



FAUNTLEROY
WATERSHED
COUNCIL

2002 ANNUAL REPORT

Established in 2001, the Fauntleroy Watershed Council provides a venue for citizens and agency partners to work toward common restoration and stewardship goals for Fauntleroy Park, Fauntleroy Creek, and other natural areas of the watershed. This report summarizes Council activities and accomplishments during 2002.

HABITAT IN FAUNTLEROY PARK

In January, Friends of Fauntleroy Park presented an extensive report of their weeding activities during 2001, including information about native and alien species. The report became a key reference document, particularly for development of a vegetation management plan for the park. Friends challenged the on-again/off-again project as a questionable expenditure. By year's end, Parks had negotiated a contract (for a reduced sum) to launch the planning process.

CREEK REPORTS AND PROJECTS

In February, the Creek Committee received a detailed assessment (commissioned by Seattle Public Utilities) of current barriers to fish passage in the culvert under 45th Ave. S.W. and the combined culverts under California Ave. S.W. and the church parking lot. Based on a review of options and possible costs, the committee decided not to pursue reconnecting the creek for fish passage but rather to continue student releases of coho fingerlings in the park and focus on maximizing downstream habitat.

In September, SPU's Chris Woelfel coordinated with volunteers to test how strategic placement of stones in the fish ladder might improve silt transport. Ruled stakes in silt deposits confirmed progress (more stones were added in October) and validated the efficacy of continued volunteer monitoring.

In November, fifth-grade students from Arbor Heights Elementary presented findings of the second annual benthic survey in the upper creek. At the same council meeting, Cathy Reidy, a graduate student at the University of Washington, presented an oral report on her examination of the hypopheric zone (the wetted area beneath the streambed) of Fauntleroy and other creeks. Both projects provided students with the opportunity to engage in real research and the community with worthwhile additions to our body of knowledge about the creek.

Preliminary work got under way in the spring for development of an erosion-control plan for Fauntleroy Park. With input from the Creek Committee, SPU finalized a consultant contract over the winter.

YOUTH INVOLVEMENT AND EDUCATION

The council partnered with the city, EarthCorps, and Consejo Counseling and Referral Service to provide a Summer Youth Employment Project for 16 Hispanic teens in Fauntleroy Park. Led and supervised by a Seattle Parks trails specialist and an EarthCorps intern, the work introduced the

Fauntleroy Park, Fauntleroy Creek, and Fauntleroy Cove are dominant natural features of the residential community in West Seattle that shares their name. From upland and riparian habitat in the 28-acre park, the creek flows one mile through a wooded ravine to the cove in central Puget Sound. The remainder of the 98-acre watershed is urbanized.

mostly female crew to trail-maintenance methods and basic job-readiness skills. The council organized our traditional end-of-project recognition on August 22 and presented each crewmember with a poster of photos from the summer. Seattle Parks Superintendent Ken Bounds and dozens of supporters from agencies and the community attended.

Field trips to the creek provided opportunities for 122 young people to explore riparian habitat and, for many, a welcoming place to release fingerlings raised in their classrooms. An equal number released their fish in the park with Seattle Parks naturalists.

COMMUNICATION

Chris Nack and Judy Pickens fleshed out our Website during the year to make it an efficient way for watershed residents, agencies, and organizations to get reliable information. We began electronic transmission of minutes and agenda to an "FYI" list of more than a dozen agency staff members and organization officials with an interest in keeping abreast of news from the watershed.

Judy continued to provide articles for *Neighbors*, the community association's newsletter (published only twice during the year because of a change in editors). We also continued publicizing upcoming meetings at the fish-ladder viewpoint and (thanks to Dennis Hinton's persistence) in the *West Seattle Herald*. Thanks to daughter Lori Hinton's initiative, the *Herald* published a feature about the summer project and a recap of the salmon drumming, which was our best publicity to date about when and where residents could witness the annual return.

SALMON RETURN

Lack of timely rainfall and disruptions in the cove when the spawners gathered were possible contributing factors to this year's dismal and disappointing coho return. Long-term, concern grew about unstable conditions at the mouth of the creek in Fauntleroy Cove. The bright spots this year were innovations in methodology, the dedication and perseverance of our volunteers, and the level of expertise and interest they and agency consultants brought to the watch.

Fish Count and Condition. Watchers tallied five adult coho (including one spawning pair), one redd, and up to three coho smolt, one cutthroat trout, and one sculpin. Volunteer examination of gill tissue from the spawned female found no parasites. In December, one of the church ministers inadvertently collected a cutthroat fry in Fenton Glen with water for a baptism, providing our first evidence of resident cutthroat.

Creek and Cove Conditions. Upstream conditions were prime except for water level (rains were nearly two weeks late). Volunteers cleared debris that might impede fish passage, stabilized banks with rock, created natural weirs, and with aid from the city, placed football-sized rocks in the fish ladder to direct flow and improve silt transport.

Our principal concern was the creek mouth, where construction activity in the cove (both ferry terminal and beach renourishment at Lincoln Park), heavy invasion of watercress, and many large drift logs (some treated with creosote) challenged spawners. We monitored them all and removed a large amount of watercress to ensure a navigable channel. Bill McMillan and Dave Grubb with Washington Trout assisted in assessing the logs crisscrossing the channel under the pier and State Fish and Wildlife granted us permission to move logs out of the way, as needed.

Since last year, the sand berm at the pier had grown sufficiently to force the creek mouth some 20 feet farther north, creating a very shallow and circuitous route throughout the season. In January 2003 after Washington State Ferries rejected our request to be party to finding a way to stabilize the mouth, the watershed council asked city and state agencies for help. Without a solution, the growing berm threatens to cut off spawner access from Puget Sound.

Innovations in Methodology. Three innovations broadened our observation and created a more rewarding experience for volunteers (as validated by post-watch survey). With a more robust return, they should also increase the value of information collected and the accuracy of our count:

- We focused watcher effort (in half-hour shifts) on the five hours directly after daylight high tides, which is when experience had shown that fish were most likely to be in the observation area.
- We added a walk-through of the spawning reach, using a tailored form with a field map, so watchers could get familiar with subtle changes and record live fish, carcasses, activity level, and spawning behavior. Watchers also counted in the traditional manner at a fixed point.
- To offset predation and wash-out, we supplemented weekly Washington Trout carcass monitoring by assigning one volunteer to come daily as warranted to tie bright, biodegradable yarn to each carcass, record its condition, and selectively take tissue samples for microscopic examination.

In addition, we required watchers to stop at our communication center to pick up an observation form then complete it for their watch and return it to a binder when leaving. Completed forms were thus readily available to upcoming watchers, watch leaders, and Washington Trout. The center had a white board, bulletin board, holders for forms and supplies, watcher schedule, and an enlarged field map for noting particular areas of check. In addition, we used mass e-mails, phone calls, and a "Watcher Extra" newsheet.

Volunteer Involvement. Watcher liaison Sherry Richardson worked with a total of 43 new and returning volunteers. Although the number and pace of returning fish were disappointing, watchers maintained an upbeat, hopeful attitude and all 19 responding to Sherry's post-watch survey said they plan to help next year. Six volunteers took leadership or special assignments in a horizontal structure that spread the load. SPU supported us in hosting a tailored training session complemented by a custom packet and creekside training.

To reduce human stress on spawners, we provided advice to watchers about how to keep noise and movement to a minimum, installed filter-fabric screening at key observation areas, and used signs to advise visitors to "act like a spy, not like a bear." Also, we solicited considerable advice this year from Washington Trout about coho behavior and possible factors at play in the low return. Sharing this information with our watchers greatly increased their knowledge and sense of involvement in what could have been a very disappointing experience.

Community Awareness and Interest. Publicity included flyers in the neighborhood and notices through Fauntleroy Church and the *West Seattle Herald* to recruit watchers, remind neighbors of the return, and announce our second annual drumming to call the fish home. The event drew nearly 100 participants to the fish-ladder viewpoint at sunset to kick off the watch with singing and drumming (led by Jamie Shilling), enactment of a salmon folktale (led by artists Mall Johani and Tom May), the first hoisting of our salmon sock (created by Kapka School), and a guest appearance by "Luna Lox," Mall's ghost salmon sculpture from the regional Soul Salmon project.

Watchers reported a total of 336 visitors observing the creek during the return period. Having early monitoring of the cove enabled us to give teachers due notice for field trips but, when the fish didn't come in, everyone cancelled except one Brownie troop. Judy Pickens made one classroom presentation in lieu of a field trip.

EMERGENCE MONITORING

Steev Ward devised a process for monitoring the emergence of the fry. The emergence that began in late February (from 2001 spawning) was apparently the smallest since 1999. The project provided baseline information and experience with the process, plus it enabled us to fix the earliest possible date for school releases and also know that some release fish could take advantage of food sources in the lower creek.

NEARSHORE HABITAT

Two concerns extended the council's attention to the nearshore. Early in the year, we reached an agreement with Washington State Ferries that allowed renovation of the terminal in Fauntleroy Cove to proceed, with due consideration for coho spawners returning at the same time to the cove and creek. Stipulations were that

- work would be scheduled from the beach outward to avoid activity at the mouth of the creek after October 8 (when spawners were first spotted last year)
- all work would be finished no later than October 15
- State Ferries would fund a fish biologist to monitor spawner behavior in general (as well as specific activities identified by State Fish and Wildlife)
- that we would revisit mitigation should the fish show signs of stress that might have stemmed from construction activity.

State Ferries met all of these terms except the last. The initial response of ferry representatives to the "crash" of the coho return was one of great concern, with indications of continued cooperation, especially in finding a solution for the build-up of sand at the mouth of the creek (see "Salmon Return"). When pressed by the council and the Fauntleroy Ferry Advisory Committee in January 2003, however, State Ferries disavowed any further role with the creek, citing budget constraints and plans to assess whether to rebuild the facility in 2008 or abandon it.

The other nearshore concern arose in the spring when we learned of plans by Seattle Parks and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to do further "renourishment" of the south beach at Lincoln Park to reinforce the seawall. We had two walkarounds on the beach with Parks, Corps, and State Fish and Wildlife representatives to discuss possible implications of deposited sand on nearshore vegetation and on the sand build-up at the mouth of the creek. Based on Parks' insistence that no research pointed to any concern about migration of the materials, we focused on the proposed timing, which would bring more construction activity to the cove in October as the spawners were gathering. The work proceeded, however, and only later through State Fish and Wildlife did we learn that research does exist to substantiate our concern about nearshore vegetation. We are expecting closer scrutiny by the state if further renourishment is ever proposed.

In the process of being a voice for the watershed, we developed and strengthened ties at city, county, and state levels that should continue to ensure that local interest and expertise are "at the table" when decisions are made affecting nearshore habitat.

COUNCIL MEETINGS

We sought and received a renewed commitment from Seattle Parks to support the council with regular representation, which began in May with the appointment of Don Allen, maintenance crew chief for the southwest district, as council liaison. Kathy Minsch continued her active involvement on behalf of Seattle Public Utilities. Other agency staff members have participated in specific projects, either at council meetings or behind the scenes.

The council continued its pattern of meeting every other month on the second Thursday evening, except July when illness and vacations forced postponement of business. The Executive Committee met between sessions and the Creek Committee met as needed.

CONTACTS

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