



The **STEELHEADER**

Official Newsletter of Tri-State Steelheaders Salmon Enhancement Group

VOLUNTEERS FLING FISH TO HELP TUCANNON SALMON

How is it possible that having so much fun flinging dead fish can help Tucannon salmon? Returning the surplus hatchery fish to the river, also called nutrient enhancement, provides nutrients that are key to the lifecycle of salmon and other wildlife.

On a recent Saturday, twenty Steelheaders volunteers joined Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife staff for a “fish fling” on the Tucannon River. Over 900 salmon carcasses were distributed between Panjab and Marengo.



Volunteers Larry Brown, Mike Taylor, and Kris Fischer load frozen salmon at the Lion's Ferry Hatchery.

We started the day at the Lyons Ferry Hatchery loading trucks with the frozen fish. We needed every bit of space in the seven trucks we had that day. Then we caravanned up the Tucannon, stopping at Marengo. From here, one group worked upstream, stopping at bridges to drop predetermined numbers. The second group drove up to Panjab, and worked downstream in a similar manner. About two hours later, the lower group was done, and the upper group would finish in another hour. In that last hour, the fish were thawing, which made them slimier and trickier to handle.

Returning the carcasses to the river provides nutrients that the fish acquired as they grew in the ocean. As the dead fish decompose, aquatic invertebrates (bugs that live in the water) and juvenile salmon feed directly on the carcasses.

The nutritional benefit to young fish provided by carcasses in streams has been related to increased juvenile growth rate and body size, improved fish condition, improved overwintering survival, and ultimately increased ocean survival.

The benefits of nutrient enhancement are wide-ranging too. Over 70 species of wildlife directly benefit from feeding on salmon carcasses, and another 25 species benefit indirectly (for example, by eating the bugs that fed on the salmon).

Historically there were many more salmon returning to northwest streams. Because there are fewer salmon now, there are fewer ocean derived nutrients being transported to our salmon-bearing rivers. One researcher estimated that about 7% of historic levels of

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David Dalan, his daughter Julia, and son Gage, prepare to launch surplus hatchery salmon into the Tucannon River

marine derived nitrogen and phosphorus is currently reaching northwest streams.

Nutrient enhancement offers a way to help maintain the productivity of salmon streams. Surplus hatchery fish may be the ideal way to replace nutrient deficiencies. And judging by the hollering and laughing, probably the most fun way to do so.



GREAT TURNOUT FOR OUR ANNUAL MEETING

On December 6, a room full of people (around 30) joined us at the Courtyard by Marriott for our annual public meeting. In a break with tradition, this year's event featured a screening of a documentary rather than a lecture—2014's "Wild Reverence: The Wild Steelhead's Last Stand," which has been featured in the Wild & Scenic Film Festival and the Big Sky Documentary Film Festival.

After light refreshments and socializing, the evening kicked off with the official welcoming of our two new board members, Peggy Willcuts and Mike Bireley. Our Executive Director Brian Burns, Education Coordinator Andrew Bassler, and AmeriCorps volunteer Alex Coak also provided updates on what our habitat restoration and education programs accomplished in 2017—see the articles from Brian and Andrew elsewhere in this newsletter for more about what they've been up to.

The main event, however, was the movie. After an injury ended his professional skiing career, director

Shane Anderson returned to his childhood haunts on Washington's Olympic Peninsula in search of the steelhead he'd loved fishing for as a boy. Dismayed to find their numbers diminished, he traveled up and down the West Coast in search of answers about what had become of them, chronicling what he learned about the effects of fish hatcheries, habitat loss, dams, and more in a documentary. Despite some minor technical difficulties with the DVD playback near the end of the running time—during which a drawing was held for hats bearing the Tri-State Steelheaders logo—the film was a thought-provoking experience for our members and supporters in attendance. If you missed the meeting, you can watch it online at vimeo.com/ondemand/17698 for a small fee.

Keep an eye out this fall for details about plans for our 2018 annual meeting. We hope you'll join us once again!

INTRODUCTIONS ARE IN ORDER

Last fall, we added a new member to our team—Donna Jones, who has taken over as our Administrative Assistant following the retirement of Cheryl Cockerline. Donna is a graduate of Whitman College and has lived in Walla Walla for the past 41 years. Her husband is a farmer who grows wheat, peas, and garbanzos in addition to owning and managing a 27-acre vineyard, and together they have two children and two grandchildren. After working for many years at Whitman College, first in the President's Office and later in the Office of Fellowships and Grants, Donna also worked part-time in several local wineries and

enjoyed time with her family prior to joining Tri-State Steelheaders. Welcome, Donna—we're delighted to have you!

The membership of our board is changing, as well. Dr. Peggy Harris Willcuts, one of two new members of our board of directors, is a Senior STEM Education Consultant in the Office of STEM Education with



*New board member,
Dr. Peggy Willcuts*

Pacific Northwest National Laboratory in Richland. There, she focuses on the research and evaluation of outreach professional development efforts in K-12 science education, as well as the impact of partnerships between scientists and classroom teachers. She has a B.A. in Biology from Whitman College, a M.Ed. from Eastern Washington University in Science Education, and a doctorate in Education Leadership from Washington State University, where her doctoral dissertation was on the impact of scientist-teacher partnerships in professional development. Peggy has spent the last 38 years in science education, having been a K-8 science specialist and district Science Coordinator in the Walla Walla School District and as a consultant in science and STEM education. Nearing retirement, she wanted to get back into the community by becoming a part of an organization that is close to her work as a science teacher and a biologist, which is what has led her to get involved with Tri-State Steelheaders. She hopes to inform and assist with our local education efforts.

Mike Bireley, our other new board member, majored in Wildlife Science at Oregon State University prior to serving 30 years with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's Enforcement Program, primarily in the southeast Washington area. He has also worked at Washington State University in Natural Resources Leadership program development and at Walla Walla Community College as Director of the William A. Grant Water and Environmental Center and was the Executive Director of Tri-State Steelheaders from 2010 to 2013. Currently, Mike resides in College Place, where he enjoys a wide range of fishing activities and shooting sports. "I look forward to serving once again with Tri-State Steelheaders as a member of the board in support of the organization's excellent ongoing salmon restoration and community outreach efforts," he says.

It takes the efforts of a lot of people to keep an organization like Tri-State Steelheaders thriving—we couldn't accomplish what we do without our staff and board. Thank you all!



New member and Board Secretary Mike Bireley

OUR NEWEST AND YOUNGEST SUPPORTER

Donations from local community members are an integral part of the funding for Tri-State Steelheaders' programs, and we want to give a special shout-out to our youngest donor—Madi Cumby Brown, a fifth grader at Sharpstein Elementary.

"Madi receives a bi-monthly allowance, and she is expected to set a minimum of two dollars aside each month to donate to a charity of her choice," says her mother Kati. "Madi has previously also used her birthday as an opportunity for collecting donation items for charitable organizations in lieu of birthday gifts."



This year, Madi has decided to split the donation from her allowance between two local organizations, one of which is Tri-State Steelheaders. Madi was introduced to Tri-State Steelheaders at last year's Return to the River Festival. "After I got to try fly-fishing this summer," she says, "I thought more about the fish in our area." Knowing that our organization relies on donations to help fund our education program, she decided this was something she wanted to help support.

Thanks, Madi! We couldn't do the work we do without supporters like you.

IT'S THAT TIME....

...to check your membership!!!

Joe Fish
123 Street
Walla Walla, WA 99362

12/31/17

How can I find out when my membership expires?

Easy! - Look at the date on your mailing label.

If you're past due, we hope you'll continue to support our mission with your membership.

If you've already renewed - THANKS!

SALMON IN SCHOOL GROWING

While 2018 has just gotten started, the Salmon in School program has already passed its halfway point in our local schools. The spring chinook salmon, once freshly fertilized eggs leaving the hatchery, have grown to become inch-long fry. Their yolk sacs, which provided them the nourishment they needed to grow to this stage, have been absorbed. As fry, they will need to be fed twice-daily by the students and staff at each of our ten schools. The fry will need to build their strength and stamina to get ready for their abrupt introduction into the wild this spring, when they will be released into Mill Creek, the Touchet River, or Yellowhawk Creek.



We are welcoming two new schools to the program this year. Mr. Gregg's high school science classroom at Touchet High School and Mrs. Claasen's 4th grade class at Pomeroy Elementary both have embraced their new salmon tanks with open arms. Mr. Gregg's tank is visible from the busy hallways in Touchet, allowing students of all ages to observe them and monitor their growth. Mrs. Claasen's tank is set up in the hallway, giving fellow elementary classrooms a great viewpoint as well. While each of our tanks are managed by one teacher and class, giving the entire student body a chance to get familiar with our native salmon is the goal.



Alex Coak, AmeriCorps volunteer, provides a salmon lesson at Rogers School (above). Salmon diorama (left) created by Angela Davis' Prescott class with gyotaku fish prints made during Salmon in School lessons.

Once the fry are big enough, we will be PIT tagging a small portion of them. A PIT (Passive Interactive Transponder) tag is a tiny radio transponder that does not require a battery. It contains a 10-digit alphanumeric number that sends a radio signal when it is in range of a PIT tag detection antenna. There are hundreds of PIT tag detection sites located along rivers, streams, and dams throughout the northwest. The antenna then relays the information to a database, allowing us to track the salmon's migration patterns. Thousands of anadromous fish are PIT tagged and monitored

to give fish biologists a better understanding of migration and population trends. Tagged salmon can be monitored on the PIT tag detection website, www.ptagis.com. The fry need to be a minimum of

65 millimeters long (about 2 ½ inches) to handle the grain of rice-sized PIT tag. Last March, WDFW fish biologist Joe Bumgarner graciously donated his time and expertise to tag about

40 spring chinook salmon fry from our Prescott tank. We plan to tag another group of fry from a tank this year as well, and will be able to see where they travel once we release them.

We thank all of our members and donors that have supported Salmon in School. The teachers and students truly do enjoy the program. Giving students exposure to salmon and the environmental issues integral to their survival is the key goal, and it is being accomplished thanks to your support. Keep an eye on our Facebook feed this spring, as each school will be releasing their salmon into our watershed and we'd love to see you at the salmon release events!

ALTERNATIVE GIFT FAIR TALLY

This year's event, hosted by the Sustainable Living Center on December 2nd, featured 22 local non-profit organizations. Donations received by the Steelheaders will provide:

**Salmon in School
Classes to Receive
Fish Art Lesson** **2**

**Fishing Poles to
Raffle at Kids'
Fishing Days** **5**

**Trees for
Habitat
Restoration** **36**

SHERWOOD TRUST GRANTS CHANGING OUR BUSINESS

Thanks to two grants from Sherwood Trust, we are literally changing how we do business. In 2015, we received a \$10,000 grant from Sherwood to update our business plan. The new plan, adopted in October 2016, makes recommendations for additional staffing, fundraising, and organizational goals.

A second Sherwood grant, received in 2017, supports some of the actions called for in the Business Plan. One of these actions was to hire a project manager. However, we had no more work stations available. Thanks to the grant, late last year we were able to update our office furnishings. Doing so created two new work stations in the office, allowing for future staff growth. In addition, the grant fully supports the project manager position for the first year, and partial support in the second and third years. We were in the process of interviewing candidates at the time this newsletter was being written and plan to introduce our new staff in the spring newsletter.

MILL CREEK PLANS TAKE A BIG STEP FORWARD

In December we wrapped up engineering and design for fish passage in Mill Creek between Park Street and the upper end of the concrete flume at Roosevelt Street.

In past phases of Mill Creek work, the largest section of design completed was about 1,400 feet. Other design phases were much shorter. With over 10,000 feet of concrete channel, we were hoping to accelerate our rate of progress. This project, funded by the Salmon Recovery Funding Board, resulted in construction ready plans for 5,000 feet of channel.

We don't expect to construct all of this at one time, but as opportunities of funding and channel access arise, we will be ready to move forward.

Channel access will be a major challenge to future phases. This section of Mill Creek is mostly residential, and densely developed. Finding space to get into and out of the channel is critical. Just as critical is having some space for staging of materials.

The design report and plans can be viewed at tristatesteelheaders.com/mill-creek-passage-2008-present/

Fishing 101

FOR KIDS

We're partnering with the YMCA to offer this opportunity for kids to learn the basics of fishing in this hands-on class. Kids will learn fishing regulations, how to cast, set the hook, and how to reel in. Parent participation is advised for the fishing trips.

For more information: www.wwymca.org/2018-winter-spring-fishing-101/

Location: Bennington Lake (transportation included)

Ages: 6-12

Dates: Saturdays, 4/14 - 5/12

Times: 10 AM-noon



FOR ADULTS

If you'd like to learn fly fishing, here's your chance! this introductory course includes five two-hour classes that cover the basics. Casting practice is included.

Location: Our office and Pioneer Park

Dates: April - May class is already full.

Summer dates TBD

Times: 5-7pm

Watch Facebook or our website for announcement of a summer session



Tri-State Steelheaders is supported by funding from U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's *Partners for Fish and Wildlife*, and by funds administered by Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife





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Tri-State Steelheaders

is a 501(c)3 non-profit
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Visit us online at www.tristatesteelheaders.com

Thank you for your support!!!

Tri-State Steelheaders' mission is to restore sustainable populations of native salmonids by enhancing habitat, providing public education, and promoting recreational angling.