

Community Engagement Committee

Skagit Watershed Council, September 29, 2020, 9:30 am – 11:30 am

Present: Richard Brocksmith (SWC), Stacy Dahl (SLT), Lucy DeGrace (SFEG), Danielle Gartenberg (SFEG), Jeff Giesen (NCI), Pete Haase (SMRC), Olivia Hubert (SFEG), Beck Pittman (ACFL), Michelle Quast (ECY), Allison Roberts (Kulshan Services), Scottie Schneider (SWC), Karen Summers (SCEA and ECONet), Kevin Tate (Skagit PUD), Holli Watne (SWC)

1. Introductions, welcome, approve July meeting notes. People like the links Holli has included. No changes or objections. Consensus approval.
2. Member updates/ what are you working on?
 - a. SFEG –
 - Using Google Sites with bitmoji (cartoon avatars) to bring Salmon in the Classroom and Junior Streams Program to virtual classrooms.
 - No schools will have salmon tanks this year, but Padilla Bay will host one with live streaming for students. The fish release event will be at Hansen Creek in May 2021.
 - Two upcoming events: [Orca Recovery Day Riverfront Park Planting Party](#) (10/17) and [Make a Difference Day Planting Party at Carey's Slough \(Hamilton\)](#) on (10/24) with participant limits of 10 or 15.
 - Spawner Survey season has started, mostly with experienced volunteers.
 - Working on a Salmon Sightings Story Map to show where salmon are in the watershed. It will have information on various public salmon sighting locations, along with the times to expect sightings. This is a living document that will be updated..
 - b. ACFL (a.k.a: Friends of the Forest) –
 - Forest activities underway for small groups (>5 people).
 - Working with Anacortes Parks to host a camp for up to 10 kids at a time.
 - Planning small community hikes
 - Offering field trips in parks to K-3 classes in Anacortes.
 - Working with parent pod groups and/or homeschoolers.
 - Did a training for an outdoor preschool.
 - c. NCI –
 - Through the Whatcom Coalition for Environmental Education (WCEE), NCI is participating with programming at Kulshan and Shuksan Middle Schools.
 - [WCEE](#) is working to increase equity and the collective capacity and positive influence in environmental education. 15 nonprofit groups are working together pooling resources and expertise to respond during COVID as well as promote environmental education. WCEE has two people dedicated to this mission.
 - Working with Blaine SD (K-2) and Mt. Baker SD (6th) to on hybrid (on-line and in person) programs. Jeff estimates its about a \$250,000 endeavor. Blaine SD wants every kid back by end of the year.
 - Jeff is seeking perspective on EE in Skagit as he would like to do more in Skagit in 2021.
 - d. SWC –

- Sent our STEAM program resources for K-12 teachers to Skagit school districts.
 - Planning for a virtual Illuminight event. School programs will make the luminaries.
 - Working on a Story Map highlighting the bountiful Skagit River Watershed.
- e. SLT –
- Switched their engagement focus from youth to interpretive signs and the web cam at March Point Heron rookery.
 - No AmeriCorps intern this year.
 - Working with the Kulshan Neighborhood Program by providing seasonal Nature Bags with items that encourage outdoor learning and explorations.
 - Hosting monthly book clubs for people in Skagit and beyond. October book is: *Rare Encounters with Ordinary Birds*.
 - Not yet doing stewardship with public. Staff and the Land Stewards are handling the workload for now.
- f. MRC –
- Monitoring projects with youth have stopped, but forage fish work is continuing.
 - Salish Sea Stewards will be done virtually this spring 2021.
 - Pete has word that public lands may loosen restrictions to allow 5-6 kids.
 - Fidalgo Bay Day was virtual with contributions of activities from many CEC members. 100s of the passports went out through the YMCA, Boys and Girls Club, and others.
 - Working with the Salish Sea School in October, in-person activities with small groups
- g. Padilla Bay Reserve (updates provided by Pete) -
- Doing all school programs virtual. This is allowing them to bring programming to more schools outside of the Skagit area.
 - Kids on the Beach program will happen this fall with Conway, Sedro-Wooley and (maybe) Mount Vernon schools, plus some homeschool pods from Anacortes. The focus will be forage fish and seining. It will be a challenge to do this virtually.
 - Because they are under a state agency, they operate under the strictest COVID rules and likely won't be open until July 1, 2021.
- h. SCEA –
- Letterbox Trail will conclude October 5. They had 140 scans on the QR code, 20 mailed-in clue sheets, and good feedback from participants.
 - Working on the county contract to do Letterbox Trail next year.
 - Working with Justine Applebaum at Ecology on the “Don't Drip and Drive” campaign, bringing the message to auto mechanics.
- i. The Salmon Festival was not possible this year. Instead there was a coloring contest which ran through the Skagit Valley Herald, with great feedback and a lot of posters submitted.
- j. Skagit PUD is working on virtual tours of water treatment plants for school groups.
- k. Department of Ecology –
- Developing the Audience Survey for the temperature focused video series. It will be tested by partners this week/next, and shortly after it will go out to the public.
 - Working with a local drone pilot and collected footage for the videos.
3. K-12 Discussion: What communications have we had school districts and teachers? How are they running virtual classrooms? What needs do they have that we can help with?

- Many organizations reach out to the schools but haven't heard much from the teachers.
- Local school districts are not clear on their plans for the school year in terms of when/if/how students will be in classrooms.
- Padilla Bay (Annie England) has had success in direct communication with individual teachers, but it's a lot of work.
- Holli is working on setting up the STEAM Train for this year in Sedro-Woolley and Burlington-Edison School Districts. Though she hasn't heard back from other school districts yet, there is hope that these school districts' taking advantage of our programs will lead to other school districts following.
- Lucy reported that district level communication is tough right now. They have been focusing on communication with teachers they know already.
- Jeff confirmed that the smaller district leadership are easier to reach. Whatcom County schools (especially Bellingham SD) don't want individual schools to do things on their own; they want to maintain equity across schools and act on a district-wide level. Teachers don't have the power to make decisions about adopting programs.
- There is a huge need for social-emotional work with kids during this stressful time.
- Jeff Giesen – How can we build on the model in Whatcom? Do we have the capacity to facilitate something like that? It requires elevating awareness and support at the school district level and requires significant funding. Jeff wants to keep trying and not let the energy/potential of this crisis to go to waste. There is great public relations potential for participating environmental education organizations. Most of the districts have identified the youngest as at most need. He has high hopes for nature preschools in public schools. The focus in Whatcom is based on the following concept: “Work with the 10% of kids furthest from opportunity” (ELL, homeless, IEPs, low-socio economic status). We have experts who can work with these populations. Organizations in Whatcom gave up some of their individual funding to fund this effort. Some kids will have been without school interaction at all since COVID hit in March.
- Richard Brocksmitth – Many of our organizations are packaging existing curriculum to meet the need. How to modify what we do? Or do we do something completely different? We are hungry to get kids outside and want to keep trying.
- Organizations modeling modified field trips: [The Salish Sea School](#) (Anacortes), [ACFL](#) (Anacortes), [Glacier Peak Institute](#) (Darrington), [Vamos Outdoors Project](#) (Whatcom), Wild Whatcom ([Nature Labs](#) (K-5), [Wednesday Walks](#) (Grades 9+), and [Neighborhood Nature](#) (K-8))
- ***Holli will try to coordinate a follow-up meeting to discuss what can be done in Skagit.**
- Even though SFEG isn't doing Stream Stewards with Concrete, she knows that Glacier Peak Institute is doing it. They are embedded in the local community.
- ***The CEC agreed to put a discussion of a Virtual Conservation Tour on the agenda for next month's meeting.**
- Due to difficulties with school districts and youth, Allison asked if there is capacity and room to refocus some efforts on the larger community and adults too with collectively organized community events, movies, speakers etc.? She suggested the [All in on Climate event in Bellingham](#) and the [Bellingham City Club](#) as potential models for education events we could host in Skagit. The group expressed concern about virtual overload. What do we think can we do now? How can we go about this in a unified way?

- Pete noted that adult-oriented speaker events such as [Friends of Skagit Beaches](#) was largely cancelled after February. Holli is continuing to post recorded talks or educational films on the SWC Facebook page every Saturday... but they are never very popular posts.
- 4. How can we support each other during this stressful time? Discuss the idea of doing a regular virtual gathering to promote our emotional well-being like “Green Drinks”, to maintain environmental thinking and the social health within our community. ***The group supported hosting an event on Friday, October 30. Holli will be working on it and will keep it low-key in terms of effort.** Scottie suggested we have people in our CEC organizations invite 10 people they know to participate.

Adjourn 11:20 am

Next Meeting: Oct. 27, 9:30-11:30 via Zoom