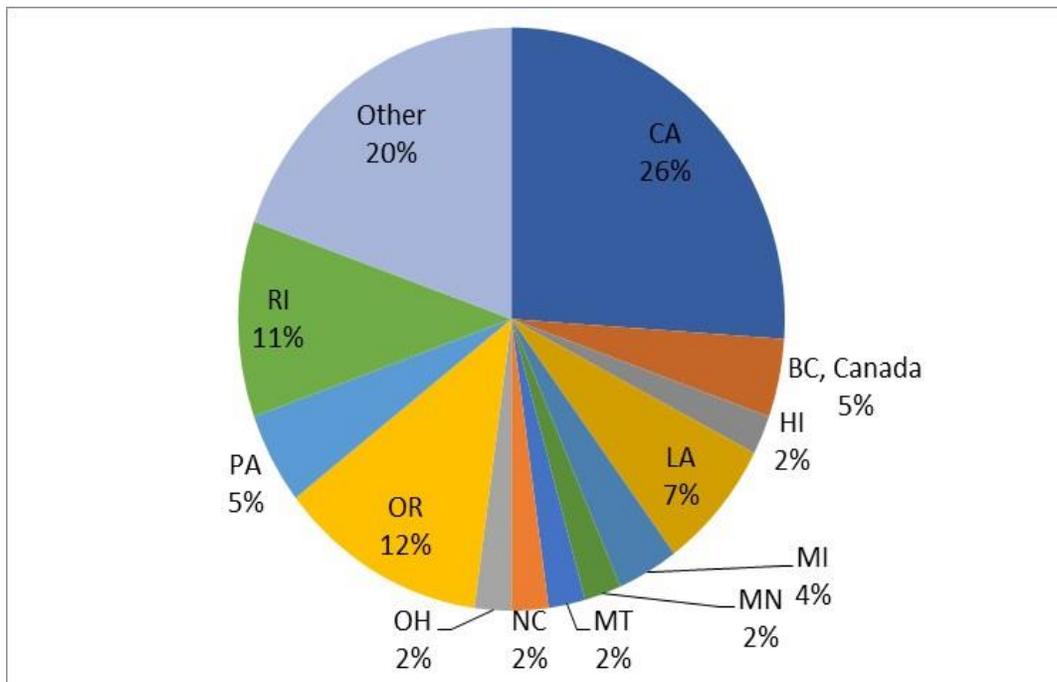
1876 (77%) of our 2,443 visitors on public visitor days voluntarily signed the SRBEIC's Guest Register. 93% of registered visitors came from Washington State (17 different Washington Counties). **Figure 1** shows the percentage of visitors for the most commonly represented Washington Counties (those who had at least 10 registered visitors).

**Figure 1:** Home counties of Washington visitors of the SRBEIC in the 2018-19 Season.



Seven percent of the registered visitors at the SRBEIC this season (140 individuals) came from outside of Washington State. These visitors come from 23 different US states. International visitors came mostly from British Columbia, but one couple came all the way from France. **Figure 2** shows where these 138 people came from. The “Other” category includes places with one or two visitors registered with us this season. They include Alabama, Alaska, Connecticut, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Utah, Virginia, and France.

**Figure 2:** Home of Non-Washington Residents who Registered at the Skagit River Bald Eagle Interpretive Center in the 2018-19 Season



## Education

Education is a key function of the SRBEIC. This is accomplished through lectures and guided nature walks covering various aspects of the Skagit River watershed as well as information on eagle viewing. Historically, a key piece of information we share has been the weekly eagle count provided by the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest and North Cascades National Park professionals. As a result of the government shutdown we were not able to get official counts for most of the season. We posted unofficial counts that we received from the Skagit River Guide Service at our center.

## Speaker Series

During our season experts from the region present topics related to the Skagit River watershed. This season, the SRBEIC offered 18 presentations by 13 different presenters. One presentation was canceled on the weekend we were closed due to a storm related power outage. Another presentation was replaced due to the government shutdown. A full list of our presenters as well as topics covered is on page 4. In total, 534 visitors attended these presentations.



Standing room crowd watching a presentation by Craig Romano

### **Guided Interpretive Walks**

Guided walks were offered at 11:00am on every Saturday and Sunday while the center was open. They usually lasted about 90 minutes and followed the Skagit River trail in Howard Miller Steelhead Park. These presentations focused on the natural history of the Skagit River, especially concerning Bald Eagles. USFS staff led some of Saturday walks in December, but had to discontinue this service as a result of the government shutdown. Some walks were led by presenters as an expansion of their program. All other hikes were led by Holli Watne, this season's coordinator. The guided walks were typically well attended and well received. In total, 366 visitors participated in the guided walks this season.



The first guided walk of the 2018-19 season

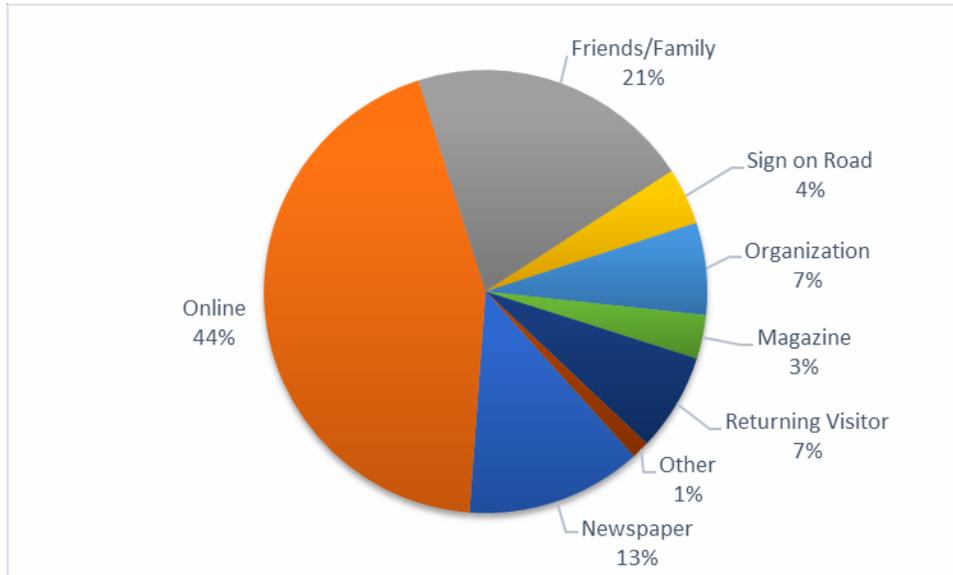
### **Nature Store**

Our facility includes a small Nature Store that features unique items made by Skagit Valley artisans. The center receives a 25% consignment fee on the sales price of most items. The store is managed by long-time volunteer Ember LaBounty. This season, the store made \$4,181.77 in sales. Local artisans included: John Burmaster, Dale Angell, Sue Coccia, Concrete Heritage Museum, Julie Erikson, Bob Kincaid, Bryce Mann, Helen Ovenell, Nicola Pearson, Steve Philbrick, John Scurlock, Don Smith, Carole Webb, and Andrea Weiser.

### **Marketing and Public Relations**

Promoting the SRBEIC is a key focus throughout the year. Our Board President is also our Public Relations Manager. This season, we updated our guest register to ask visitors where they heard about us. 1161 people responded, as summarized in Figure 3.

**Figure 3:** Responses to the Questions “Where did you hear about us?” Among Registered Visitors at the SRBEIC in the 2018-19 Season



The internet has become the most common source of hearing about the SRBEIC with Facebook (185 people) being the largest single source. The SRBEIC team puts a lot of effort into keeping the center’s Facebook page active and up-to-date. Also, Our Public Relations Manager used his connections with professional photographers to regularly post stunning images of bald eagles. According to the insight tool on our Facebook page, our page was viewed 1927 times in December 2018 and January 2019. And as of early February 2019, the center has 1,788 Facebook followers.

The second most common way people heard about us was through word of mouth from friends or family. We take this to be a sign that our community appreciates the work that we do.

## 2018-19 Photo Contests

SRBEIC continued its tradition of hosting an annual photo contest this season. We also added a Youth Photo Contest for photographers 15 years and younger. Mandy Newby won our grand prize for her image, titled “Young and Wild”, below. She received a backpack with educational bird books and a large plush bald eagle. The adult prize of an eagle float tour for two sponsored by Skagit River Guide Service, worth \$150, went to Greg Walker for his image, title “Tight Formation” (on the cover of this report) The top ten entries as well as some runners-up are posted on our website and our Facebook page. The staff and board would like to thank everyone who participated in this year’s competition.



“Young and Wild” by Mandy Newby (age 10)

## Opportunities for Future Years

Despite some hardships related to weather and the government shutdown, the 2018-19 bald eagle season was still a time of growth in both attendance and revenue for the SRBEIC. This has been made possible through the team work of our staff, board members, volunteers, and the many other organizations and individuals that help us along.

We are embarking on a Strategic Planning process to help us grow in the years to come. Short term goals include the acquisition of a new laptop computer, a ceiling mount for our new projector and a portable sound system for field trips and guided walks. We also hope to improve volunteer recruitment/retention and recruit more Board members. Long term goals include developing more interacting interpretive displays, expanding outreach to local public schools, improving our relationships with our partners, extending our season of operation, and looking into the possibility of moving to a larger building where we can support even more visitors. Growth in funding would provide needed resources for increased learning opportunities

