

Skagit River Interpretive Center
End-of-Season Report
Prepared by
Joe Ordonez, Education Coordinator
March 1st, 2023

Introduction and Overview

The Skagit River Interpretive Center (SRIC), located in Rockport, Washington, opened in 1997. The mission of Skagit River Interpretive Center is to **increase education about, appreciation for, and stewardship of the Skagit River Watershed ecosystem**. This is accomplished through a variety of educational programs and by serving as a resource for visitor information. The programs are run entirely by volunteers with the exception of one paid staff position, the Education Coordinator.

The 2022/2023 season at the Skagit River Interpretive Center (SRIC) was a success. Visitation and participation grew considerably as SRIC built on last year's efforts. Joe Ordonez, education coordinator, returned for his second season and expanded the naturalist-led walking tour program. Board members Eric Spandi, Judy Hemenway, and Ember La Bounty put in many hours at the Center and behind the scenes. A few volunteers returned, new volunteers were trained, and a featured artist interacted with the public in January. **Below are some numbers that highlight the scope and level of service SRIC provided this year:**

General Public:

We were open **26 days** during December, January and February.

1839 visitors were logged into the Center by our staff.

1055 guests joined our nature walks.

Groups:

We were open **8 additional dates** for special group programming. **205 students and their parents** were served. These programs supported homeschool groups and the US Forest Service "Every Kid Outdoors" program.

Donations:

\$6088.43 in donations were collected this year. This includes **\$1040** from a raffle.

A beautiful quilt was donated to us anonymously this year. We sold 104 tickets at \$10 each.

Sales:

\$5,894.65 in sales were made in our gift shop.

Volunteer and Education Coordinator Hours:

16 volunteers logged in at least **991 hours**.

Approximately 180 hours were logged in by the **Education Coordinator**.

Programs and Services:

SRIC provided the following programs and services during the 2022/2023 season:

- 1) **Natural history walks** led by trained naturalist guides
- 2) **School group programs**, including walking tours and indoor programs
- 3) **Public outreach** and communication via telephone, email and social media
- 4) **Our Interpretive Center** was staffed with friendly and welcoming volunteers, providing educational materials, local information and a place to warm up and learn.
- 5) **Ramon Shilo, visiting artist**, spent three days at the Center interacting with visitors.

Walking Tours:

Like last year, Education Coordinator Joe Ordonez, set up a training program for volunteer walking guides and prepared training materials for them. Nine volunteers attended SRIC's training on November 19th and December 10th. One positive development this year was that the majority of the volunteers reside in the Skagit Valley.

SRIC offered 1.5 to 2-hour nature walks each Saturday and Sunday. Walks departed at 11:00am and 1:30pm. This schedule allowed SRIC to interface with both morning and afternoon visitors.. January brought a substantial increase in the number of visitors. By then, SRIC had a strong team of well-trained volunteer guides who comfortably led high-quality educational nature walks from the Center. This year, we extended the season into mid-February and continued to serve large numbers of visitors on the weekends until our last day, February 12th.

School groups:

SRIC provided programs for seven school groups this year. The typical program included a morning nature walk followed by an indoor educational presentation at the Center.

Every Kid Outdoors Program:

SRIC provided assistance for an Eagle Watchers Field Trip for the "Every Kid Outdoors" program run by the US Forest Service.

Visiting Artist Program:

Artist Ramon Shilo spent three days interacting with visitors and signing books and posters. All involved felt like this was a successful event and that the visiting artist concept could be expanded in the future.

Phone calls and emails:

SRIC provides information about the Upper Skagit River to those requesting it. Phone calls and emails were checked regularly and messages were responded to in a timely manner.

Communication and promotion:

Newspaper Articles:

SRIC enjoyed some free advertising by being featured on the front page of the Skagit Valley Herald and the front page of the Concrete Herald. There was also an article in the Skagit Valley Herald that highlighted Ramon Shilo's weekend visit in January.

TV:

SRIC was featured on the *King 5 TV show, Evening Magazine. The episode aired on January 19th, 2023.*

Social Media:

Our **Facebook Page** and our **website** (www.skagiteagle.org) were updated by the Education Coordinator and Center staff with the help of **Alex Aiken**. Alex was very responsive and did an excellent job. We also advertised with the Facebook group ***Skagit Kids Insider***. This proved to be an effective way to reach many families.

Other advertising venues included:

Skagit Valley Herald (both print and online)

Concrete Herald

Adventures Northwest magazine

Whatcom Kids Insider

AAA

Visitskagitvalley.com

Whidbey Weekly

Posters & pamphlets were placed in all hotels and information centers in Skagit County, Whatcom County, Oak Harbor, and Anacortes.

Challenges and Opportunities

Covid-19:

Following WA State protocols, we did not require the public to wear masks inside the Center this year. However, Covid-19 continued to present challenges. Several volunteers could not work at the Center on their scheduled days because they were quarantined. Like last year, we did not offer a Speaker series this year because of Covid concerns.

Approaching maximum capacity

On several dates this year, we reached maximum capacity on our walking tours. This is the result of our successful marketing campaigns, the positive reviews we have received and our growing (and glowing) reputation. Large numbers of visitors participated in our walks - for one of our morning walks in early January, over 75 guests showed up. Fortunately, we had three guides available that day and were able to split into manageable-sized groups! We may have to institute a pre-registration system for next year.

Bald Eagle Numbers:

SRIC has been offering educational programs for over twenty years. The number of bald eagles has declined noticeably during the past few years. This is attributed to a decline in the fall chum salmon run which the eagles depend on. Fortunately, SRIC's mission is not dependent upon the presence of large numbers of bald eagles. We emphasize the unique geography, natural history and history of the Skagit watershed. The overarching theme is "connections" - the web of relationships that tie the upper Skagit River watershed to the bald eagles, forests, as well as the animals and humans that live nearby.

Looking to the Future:

Interest in nature and the outdoors has grown, and interest in the upper Skagit River and the Skagit River Interpretive Center's offerings have grown as well. ***As eagle numbers along the upper Skagit River decline, SRIC's mission to promote stewardship of the Skagit River becomes even more important.***

With more volunteers, more volunteer hours, and more funds for professional staff, SRIC could expand. SRIC could serve more visitors on the weekends during the winter and expand by increasing the length of the visitation season. The visiting artist program was successful and could be expanded in future years.

Like an eagle catching the thermal updrafts off Sauk Mountain on a sunny winter morning, SRIC is ready to soar!

Acknowledgements

The Board and staff of the Skagit River Interpretive Center wish to acknowledge and thank those who helped contribute to SRIC this season.

Donors:

City of Burlington
Don Smith
Jim Stout
Skagit County
The public

In-kind Donors:

5 B's Bakery
Adventures NW
EarthArt International
Concrete Herald
Whidbey Weekly

Partners:

Burlington Chamber of Commerce
Concerte Chamber of Commerce
North Cascades Institute
North Cascades National Park Complex
Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest 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

Board members: *Ember LaBounty, Eric Spandi, Judy Hemenway, Leatha Sullivan, Dana Ledford,*

Walking Tour Guides: *Patrick Hutchins, Julie Shumway, Julia Dahlquist, Dale Cuning, Diana Hoffman, Annemarie Todd,, Richard Smith, Sydney Gaylor, Billie Morelli, Matt Riggins*

Center Staff: *Deborah Money, Addison Edwards, Eric Spandi, Judy Hemenway, Ember LaBounty, Annemarie Todd*

Education Coordinator: *Joe Ordonez*

Guest Book Register

Washington State Visitors (by County)

<u>WA County</u>		<u># of Individuals</u>		<u>from # of households</u>	
Island		67		26	
Jefferson		5		2	
King		495		193	
Kitsap		20		6	
Kittitas		4		1	
Lewis		2		1	
Mason		3		2	
Pierce		37		14	
Skagit		330		99	
Snohomish		191		69	
Spokane		3		1	
Thurston		31		11	
Whatcom		155		66	
Yakima		6		2	

Outside of Washington State Visitors (By Zip Code or Country)

Number	Zip Code	Town or City
3	06360	Norwich, CT
2	07028	Glen ridge, NJ
1	13350	Herkimer, NY
2	28445	Holly Ridge, NC
2	32926	Cocoa, FL
2	43606	Toledo, OH
1	55792	Virginia, MN
1	56048	Janesville, MN
8	60123	Elgin, IL
2	60654	Chicago, IL
1	80403	Golden, CO
2	80439	Evergreen, CO
2	84790	Saint George, UT
1	88011	Las Cruces, NM
3	89521	Reno, NV
1	90057	Los Angeles, CA
3	90503	Torrance, CA
2	91746	La Puente, CA
1	92008	Carlsbad, CA
2	94963	San Geronimo, CA
28	95685	Sutter Creek, CA
3	97201	Portland, OR
4	97205	Portland, OR
Number	Country	
4	Canada	
2	Ireland	