



Skagit River
Interpretive Center End of
Season Report



2023/2024 Season
Prepared by Amanda Eisenberg
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INTRODUCTION

The SRIC

The Skagit River Interpretive Center (SRIC) is an educational facility located inside of Howard Miller Steelhead Park, located in Rockport, Washington. It was opened in 1997, to provide education about the bald eagles that concentrate in the Skagit River Watershed drawn by the

Skagit River's winter chum salmon run. The Skagit River is home to the densest population of wintering bald eagles in the lower 48 states. In recent years, the SRIC's educational programming has evolved to encompass many parts of the ecosystem. It is currently open from December to February and is run entirely by volunteers with the exception of one paid staff position, the Interpretive Coordinator & Education Specialist.

Mission

The mission of SRIC is to **increase education, stewardship, and appreciation for the Skagit River Watershed Ecosystem**. This is accomplished through many avenues, including volunteer- naturalist led nature walks, school programming, and as a resource for visitor information.

OPERATIONS

Volunteer Training

Volunteer training was held on Saturday, December 2nd from 10 am to 3 pm. The training was led by previous Interpretive Coordinator Joe Ordonez. This was done as a way to continue and add to the program that he started a few years ago, which proved to be extremely successful for the SRIC. The new Interpretive Coordinator & Education Specialist, Amanda Eisenberg attended along with previous volunteers, Richard Smith, Deborah Money, Addison Edwards, and Julie Shumway. New volunteers, Jose Alevar, and Elizabeth Alevar-Wilson attended.

Volunteer and Coordinator Hours

We had 11 volunteers including board members put in at least **876** combined hours. These volunteers put hours in as volunteer naturalists and support, staffing the nature store, interacting with visitors inside the center, leading and acting as support for school programming, and many hours behind the scenes keeping everything running.

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The Interpretive Coordinator & Education Specialist put in over **300** hours and either led tours or acted as support on every naturalist-led nature walk that was given over the season and supported volunteers for every school group.

Knowledgeable, experienced, and outgoing volunteers are vital in order to provide visitors with information about the Skagit River Watershed. The Interpretive Coordinator & Education Specialist, board members, and volunteers staffed the Interpretive Center, led nature walks, ran school programs, and acted as a source of information for visitors.

We had a solid mix of new and veteran volunteers dedicate their time to the SRIC for the 2023/2024 season. In addition to the volunteers that led and acted as support for the nature

walks. The inside of the center was staffed with knowledgeable volunteers available to answer any visitor questions ranging from giving directions to answering questions about the educational tools located within the center. They also kept track of the number of people that visited the interpretive center per day. As well as making sure they signed into the “guest book” so the center can keep track of where the visitors came from.

In addition to the educational tools located inside of the center. Including two taxidermied bald eagles at different life stages, a table full of replicas of a bald eagle skull, eggs, various animal skat, and animal tracks. The center got a new smart tv, which kept visitors engaged with a live stream of bald eagle nests located in Florida and in California. This gave visitors an opportunity to see the process of laying, incubation/brooding, hatching close up.

Nature Store

In addition, to staffing volunteers inside the interpretive center to answer questions. The interpretive center also has a nature store full of handmade items from local artisans. This is managed by volunteer, Ember LaBounty. Not only does the store help the center but also the local community of artisans that benefit from the sale of those items, as they get a percentage of what the center sells. The SRIC had two photos of Bald Eagles up for a raffle for \$2 per ticket which could be purchased in the Nature Store. One photo by Lee Mann, and the other donated by former board President Fred Wilson.

Website/Social Media

The Skagit River Interpretive Center’s website is managed and updated by Alex Aiken, the interpretive Coordinator worked directly with Alex to add updates and current events to the website, This included digital flyers that the Interpretive Coordinator designed. These flyers were used to try and get new volunteers, alert visitors to updates due to holidays and weather, and advertise for visiting artists and speakers. The Interpretive Coordinator & Education Specialist also set up an instagram account to gain exposure for the center.

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The Interpretive Coordinator created an instagram for the SRIC with posts of current events, like when Ramon Shiloh came and wildlife photos.

The Interpretive Coordinator created a google form that Alex linked to the nature walk schedule page. The form is linked to a spreadsheet that gives us the potential numbers for the nature walks. This RSVP system was used to estimate how many people would be going on each of the nature walks. This system was made so the Coordinator could separate the groups based on the number available to lead. An advantage to this RSVP system is potential volunteers can comment if they need extra accommodations or have questions. The interpretive coordinator also set up an RSVP form for visiting private groups, so that the process to book these programs is streamlined and efficient.

SUMMARY OF 2023/2024 SEASON

The 2023/2024 season at the Skagit River Interpretive Center was very successful thanks to a whole bunch of moving parts. The Skagit River Interpretive Center was open to the general public from Saturday December 16th, 2023 to February 11th, 2024.

General Public

The Skagit River Interpretive Center was open for a total of **21 days** between opening on December 16th, 2023 and closing on February 11th, 2024.

We had a total of **1,220** visitors logged into the center by our volunteers.

Out of 907 visitors to the nature center, **814** participated in the Naturalist- led nature walks. That is around a **67% participation rate**.

Groups

In addition to being open for the general public, the Skagit River Interpretive Center was open an additional **10 days** for various home school and private groups. A total of **419 students, parents, and teachers** were served. These programs supported homeschool groups, homeschool collectives, public school groups, and after school groups. The SRIC partnered with Every Kid Outdoors, a forest service program prior to our official start of the season and partnered with the North Cascades Institute while they executed their own program.

Group Name : # of kids and adults	#total people
Every Kid Outdoors- Forest Service Program (over three days) 127 kids and 20 adults	147
Lutheran Christian School (over two days) 37 kids and 31 adults	68
Snohomish and Surrounds Homeschool 36 kids and 6 adults	42

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Wild and Free Explorers Homeschool 35 kids and 20 adults	55
Concrete Boys and Girls Club 12 kids and 3 adults	15

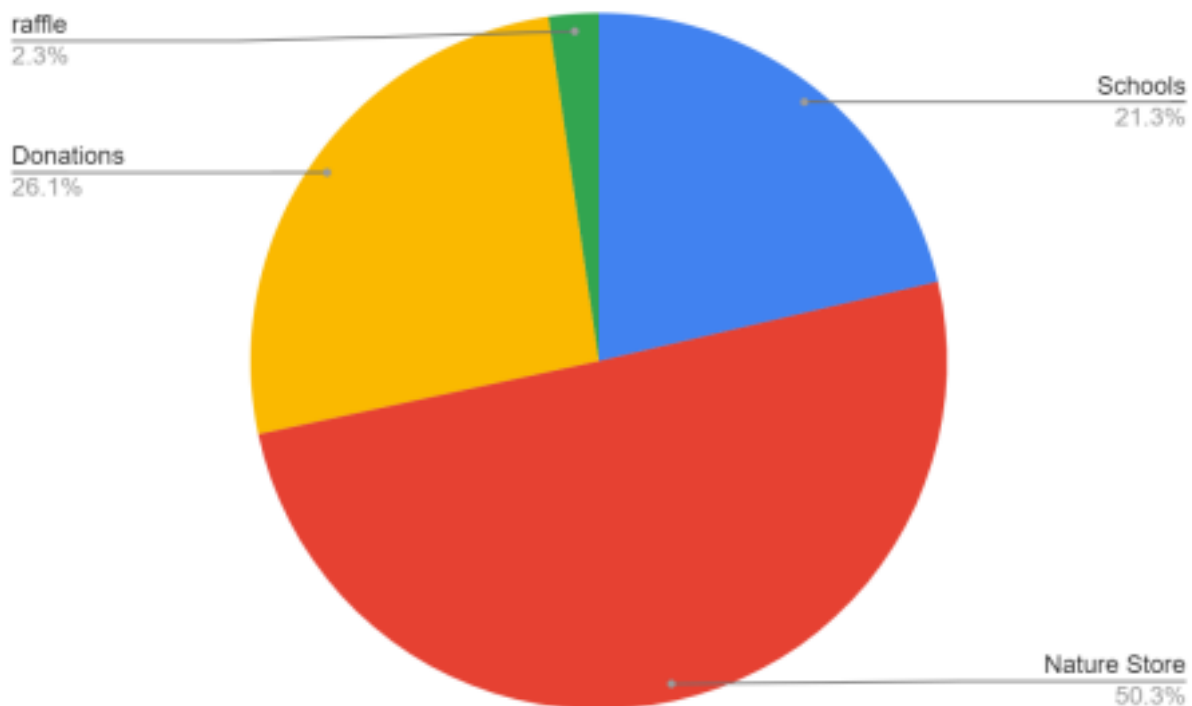
Classical Conversations Homeschool 17 kids and 5 adults	22
Homeschool Adventure Club 17 kids and 8 adults	25
Wild and Free Explorers- Skagit County Homeschool 11 kids and 4 adults	15
Clear Water Elementary School 17 kids and 13 adults	30
North Cascades Institute 13 adults	13
Total	432

The total number of visitors that signed in, including private groups, was **1,652 people**.

Revenue

The total revenue made for the 2023/2024 season is : **\$12,817.79**. See below for the chart of the revenue spread.

Schools	\$2,524.11
Nature Store	\$6,937.00
Donations	\$3,082.68
Raffle	\$274.00
Total	\$12,817.79



Programs and Services

SRIC provided the following programs and services during the 2023/2024 season: 1)

Naturalist Led Nature Walks led by the interpretive coordinator and volunteers and supported by volunteers.

2) **School Groups**: Which included an indoor education portion and outdoor nature walk.

3) **The Interpretive Center** was staffed with friendly volunteers that kept counts of people that walked into the center, answered questions, and provided education. During the middle of the season the center had a live stream of an eagles nest from Florida on the new smart tv and that brought a lot of attention.

4) **Store**: the store was manned and managed by Ember LaBounty with assistance from Judy Hemmenway, and Annemarie Todd.

5) **Visiting Artist and Speakers**: Visiting Artist, Ramon Shiloh spent three days interacting with visitors and showing his artwork. Holly Henderson from Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group came to give a presentation about her organization.

Volunteer Naturalist Led Nature Walks

SRIC offered 1.5 to 2 hour nature walks, twice a day at 11:00 am and 1:30 pm. These nature walks were very popular and drove most of the visitation to the center. The tours were focused on discussing the connectivity of the Skagit River Watershed. We had a total of **814 people**

attend the nature walks. The average group size at 11:00 am was around **23 individuals** and the average group size at 1:30 pm was around **16 individuals**. Our outliers for the average

included a **max of 48 individuals** on one tour and **minimum of 2 individuals** on one tour. There were **0 days** that we did not go on nature walks due to no visitors.

The walking tour was amended slightly to start at the bridge to search for wildlife up and down the river. As a result, our long line of people drew people who did not know about the nature walks who would join the tours.





Visiting Artist and Speaker Programs

The SRIC had Ramon Shiloh visit for another year with some of his works on 2/2/24, 2/3/24, 2/5/24. He was present for all hours the center was open during these days. The weekend Ramon Shiloh was at the center was the busiest weekend it had during the season.

Holly Henderson Fisheries Enhancement Group did not have the same turn out, For next year, it might be necessary to re-think the timing. Originally, it was decided that Holly Henderson would give her presentation at 1:45 pm. The thought behind this was that if people wanted to go on a nature walk at 11 am and then her presentation they could hang around the center or the Rockport Bar and Grill. The 1:30 pm group would then leave the building so it wasn't overcrowded for her presentation. A better option may be to opt out of leading an afternoon nature walk and have it close to the end time of the 11 am walk so people are funneled into the center in time for the presentations.

Phone Calls, Emails, and Messages

SRIC provided information about the Skagit River Watershed. Phone messages, Facebook messages, and emails were responded to in a timely manner. People called asking questions about the nature walks, directions, weather conditions, and info about potential wildlife sightings.

ADVERTISING

Newspaper Articles

The Skagit Valley Herald interviewed the Interpretive Coordinator & Education Specialist and posted that for January and included Ramon Shiloh and Holly Henderson's visits.

TV

KING5 re-ran SRIC's feature from last season (2022/2023)

Social Media

Visitors RSVPing had to answer "how did you hear about us?" question and a majority of them responded either the SRIC's website or the SRIC facebook page.

The coordinator also posted in various outdoors and rv travel focused facebook groups.

List of Advertisers

Adventure Northwest Magazine

Skagit Kids Insider

Concrete Herald

Whatcom Kids Insider

AAA

Visitskagitvalley.com

Challenges and Opportunities

Volunteers

While our volunteers this year were incredibly dedicated and consistent. Volunteers that came on Saturdays were not confident and able to lead tours so the groups were very large and unable to be broken up.

Weather

This season, the cold snap made some visitors and volunteers feel unsafe getting to the center. We had to reschedule Ramon Shiloh and a public school group from their original days. This might be a continuous issue with the changing climate. A solution for next year, could be to more actively front load the season that way rescheduling can be executed easier.

Speaker Timing

Unfortunately, Holly Henderson who came to present from the Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group did not have an audience. She was scheduled at 1:45 pm but all of the visitors left on the 1:30 pm walk. The speakers may need to be scheduled at the end of a walk so we can funnel visitors inside.

Looking to the Future

With more volunteers, and more volunteer hours the SREIC could serve more visitors on the weekends. Next season the center should be open at least another week to accommodate more visitors.

The SRIC should also think of passive income during the off season. A downloadable lesson plan on eagles for teachers. It might not be a lot but it could help.

Based on the data collected from the Guest Book Register King and Snohomish counties were the top two counties that people have visited from. Skagit County, home to the SRIC, was third. Advertising focus should be centered on the first two counties and the school programs.

Guest Book Register

A majority of people visiting the SRIC are from Skagit, Snohomish, King, and Whatcom Counties.

Washington Counties	# of visitors
King	326
Skagit	194
Snohomish	207
Kitsap	11
Grays Harbor	4
Pierce	35
Pierce	121
Whatcom	1
Claellum	31
Island	8
Island	2
Thurston	4
Douglas	4
Mason	2
Cowlitz	3
Clark	
Jefferson	10

State	# of people
Pennsylvania	3
California	21
Maine	1
Virginia	13
Arizona	2
Texas	2
New York	1
Michigan	2

New Zealand
Japan
Canada

	# people
	6
	2
Country	1

