

SALMON WATCH 2003: FAUNTLEROY CREEK

Once again our salmon count was disappointing, but we were encouraged by the continuing interest of our volunteers. A nod once again, as well, to our volunteer leadership team: Sherry Richardson (watcher liaison), Tom Linde (monitoring), Steev Ward (biology), Phil Sweetland (logistics), Judy Pickens (coordination), and Dennis Hinton (media relations).

THE NUMBERS

Number of coho spawners sighted: 4

Number of redds: 1

Number of carcasses found: 0

Number of students hosted: 16

Number of visitors observed at the viewpoint: 192

WATCH METHODOLOGY

Our watch procedure was the same as last year. Scheduled for 30-minute increments, volunteers watched during the five hours after daylight high tide. Thus, we were able to have volunteers on duty at the most opportune times. Watchers were responsible for signing up for time slots and finding a substitute if they were unable to come as scheduled.

Watchers performed a walk-through of the spawning reach to become familiar with subtle changes, noting any fish, carcasses, redds, or changes in the water or surroundings. Our form also encouraged notation of observations they deemed relevant. Had we had numerous fish, watchers would also have done a stationery count from a bridge to record fish that went upstream and stayed there.

We provided a supply of forms on plain paper for dry days and "Rite in the Rain" paper for wet days. Watchers picked up a fresh form at the start of each visit and returned the completed form to a notebook kept available to volunteers and agency staff throughout the watch.

We recorded weather conditions (barometric pressure and local precipitation) and monitored the cove for spawners. Exceptional flow during a major storm in late October punched through the sand berm on the beach to restore a stable mouth, greatly reducing the need for volunteers to shift logs to keep the mouth open.

VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND COMMUNICATION

We relied heavily on returning watchers from last year and recruited new volunteers at our neighborhood fall-festival celebration in mid October. We also posted fliers and published a call for volunteers in community and church newsletters, on the community Website, and in the *West Seattle Herald*. A feature column in the *Herald* about the drumming included a way to inquire about watching.

New watchers and those who wanted refresher training came for one of two on-site training sessions. The packet each watcher received provided details in writing about methodology, guidelines for reducing spawner stress, and scheduling instructions, plus a layout of the host property. Bob Spencer with Seattle Public Utilities provided the pocket folders, as well as handouts about where to see salmon when in the region, brochures on natural yardcare and creek stewardship, and anti-glare glasses.

Except for a few watchers without Internet access (whom we telephoned), we relied on mass e-mails to provide not only information but also encouragement and a sense of participation during the six-week watch (October 23 - December 6). Forms, equipment, the master schedule, and updated information were continuously available to them on the Pickens/Sweetland porch - our "communication center."

COMMUNITY INTEREST

For our 33 veteran watchers and newcomers alike, the watch offered a "front-row seat" to observe the delicate balance between habitat and salmon, the tragic consequences of human impact, and the potential of community stewardship. Watchers ranged in age from children to elders (two from the nearby Kenney Home). Some volunteered as a family and some watched with friends. One middle-school student applied watch hours toward her community-service requirement.

Though difficult to gauge, the scarcity of spawners for the second year in a row may have begun to influence community interest. Potentially noteworthy in this regard:

- 16 of the 49 people we recruited did not follow through to become watchers. Several who did said that their time at the creek was a welcome respite, with or without fish, but "with" was clearly preferred.
- Three new teachers were among schools and home-school groups that scheduled field trips. All but one school, though, cancelled for lack of fish.
- The number of viewpoint visitors observed by watchers was down by 40 percent from last year.

For the third year, we kicked off the watch with a drumming to call the fish home. Thanks to notices in the *Herald* and at the viewpoint, we had inquiries from two experienced drummers (though neither attended). Because of coordinator illness, the event wasn't as well thought out as it might have been; the return to standard time brought early darkness and students expected to act out a story did not materialize. Nonetheless, Jamie Shilling again ably led some 75 people of all ages in spirited singing and drumming.

A writer for *The Seattle Times* inquired about opportunities to see fish and, when told of the situation this year here (and at other city creeks), she chose not to include Fauntleroy in the article. The lack of fish itself resulted in a front-page article in the *Herald*, including photo.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue to communicate with watchers throughout the year so that they are equipped with up-to-date knowledge and realistic expectations by watch season.
- Be more purposeful about tapping the watcher list for monitoring, field-trip support, or other special assignments.
- Continue on-site training of new and returning watchers in lieu of an evening workshop.
- Hold steady on watch methodology until we have enough experience with it to evaluate.
- Schedule the drumming before dark and be more purposeful about content.
- Be certain that spawners are present in the cove (schooling near the mouth) before scheduling student field trips.
- Follow up with information to the *Herald* about planned steps in the wake of this return to improve rearing habitat.

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