



# Rivers for Life

A Quarterly Newsletter of the WRIA 16 Planning Unit

## Cascadia Consulting Group Prepares Skokomish-Dosewallips Watershed Plan

In October, Cascadia Consulting Group of Seattle was hired to develop the WRIA 16 Watershed Plan with funding from the Washington State Department of Ecology. Lead writer Peter Erickson said, "We're excited to be working on this particular plan. There's a dynamic group of people involved in its development who are willing to dig into the science for the best possible options. Many of us at Cascadia have a strong connection to the area from hiking and visiting."

The Watershed Plan will support good decisions about water resources and their management, including the granting of future water rights as well as land use and development choices. The plan's recommendations will help ensure that there is enough water for human uses and to provide adequate habitat for fish.

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Shawn Green holds up one of the female chum salmon caught by his family.

## Skokomish Tribe Keeps Chum Salmon Carcasses Out of Hood Canal

By Tami Pokony

The tide is out this mid-November morning and the chum salmon harvest has hit full stride. Small boats are beached along the shoreline just north of the Hood Canal Hatchery and dozens of Skokomish Tribal families and crews are hard at work hauling beach seines ashore laden with fish.

The tribal members are harvesting roe for Asian and European caviar; the fish themselves have little cash value. But this year, thanks to a concerted effort by fishermen, the tribe, buyers, and agency funding, the carcasses are being utilized on-shore rather than discarded into Hood Canal.

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### The WRIA 16 Planning Unit Vision:

A watershed connects people to one another and to the natural landscape. WRIA 16's purpose is to manage this shared resource to benefit both people and the environment. We will listen to every individual in our watershed community who voices their needs, concerns, and ideas. Our vision is to develop a plan that achieves a broad consensus within this unique community. Only with the involvement of our whole community can this vision be realized.



Fishermen and women Nick Wilbur, Katie Smith, Richard Smith, Lyle Wilbur, Jacob Smith and Eleanor Smith with their catch.

## Cascadia

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Diminishing water availability and quality, and the loss of critical habitat for fish are key issues facing the State of Washington. The 1998 Legislature passed the Watershed Management Act to provide a framework for local citizens, interest groups, and government organizations (the "Planning Unit") to collaboratively identify and solve water-related issues in each of the 62 Water Resource Inventory Areas (WRIAs) of the State ([www.ecy.gov/watershed/16.html](http://www.ecy.gov/watershed/16.html)). The drainages of the Skokomish, Dosewallips, Hamma Hamma and Duckabush rivers, as well as several smaller streams, comprise the Skokomish-Dosewallips watershed (WRIA 16). In addition, the Planning Unit has an agreement with WRIA 14 to prepare the plan for the south shore of Hood Canal as part of the WRIA 16 planning process.

Slated for publication in November 2005, Cascadia will complete the Watershed Plan with assistance from the Planning Unit and agency staff. It will also incorporate several previous and on-going scientific studies in a summary of what is known about the watershed. Citations will include reports on water quantity, water quality, including temperature and fecal coliform bacteria, nitrogen loading to Hood Canal, summer chum recovery, and factors limiting habitat for salmon and steelhead. The Watershed Plan represents the third phase of



An unidentified fisherman looks on as salmon are pumped ashore from a floating pen.

the four-phase watershed planning process. Citizens are encouraged to become involved in the process by attending Planning Unit meetings—they're held the first Thursday of the month, usually from 2-4 PM at the PUD "Board Room" in Potlatch. For more information contact Susan Gulick, facilitator for the group, at (206) 548-0469 or [soundres@earthlink.net](mailto:soundres@earthlink.net), or the Mason County Department of Community Development at (360) 427-96760.



Workers for American-Canadian Fisheries, Inc. sort the catch.

## Salmon

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Scientists believe decomposition of the carcasses is a contributor, albeit a minor one, to the historically low levels of dissolved oxygen in the Canal. In recent years, oxygen scarcity has caused massive die-offs of marine life, including fish and shrimp.

Skokomish Fish Committee member Eddy Green remembers hearing about fish kills in Hood Canal as a child and isn't convinced that removing the carcasses will make enough of a difference. "We'll do whatever it takes to fish though," he said. He and several other fishermen expressed satisfaction in knowing that food banks would receive more of their salmon. Frank Benavente, WRIA 16 Planning Unit member and owner of the Sunrise Hotel since 1991, said that the community has always been interested in utilizing the salmon carcasses.

Men and women deftly slice the bellies of the females, slide the roe into buckets, and toss the fish carcasses on board the boats for a trip to the M/V Norman, a tender docked nearby. American-Canadian Fisheries, Inc. is providing the ship through a \$95,000 federal grant to prevent salmon carcasses from entering Hood Canal. Alongside the M/V Norman B, the excess carcasses are dropped into a floating pen and pumped ashore, through a large hose, for sorting. American-Canadian Fisheries is contracted to provide carcass

disposal; two other companies are paying about \$.05 per pound for the salmon.

Meanwhile, the M/V Chief Kwina, another tender for American-Canadian, receives buckets of roe—valued at \$3-5 per pound. A single seine haul can yield more than 400 pounds of eggs.

According to Val Peterson, fisheries technician for the Skokomish Tribe, “It takes good communication between the fishermen and the buyers and lots of teamwork to keep the salmon carcasses out of the Canal.” Fishermen are not permitted to use motorized hauling equipment to retrieve their nets in this fishery, so the recovery of the carcasses has created more work. The first two days were a little rough as the bugs were worked out of the new system, but there was plenty of cooperation. If someone left salmon on the beach, others soon gathered them for composting.

Fortunately, the carcass re-

covery effort is initiating a market for whole chum salmon according to David Herrera, fisheries manager for the Skokomish Tribe. “Initially there was a lot of apprehension about the carcass removal because it affects people’s livelihood and we’re asking them to do things differently.”

Currently there are four buyers involved in the purchase of roe or salmon. One of them, Fish Peddlars LLC from Cathlamet, owned by brother/sister Gary and Cheryl Backman, has a scale and trailer at Saltwater Park just south of Hoodspout to receive fish, but no roe. “We’ve bought 200,000 pounds so far (as of November 11) and we’re shooting to be back, market willing. This year we’re flying by the seat of our pants.”

Carcasses not suitable for other uses can be composted at two locations—on Tacoma Power property along Skokomish Flats Road and on tribal land near Potlatch State Park. The compost will ultimately enrich soils in the two-acre tribal garden, tribal timberlands, as well as community vegetable, flower and tradi-

tional medicinal herb gardens.

“It’s a thousand times cleaner on the beach this year. There’s been a tremendous good faith effort to keep the carcasses off the beach and out of the Canal,” said Dennis Popochock, Minter Creek-Hood Canal Complex Manager.

According to Popochock, the Hoodspout Hatchery, at the mouth



Hauling the nets to shore.

of Finch Creek, was built in the early 1950’s to supplement the tribal and all-citizen fishery for Chinook and other species. After the Boldt decision of 1974, production of chum salmon increased to provide more fishing opportunities for everyone. But, because fall chum tend to lose their brightness quickly and arrive at a time of year when the market is already saturated with salmon,

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Shawn and Crystal Green harvest salmon roe.

#### Did you know?

Water temperature affects the development, growth, migration and risk of disease in fish, especially salmon? High stream temperatures, linked to a loss of surrounding vegetation, have been recorded in the Dosewallips River, Marple Creek, Rocky Brook, Duckabush River, Lebar Creek, South Fork of the Skokomish River and Fulton Creek.

## Meet some of the Planning Unit Members and New County Staff



**Constance Ibsen** represents the Lower Hood Canal Watershed Implementation Committee (LHCWIC) citizen's advisory committee to Mason County Commissioners established in 1998. Currently she serves on both WRIA 14, 16 and the Joint Hood Canal Watershed Committee. She lives in Union.



**Frances Arnold** is a retired accountant who's been visiting the Hood Canal since 1942. She's a 14-year resident of Union and a member of the Walkie Talkies Hiking Group. Frances participates in Mason County's Growth Management and Mason County transportation boards. She is also a member of the Great Peninsula Conservancy.



**Craig Schrader** is an Environmental Specialist with Jefferson County Natural Resources. He serves on the technical committees in WRIA 16, 17 and 20. He works in cooperation with the Department of Ecology on stream gauging in WRIA 17. Craig moved to Port Townsend in 2001 from St. Paul, MN with a background in soil science.



**Jeff Heinis** is a life-long resident of Mason County. He was a logger for Simpson Timber Company for 20 years. After Simpson, he went back to college at Evergreen for a B.S. in environmental studies with a focus on salmon ecology. Jeff has been a habitat biologist for the Skokomish Tribe's Department of Natural Resources since 2001.



**Tami Pokorny** is an environmental specialist with Jefferson County. She works with the Solid Waste and Conservation Futures Fund advisory boards, produces this newsletter, and is an environmental educator. She lived in Lander, Wyoming for 14 years before moving to Port Townsend in 2000.

For information on water rights changes, water conservation, Washington water acquisition program, and other water topics see <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wr/wrhome.html>.



## Newly Formed Joint Watershed Planning Committee Develops Big Picture of Hood Canal

This fall Planning Unit members from the four WRIA's bordering Hood Canal formed the Joint Watershed Planning Committee. The Canal and its 180 miles of shoreline span tribal lands, three counties and five major river basins as well as numerous diverse wildlife habitats and human communities.

The purpose of the Committee is to create the "big picture" of Hood Canal, and to prepare a list of options and recommendations to improve its aquatic environment. Many of the Committee's recommendations will likely be incorporated into forthcoming watershed management plans.

The Committee's facilitator, Susan Gulick developed a questionnaire to assess the level and variety of scientific monitoring, research, public education and planning activities underway and anticipated. Respondents identified key issues that they believe are not being adequately addressed regarding Hood Canal. Listed among these issues were concerns about land use, forest cover and pioneer species, variances in building setback requirements, the need to protect the shoreline by offering financial alternatives to development, and the problem of septic failures.

## SALMON

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at a time when the prices for whole fish were low. Tribal fishermen and women switched to harvesting roe and left the carcasses in the Canal to feed scavengers.

If the anticipated 300,000 carcasses were left to decompose in the Canal, they would contribute 16-24 tons of nitrogen, a nutrient that promotes the growth of algae—both microscopic phytoplankton and seaweed. It's the decomposition of algae that robs the water of oxygen in quantities that can affect marine life.

By contrast, estimates of the nitrogen contribution from human sewage range between 39 to 241 tons. Authors of the Preliminary Assessment and Corrective Action Plan (PACA), developed by the Puget Sound Action Team and the Hood Ca-



### A WORD ABOUT WATER QUALITY

The water quality of a nearby stream, a watershed, or a large river system can be enhanced only by collecting good information about conditions and by responding—most effectively at the local level—to that information. Informed citizens of a watershed often are in the best position to identify priority water issues and to understand the political, social, and economic context in which those issues are addressed.

nal Coordinating Council, emphasize that oceanic sources of nitrogen could be contributing as much as ten times the total input of nitrogen from human-related sources. It's hoped that an in-depth monitoring and modeling effort will resolve much of the uncertainty around low levels of dissolved oxygen in Hood Canal and what might be done to correct the problem.

In the meantime, concern persists for the welfare of Hood Canal fisheries. Lalena Amiotte, Skokomish Tribe chum salmon run coordinator, wrote in an email, "A very large percentage of tribal members are self-employed fishermen who rely solely on fisheries for income to support their families. We must remain self-sufficient and if our waters are polluted, our economy will decline sharply...It is our position that if we are going to go the extra mile, then homeowners, the County, the State and the federal government need to follow suit. Studying the problem, analyzing the problem and discussing the problem will not fix the problem. Action is what is needed now."

Laura Hanlon, Skokomish Tribe salmon management biologist, estimated the catch as of November 18 to be about 250,000 fish. "We are seeing less [fish] this year. Even though the estimated run size could be as high as 1.3 million and the non-treaty commercial fishery has caught over 560,000, we do not anticipate catching anywhere near that number this year," she wrote in an email.

Regardless of the size of the catch in 2004, Hood Canal may gain a little more breathing room thanks to the efforts of everyone involved in the salmon recovery program.

**For more information, visit:  
[www.psat.wa.gov](http://www.psat.wa.gov)**

**The author wishes to thank Jeff Heinis** for assistance with this article, introductions and an orientation to Hoodsport and the chum salmon fishery.



**You're invited to attend  
FUTURE MEETINGS**

The **Planning Unit** meets on the first Thursday of each month. **Technical Committee** meetings are on the third Thursday. Call for times and locations. The next PU meeting will be: Thursday, January 6 10-12 AM PUD #1 Board Room Potlatch, WA

The **Joint Watershed Planning Committee** meets every other first Thursday. The next JWPC meeting will be: Thursday, January 6 1-3PM Alderbrook Lodge Brinnon Booster Club, Brinnon, WA

For information contact:  
Susan Gulick, Facilitator at  
(206) 548-0469

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**RIVERS FOR LIFE** is published by the WRIA 16 Planning Unit and made possible by a grant from the Washington State Department of Ecology through funding provided under the Watershed Planning Act.

The newsletter is designed and edited by Tami Pokorny, Natural Resources, Jefferson County. If you have comments or ideas for future issues, please contact call (360) 379-4498 or [tpokorny@co.jefferson.wa.us](mailto:tpokorny@co.jefferson.wa.us).



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WRIA 16 Watershed Planning  
411 N. Fifth , PO Box 279  
Shelton, WA 98584

