**A Celebration of the Chehalis Watershed!**

By Janel Bistrika, Watershed Coordinator for the Chehalis Basin Partnership and Grays Harbor College

The 7th Annual Chehalis Watershed Festival, held on Saturday September 15th at Morrison Riverfront Park in Aberdeen, turned out to be another wonderful celebration of our Chehalis Watershed. The Festival is a great example of our whole Chehalis Watershed Community coming together to do something special for our citizens while also showcasing how unique and special our watershed is.

There were a variety of exhibitors each with a hands-on activity for kids and information about the Chehalis Watershed. Fin, the 28 foot long fiberglass salmon, was at the Festival for kids and adults to enjoy, as well as 5 schools the week prior to the Festival to teach kids about watershed education and the salmon lifecycle. We try to visit a different elementary school each year with Fin so if your school hasn’t been visited yet, stay tuned, you might be on the list for next year!

Festival attendees were able to catch a rainbow trout at the Chehalis Basin Fisheries Task Force fishing pond, and then had the option of the Chehalis Tribe cooking the trout over a fire. The Chehalis Tribe also held their traditional salmon bake, with delicious-tasting salmon for everyone to enjoy! The Salmon bake is something attendees and exhibitors alike look forward to each year.

The City of Centralia won top honors in the 5th Annual Chehalis Basin Drinking Water Taste Test, with McCleary, Chehalis and Aberdeen also competing this year. Centralia has won 4 out of 5 times…are they putting something in their water or is it just that good? Participants in the drinking water taste test get to sample each city’s water in a blind taste test and then vote for their favorite, either A, B, C, or D. Overall, each city’s water received many positive comments from taste-testers indicating that all of our cities are doing a good job at providing clean, good-tasting water for its citizens.

Some of the other hands-on activities for kids and their families included a fish printing art activity; building a monster bug, touch and feel antlers, bones and other critters, learning the age of a salmon through looking at one of its scales through a microscope, learning about the geology of the Chehalis Watershed, and seeing how litter, chemicals and other debris ends up in our waterways using a hands-on watershed model.

We also held a prize raffle drawing featuring a grand prize of a 1-night stay at the Great Wolf Lodge with 6 water park passes and a $250 gift card for the stay. One lucky boy from Aberdeen got to take home the grand prize and other winners received prizes including gift certificates, coloring books, water bottles, backpacks and camping equipment.

For the 3rd straight year the Festival was sponsored by local organizations, businesses and government entities. Thanks goes to the Chehalis Tribe, the Chehalis Basin Partnership, the Chehalis Basin Education Consortium, the Chehalis River Council, City of Aberdeen, City of Centralia, City of Montesano, East Grays Harbor Rotary Club, Grays Harbor College, Grays Harbor County, Grays Harbor County Marine Resources Committee, Great Wolf Lodge, Hoquiam Rotary Club, and the Washington Coast Sustainable Salmon Partnership. A very dedicated and hard-working committee also helped in the planning of this year’s event and several volunteers helped on the day of the event! This event would not happen without everyone coming together to hold this fun, free, hands-on family event for our Watershed. Thank you to everyone who is involved!

For more information about the Chehalis Watershed Festival please contact Festival Coordinator Janel Bistrika (360) 538-4212 or email jbistrik@ghc.edu.

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**Draft Regional Salmon Plan Released**

By Dana Dietz, Washington Coast Sustainable Salmon Partnership

After three years of workshops involving many people throughout the Coast Region, the first draft of the Washington Coast Sustainable Salmon Plan was released in June by the Washington Coast Sustainable Salmon Partnership (WCSSP). The draft Plan is available at www.wcssp.org. A second draft will be released before the end of the year.

The Washington Coast Region represents the last best chance for the Pacific Northwest to get it right. We still have the fish, and we still have a number of functioning watersheds. What we need is a road map to get us moving in the right direction. This Plan starts that journey. We need to do both: “Protect the Best” and “Restore the Rest,” the two components of WCSSP’s motto and outlook.

Does this mean that we have healthy salmon populations? No, it does not. But we have a fighting chance here of returning their habitats and their numbers to something closer to historical health.

This Plan was developed to restore and protect the region’s salmon habitats by bringing together coalitions and partnerships aimed at safeguarding and restoring the natural function of the regional ecosystems in which salmon live, not only for the fish themselves but also for the human communities that depend on salmon.

Salmon are key components and indicators of healthy freshwater and estuarine ecosystems. Juveniles can be found at times throughout the entire ecosystem – from headwaters to ocean. They feed on invertebrates that are also indicators of water quality. They are sensitive to changes in water quality, temperature and turbidity, as well as to changes in river flows and nutrient cycles. More natural, complex and productive ecosystems support healthier and diverse salmon populations; less healthy ecosystems have less capacity to grow juvenile salmon. The complexity of the interactions between salmon at different life stages with habitats and ecosystem processes that affect them requires an ecosystem-wide approach.

The strategies in the Plan are organized into five separate categories: Education and Outreach; Habitat Protection and Restoration; Harvest and Hatcheries; Economic Tools; and Regulatory Effectiveness. Within each are a series of Strategies and Actions Steps crafted specifically to maintain naturally functioning ecosystem processes that will support abundant salmon populations, while directly addressing or mitigating the critical threats to salmon sustainability.

Overall, the Plan contains twenty-four specific strategies addressed in 200 action steps, many of them well beyond the capacity of any one organization or agency. To address this challenge, the Plan is guided by an overarching strategy to organize, promote, and maintain broad partnerships through the four Lead Entity Groups that make up the Washington Coast Sustainable Salmon Partnership.

The WCSSP Coast Region includes four Lead Entity Groups, including the Chehalis Basin/Grays Harbor County Lead Entity Group (LEG). The others are the North Pacific Coast LEG, the Quinault Indian Nation LEG and the Pacific County/Willapa LEG. These four groups came together in 2007 as a “federation of strong lead entities” to form the Washington Coast Sustainable Salmon Partnership. Each of these groups has been doing salmon habitat restoration work for over a decade, and has developed particular strategies for habitat restoration in its area. These strategies and more information about each LEG are available at www.wcssp.org. Each of these LEG strategies has prioritized project lists for protecting, preserving, and restoring habitat, as well as recommendations for solving data gaps. The lists are regularly updated as projects are completed or new ones are identified.

WCSSP is now seeking feedback and public comment on the draft Salmon Sustainability Plan for the whole Coast Region. There is an online option to provide comment at www.wcssp.org, or you can email your comments to Dana Dietz at danajd@wcssp.org. In addition WCSSP will be giving presentations and accepting feedback about the Plan at regularly scheduled citizen group meetings in the region in the next several months. The presentation can be oriented around a specific topic that your group is interested in, and no prior knowledge of salmon restoration, maintenance or sustainability is required! If your group would like such a presentation, please contact Dana Dietz or Miles Batchelder at (360) 289-2499 or email danajd@wcssp.org or milesb@wcssp.org.

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**Project Opens Up Fish Passage on McDonald Creek**

By Janel Bistrika, Watershed Coordinator for the Chehalis Basin Partnership and Grays Harbor College

During the Spring and Summer of 2011, the Grays Harbor Stream and the Chehalis Basin Fisheries Task Force partnered together to write a grant for a culvert replacement project on McDonald Creek in Elma. This is just one of the projects of the entire McDonald Creek Restoration Project, headed up by Elma High School student Jarred Figlar-Barnes. The group was successful in receiving the $66,500 grant from the Salmon Recovery Funding Board and the project was completed just this last month.

There was an under-sized shot-gun culvert (two round pipe culverts side by side) that created a fish passage problem, especially for juvenile salmon, who spend time growing up and living in McDonald Creek, and for adult salmon returning to spawn. The project replaced the shot-gun culvert with a 40 foot steel bridge, which allows fish passage for all life stages of salmon. Large woody debris (LWD) was also placed in a few locations just downstream of the bridge to help provide better habitat for salmon and other critters in the stream. A volunteer riparian planting will take place later this fall, and will complete the restoration project at this site. The bridge will be used and maintained by the landowner, Dave Spalding, to haul his farm tractors and even his cows across when moving them to other fields.

There are already fish taking advantage of the improvements made so far. In one pool off the creek, Jarred counted more than 300 fish, including Coho, Cutthroat trout, sculpin, and lamprey. Jarred also noticed some small critters checking out their new home, including a mink, red-legged frogs, and numerous birds. For the last two years Jarred has been doing “fish plants” in McDonald Creek, in which he places spawning Coho pairs of salmon in different sections of the creek to pair up and spawn. Over the last two years he has identified over 15 different redds. This fall will be the last year of his “fish plants” and starting in 2013 we should see some of the Coho salmon come back as adults and start spawning in McDonald Creek, to complete the salmon lifecycle.

This project was the first fish passage project Jarred identified on his 40-project long list for McDonald Creek. When you do stream restoration and fish passage projects, it is important to start downstream and work your way up. However, on McDonald Creek, several other important restoration projects have taken place concurrently with this project, including the construction of the new hospital in Elma. As part of the hospital project, they re-meandered McDonald Creek to put it back into its relic channel, widened it, added LWD and stream gravels, and later they will be doing a riparian planting. Getting this fish passage project completed on the lower section of McDonald Creek is an important first-step towards improving the entire length of McDonald Creek. The successes of other projects upstream of this one were directly dependent on the completion of this first fish passage project further downstream so it was vital to get it done.

There were many individuals and groups to thank for helping get this project off the ground, including Lonnie Crumley of the Chehalis Basin Fisheries Task Force, the landowner Dave Spalding, project engineer Fred Becker, the Habitat Work Group for the Chehalis Basin Lead Entity, the Grays Harbor Conservation District and Mason Conservation District, Elma High School students, and Grays Harbor Stream Team volunteers.

Jarred is planning to keep working his way upstream to fix other fish blockages and improve the riparian section of the stream where it’s possible. If you would like more information about this project or the overall McDonald Creek Restoration Project contact Jarred Figlar-Barnes, jfiglarbarnes@yahoo.com or Janel Bistrika, jbistrik@ghc.edu, (360) 538-4212.

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**First of its kind in Washington State: Linking USFWS scientists with local students to survey freshwater mussel populations!**

By Kathy Jacobson, Chehalis Basin Education Consortium Coordinator

The Chehalis Basin Education Consortium (CBEC) in partnership with its sister watershed education project, South Sound GREEN, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Evergreen State College and several local schools recently launched a pilot freshwater mussel monitoring project. Our native freshwater mussels are an indicator species that reveal the health of the river, however, not much is known about the presence or absence of these mussels in the Pacific Northwest.

With funding received from USFWS' Connecting People With Nature Initiative and ESD 113, the following teachers and their students are participating in the project: Martin Woodruff, Rochester Middle School Science teacher; Heidi Kirk, Olympia High School science teacher; Quinn Crowell, Aspire Middle School Science teacher, NTPS; Elizabeth Thiel, Komachin Middle School Science teacher; and Linda Mesiter, Director, East Grays Harbor Alternative High School. We only invited middle and high school teachers for engagement in this meaningful and hands-on biological water quality monitoring activity!

Along with CBEC Coordinator, Kathy Jacobson, four staff from the USFWS have been assisting teachers and their students with this pilot project: Teal Waterstraf, biologist and project lead, Taylor Goforth, education and outreach, Howard Gearns, biologist and safety officer and Dan Spencer, also a fisheries biologist. In addition, James Morrill, an AmeriCorps volunteer with South Sound GREEN has been assisting.

Through this project, volunteer student groups are helping us collect data that help us determine:

1) The distribution and relative abundance of different native freshwater mussel species

2) Changes in the distribution and abundance of native mussel species over time and

3) The presence of exotic mussels.

The project was kicked off with a Mussel Academy conducted by USFWS biologist Teal Waterstraf, at the WET Science Center, and with a field trip to the Chehalis River mussel field site. Thirty-nine students from the five schools were selected to become their "class experts" on mussels and to take on leadership roles as each school monitored at their own site. During the Mussel Academy, students and adult volunteers waded into shallow waters, using “observascopes” to note the presence or absence of native freshwater mussels. Biologists, wearing dry suits snorkeled alongside student monitors. The student monitors used surveying protocol developed by the USFWS and the Xerces Society.

The students and other community volunteers will share their mussel data with other student groups, natural resource agencies and with their local communities. By studying native freshwater mussel populations, students and other community volunteers will be able to observe and help measure the long-term degradation – or recovery of aquatic ecosystems. To date, three of the five schools have completed their fall mussel monitoring, with more surveying hopefully to occur in the late spring.

Identifying mussel species in the field is educational, fun and challenging for our citizen scientists! Riley Moody, an 8th grader from Rochester Middle School shared, “I really liked the Mussel Academy. I learned how to identify the different freshwater mussel species, and learn about the invasive ones.” Cooper Mcleod, also an 8th grader from Rochester Middle School added, “It was so interesting learning about the different types of mussels, and if the native ones go extinct, we may not have clean water. One mussel can filter like 15 gallons of water in one day!”

The USFWS has a blog about the project with more details, written by USFWS intern Meghan Kearney:
[http://facesofnatureusfws.blogspot.com/2012/09/the-best-field-trip-ever.html](https://mail.ghc.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=R1awTTQT2kyYcwrpmtHUfijz5Jk3dc8IgdYMzJNdp0EUTq-bPVjvjfnhnjpVpBeMeVHWqDnbuOM.&URL=http%3a%2f%2ffacesofnatureusfws.blogspot.com%2f2012%2f09%2fthe-best-field-trip-ever.html).

For more information about this project contact Kathy Jacobson, CBEC Coordinator (360) 464-6722 or email kjacobson@esd113.org.

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