

2024 ANNUAL REPORT



**FAUNTLEROY
WATERSHED
COUNCIL**

This was a year when the many lessons learned while preserving, restoring, and stewarding natural features of this urban watershed seemed to pay off. Most notably, we

- documented another record number of spawners that found the healthy habitat they sought in this small urban creek.
- hosted one of our biggest salmon-release seasons ever.
- welcomed more differently abled students for creekside experiences.

SALMON

The Pacific Northwest's iconic species again warrants top billing in our annual report because we set multiple salmon records in 2024 - for participation in our annual drumming, spawners coming into Fauntleroy Creek, salmon watchers, and students learning in the watershed.

EGG DISTRIBUTION. Achieving these records started with distribution of eyed coho eggs on Jan. 4 to 14 participating schools in West Seattle. They were among 70 public and private schools across the city that participated in the Salmon in the Schools program this year. Soon water-quality problems at two schools necessitated replacing their eggs. Through the four-month rearing season, volunteer Phil Sweetland helped teachers succeed (and keep their good humor) in spite of the unexpected.

We're down to one fat fish who is probably pretty lonely because he ate all his friends.

Shannon Crowley, Sanislo Elementary

OUT-MIGRATION. Coho smolts that survived nearly a year in the creek began leaving for saltwater on March 18, just three days after new traps went into the upper and lower creek. Eagle Scout candidate Ben Vornbrock tapped family members and fellow Scouts as he designed, built, and installed the traps.



As demonstrated by monitor Diana Spence, Ben Vornbrock's traps proved to be easy to use and kept smolts safe from predators until monitors could count and release them. The project earned Ben his Eagle Scout rank and his troop a salmon release.

Dennis Hinton coordinated volunteers who checked each trap twice daily through May 15 and made additional visits after rain to clear debris. To ensure that smolts caught in the upper trap safely continued their out-migration, monitors transported them to just below the lower trap, as authorized by State Fish and Wildlife. They documented 30 robust smolts leaving for saltwater (eight from the upper creek; 22 from the lower creek). They also recorded 222 fry leaving for saltwater a year early, plus seven dead fry.

RELEASE SEASON. As coordinated by Mid Sound Fisheries Enhancement Group, elementary and high-school students from White Center did the first releases on March 29, a month earlier than West Seattle schools. Between then and May 31, 746 students, plus 299 adults, younger siblings, and Scouts released 2,018 coho fry in the upper creek except when limited mobility made the lower creek more accessible. Volunteer Jack Lawless reared 380 fry as backup so all students would have at least one to release.



WELCOMING ALL STUDENTS. Education has always been a major component of what we do and this year we gained experience hosting differently abled students on field trips. After seeing salmon grow in their school’s tank, several elementary students and their aides participated in releasing those fry in the upper creek. Older students and their aides released their fry and saw activity in the spawning reach.

Volunteers interested in learning the ropes joined release regulars Dennis Hinton, Tom Trulin, and Shannon Ninburg as students got their fish safely in the water and explored nearby habitat. Additional volunteers made sure trail conditions and flow at the release site were ideal, provided hospitality for the many students who had lunch on the Pickens/Sweetland patio adjacent to the fish ladder in the lower creek, and told the environmental story behind Bruun Idun, a troll sculpture in Lincoln Park. Our welcome extended to providing a safe and engaging field-trip experience for more than two dozen special-needs students.



(L-R) Preschoolers wore their salmon hats to release fry with Dennis Hinton. A pitcher enabled most students in Bridges, the school district’s transition program for young adults, to release their fry. Bruun Idun’s environmental story capped Pathfinder K-8’s release field trip.

SPAWNING SEASON. We opened the season on Oct. 13 with our annual drumming to call in coho spawners. A record 100 guests from infants to elders brought a variety of drums and noise makers to the Pickens/Sweetland parking area. Jamie Shilling led the singing, drumming, and activities for young children, emcee Judy Pickens advanced the theme of “wonder,” and Dennis Hinton reported spawner status. Chaz Hastings loaned his audio gear and introduced the unique sound of tabla drumming. At the close, attendees checked out habitat-related signs installed for the season in the spawning reach.

On Nov. 1, a record 27 watchers documented the first of 19 spawners and the general public had a look during our weekend open creek. With no more fish for a week, we called off the watch on Nov. 10. Since 1994 when the first spawners in modern history came into the creek, the count had ranged from 0 to 274, so we accepted that 19 could be it for this year. A few watchers persevered, however, in case especially high tides brought in more.

“More” proved to be an understatement. On Nov. 14, a second wave of two-to-



Judy Pickens, Jamie Shilling, and Chaz Hastings engaged everyone during the annual salmon drumming.

seven-pound, vigorous spawners began pouring in from Fautleroy Cove. Daily counts ranged from 76 on Nov. 15 to zero by Nov. 24. Without watchers to ensure visitor safety during the second wave, we invited volunteers to stop by and bring guests. All told, we recorded 397 visitors, including student groups from preschool to high school, and documented three cutthroat trout.



LOG RELOCATION

Mark Sears led a September work party to move drift logs imbedded in the sand where the creek flows across the beach in Fautleroy Cove. He also checked daily as spawners arrived and monitored carcasses near 45th Ave. SW.

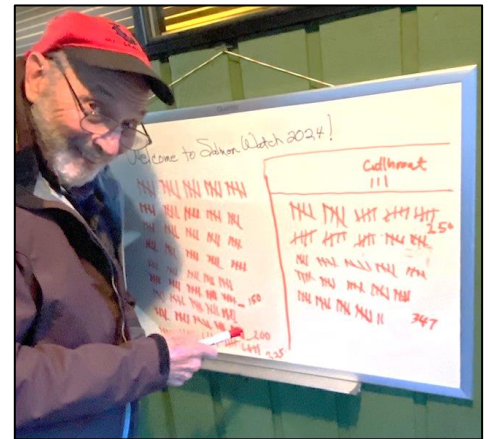
Salmon numbers were high this year throughout central Puget Sound. Many of our spawners had their adipose fin (which some hatcheries clip off to mark that the fish are not wild). This suggests that many of our 347 spawners could have been wild strays and/or unclipped hatchery fish that came in here after sniffing clean water. A few may have been returning.

Congratulations! Your group has done some amazing restoration work and it is paying off.

Executive Director Greg Shimek
Coastal Cutthroat Coalition

Fautleroy Creek had an amazing season! Thanks to all the stewards that work so hard to make it all happen!

Steve Damm, Seattle Public Utilities



(L-R) Coho spawners queued in the surf awaiting high tide. Salmon watcher Ryan Baum leaned in close to hear questions during a visit by The Bridge School Cooperative Elementary. Official tallier Dennis Hinton filled the watch board with tick marks after spawners came in.

SALMON DATA

Year	Eggs	Released Fry	% Fry From Eggs	Live Smolts Upper	Live Smolts Lower	Smolts to Salt	Spawners	Release Students	Spawning Visitors
2024	2,600	2,018	78	8	22	30	347	872	397
2023	2,600	1,797	69	11	30	41	34	780	224
2022	1,950	1,624	83	2	9	11	254	460	441
2021	1,500 ⁴	1,061	---	15	34	49	244	130 ²	400
2020	2,400 ²	2,069	86	22	55	77	2 ³	50 ²	5 ²
2019	2,400	2,006	83.5	4	18	22	19	730	125
2018	2,400	1,955	81	26	19	45	18	662	240
2017	2,400	1,817	---	18	14	32	4	744	?
2016	2,900	1,795	62	14	5	19	7	764	67
2015	2,700	1,700	63	2	33	35	0	750	?

² Approximate ³ 1 live/1 dead at mouth ⁴ Participation reduced by pandemic

Data since 1990 are posted at fautleroywatershed.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/SalmonDataTable.pdf.

RESEARCH & EDUCATION

STUDENT RESEARCH. This year, we continued to support two annual studies that give elementary students real-world experience.

■ **Exoskeleton count:** On April 23, fourth graders from Louisa Boren STEM K-8 did our annual count of stonefly exoskeletons in the spawning reach. Their total was the lowest since 2011. Torso length was similar to prior years. The students advised doing the count in March, closer to peak emergence.



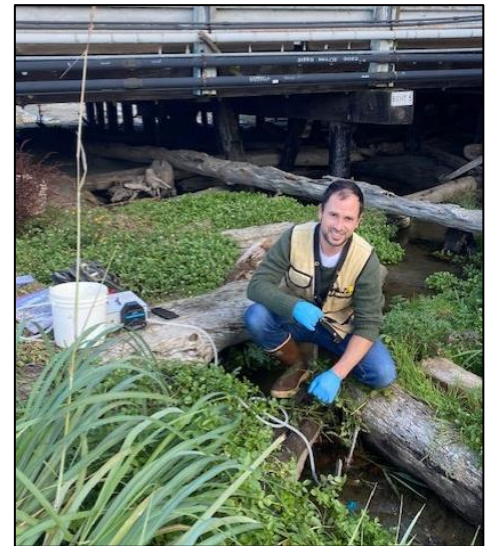
(L) Tracking torso length is part of the annual exoskeleton study. (R) Shannon Ninburg processed exoskeleton-count findings with Boren students and teacher Beth Mahrt in the lower creek.

■ **Benthic sampling:** On Nov. 1, fourth graders from Boren did our annual benthic sampling for macroinvertebrates, reporting four in the upper creek and 10 in the spawning reach, both similar to prior years. Varieties at both sites require good-quality water. They credited nutrients left by spawners for making macro-invertebrates more abundant and bigger in the lower creek.

SALMON IN THE SCHOOLS. Freshwater tanks across the city focused lessons on science, math, and other subjects and also encouraged responsible stewardship. Salmon in the Schools-Seattle provided teacher training in October for our 14 participating schools, eyed coho eggs in January, and ongoing curriculum and technical support throughout the rearing season, and our volunteers assisted with release field trips. Phil Sweetland and Judy Pickens continued on the program's citywide leadership team.

PROMOTING LEARNING IN OTHER WAYS. Part of our commitment to teachers is making connections to enhance the environmental learning opportunities they direct. This year, we

- invited salmon watcher Julia Stavnitski to be our liaison with area preschool teachers wanting to make the most of the creek and park as learning resources.
- connected the staff at Roxhill Elementary with volunteer woodworkers who cut salmon profiles for students to paint and hang on the school's playground fence.
- connected the science teacher at Summit Atlas charter middle/high school with water-quality specialists at the State Department of Ecology. They briefed her students on their research, engaged them in sampling creek water that would be tested for the chemical causing salmon pre-spawn mortality, and involved them in reporting the data.
- heard reports by Summit Atlas students about woody plants from the park and neighborhood they chose to research.
- cooperated with a student project at Summit Atlas to apply to ArbNet to declare Fauntleroy Park an honorary arboretum and list our watershed council as the applicant of record.



OTHER RESEARCH

Adrian Tuohy took samples on the beach in the fall as part of the Wild Fish Conservancy's ongoing research to compare near-shore habitat heavily impacted by development with pristine sites. Findings add to knowledge about species abundance and diversity, behavior patterns, and geographic distribution.

ACCESSIBILITY & STEWARDSHIP

WAYFINDING IN FAUNTLEROY PARK. This year, salmon watcher Tracy Randle and her team of dedicated volunteers made considerable progress in creating a digital map for exploring and appreciating the natural beauty of Fauntleroy Park. She and designer Sam To put in *many* hours to draft the map and make sure it will work well in print form at park kiosks and digitally through a QR code accessible by smartphone.

Visitors may use the map to navigate existing nature and tree walks, notice other points of interest, and link to additional information on the park section of our website (<https://fauntleroywatershed.org/index.php/park/>). This ambitious project is almost ready for public launch and will soon be a valuable resource for visitors in general as well as educators and students exploring the park's natural habitats.



The dense gravel path that Scouts installed in February is improving park access for visitors who rely on wheels.

WHEELED ACCESS. Thanks to a suggestion by Seattle Parks, we made progress this year in improving wheeled access within Fauntleroy Park. Eagle Scout candidate Kai Longmeier and her crew from Troop 681 installed a dense gravel path at the SW Barton Street entrance to give visitors using wheelchairs, walkers, and strollers a firm surface between the sidewalk and the trailhead.

CULVERT REPLACEMENTS. The city's replacement of the impassable creek culvert at 45th Ave. SW reached a design milestone this year following community input.

In addition to dropping a proposed overlook into the ravine, planners added screening to reduce visual impact and restrict unauthorized access into the ravine. A two-year period of construction is penciled in to start in spring 2026.

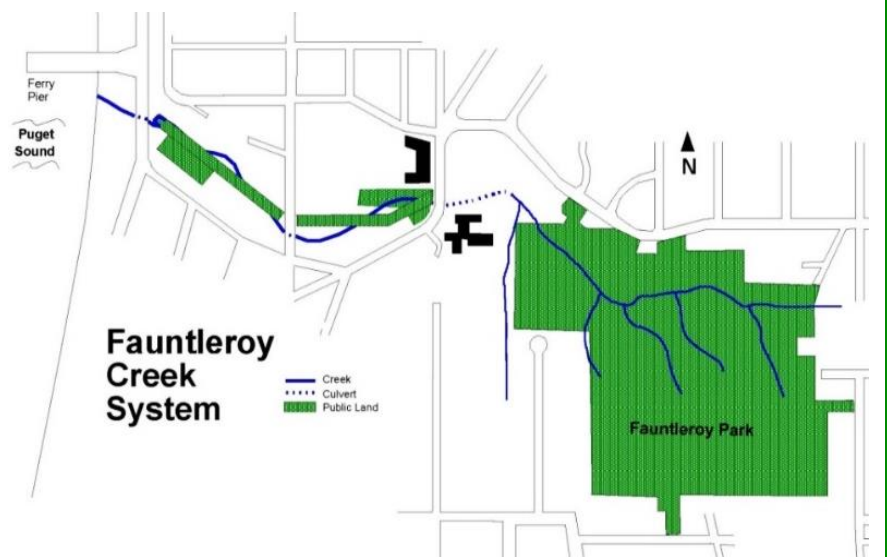
Upstream, planning for replacement of the remaining impassable culvert under California Ave. SW and the Fauntleroy Church parking lot is poised to resume in 2025 after the two parties negotiated a deal to relieve the church of a substantial financial burden. In June, the congregation voted to cede property to the city for the new culvert in exchange for the city's taking immediate responsibility for both existing and new culverts. Watershed council members Judy Pickens and Phil Sweetland have been involved in this process since its inception in 2017. The city will be bringing its preferred design to the community for input.

ABOUT THE WATERSHED

Fauntleroy Park, Fauntleroy Creek, and Fauntleroy Cove are the dominant natural features of the residential community in West Seattle for which they are named.

Fauntleroy Park is a 28-acre wooded ravine preserved as natural space. Its network of well-maintained trails provides access to explore and enjoy a remnant of the forest ecosystem that once blanketed this region.

Fauntleroy Creek originates in the park and drops 300 feet over its one-mile course to Fauntleroy Cove in central Puget Sound. Springs and runoff from a 149-acre watershed sustain flow year round. Prior to the city's installation of the drainage system that captures most stormwater runoff, 493 acres drained into the creek.



KILBOURNE RAVINE STEWARDSHIP. We invested in one EarthCorps crew day this year to prevent invasive species from re-establishing along the middle reach of the creek. A six-year project to restore beneficial habitat ended in 2019, and annual maintenance has been necessary ever since. With scant grant funding for such work, we dipped into our Fauntleroy Watershed Stewardship Fund to finance the work. English ivy, wild clematis, English holly, spurge laurel, and Himalayan blackberry were among the crew’s target species. We informed Seattle Parks about to invasives the crew found in the Kilbourne Park portion of the ravine.

FAUNTLEROY PARK STEWARDSHIP. While volunteer stewards Karen Farnsworth and Charlotte Linton kept an eye on maintenance needs in the park, we referred several to the Seattle Parks crew chief for this area. Topping our list was finding a long-term solution to the seep that for years has muddied the northwest entrance to the park, which is heavily used by school groups during salmon releases and is part of our self-guided nature walk in the park.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

IN THE MEDIA. The *West Seattle Blog* conveyed watershed news to peninsula residents as follows:

- January - distribution of salmon eggs, park accessibility project
- March - 45th culvert replacement, home hatch from spawning
- May - church/city culvert-replacement agreement, new smolt traps; multiple articles on salmon releases
- October - salmon drumming, first spawners, public open creek
- November - spawner record

WEST SEATTLE BLOG
NEWS 24/7

Neighbors, the quarterly newsletter of the Fauntleroy Community Association, conveyed watershed news to residents as follows:

- March - accessible access into the park, culvert replacement at 45th Ave. SW
- June - salmon releases, smolt report
- September - preschool emphasis, church/city culvert replacement
- December - spawner record, 45th Ave. SW culvert replacement

NEIGHBORS



FAUNTLEROY FALL FESTIVAL. This annual all-ages community event on a sometimes-damp Sunday afternoon in October connects neighbors and provides fun activities to participate in or watch unfold. Cathy Follis and her team of volunteers at the watershed table assisted 110 young children as they decorated paper coho profiles that, when stapled fore and aft, became festive hats.

WEBSITE. Webmaster Chris Nack reported a 7% increase in page views in 2024, with the most popular topics being natural features of the watershed, Fauntleroy Creek, and our tree walk in Fauntleroy Park. The bulk of referrals came as a result of links published in *West Seattle Blog* articles.

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Total Users			968	1,002	749	878	849	1,777	1,869	2,292
New Users	2,329	1,544	955	995	74	873	847	1,771	1,868	2,270
Sessions	2,710	1,904	1,187	1,187	1,048	1,115	1,123	2,021	2,414	2,994
Page Views	4,681	3,915	2,531	2,368	1,805	2,188	2,632	4,209	4,743	5,077
Duration in Minutes	0.04	0.07	0.06	0.05	0.04	0.14	0.10	1.29	.51	.44

Note: In 2016, teachers began going to the Salmon in the Schools-Seattle website instead of ours for learning resources.

ADVOCACY

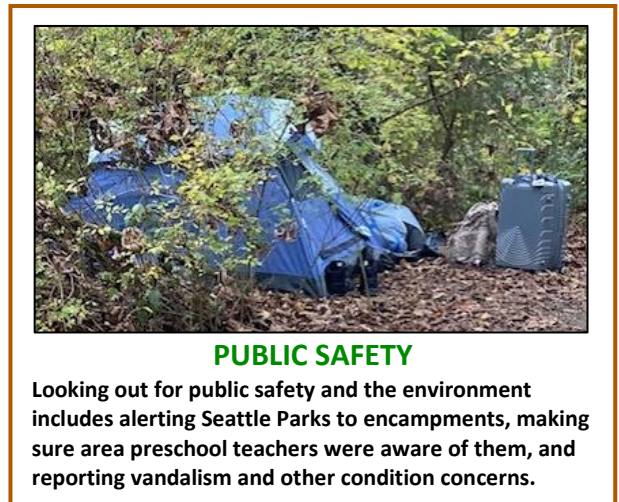
HOUSING DENSITY. In response to a legislative mandate that cities adopt policies to increase housing density, the mayor issued his draft One Seattle Plan for public comment by late December. Judy Pickens encouraged other watershed council members who had not yet commented to join her in emphasizing how the proposed plan would significantly reduce open space; create heat islands for people, plants and wildlife; and significantly add impermeable surfaces that would increase the potential for flooding, landslides, and water pollution. Other comments noted that, unless infrastructure capacity increased along with housing, demand on the sewer line running through Fauntleroy Park could fail, with major consequences for delicate habitat there.

ACCESS TO PARKS/NATURAL AREAS. Rosalie Miller commented this year on behalf of our watershed council on the city's draft update of its comprehensive plan for parks and natural areas, emphasizing the lack of attention to improving wheeled access. She advocated for access for all, including those served by programs for persons with disabilities.

SEATTLE WATERSHED ALLIANCE. As a founding member of this all-city collective, we joined with other watershed stewards to advocate changes to Seattle's tree ordinance that would better preserve and enhance the city's tree canopy, for including funding for street trees in an upcoming transportation levy, and for putting more emphasis on potential environmental impacts of proposed upzoning to increase housing density across the city.

COMMERCIAL NET PENS. Several members of our watershed council signed onto advocacy spearheaded by the Wild Fish Conservancy to end commercial net-pen aquaculture in state waters. Topping our list of concerns was a history of Atlantic salmon escapements that posed a threat to the future wild Pacific salmon in Puget Sound. Early in 2025, the Board of Natural Resources made its temporary prohibition permanent.

FERRY-TERMINAL REBUILD. Council member Judy Pickens served for a fourth year on the community group advising Washington State Ferries as it plans to rebuild the Fauntleroy Ferry Terminal. She advocated for Fauntleroy Creek and nearshore habitat as well as for public safety in the residential neighborhood.



RECRUITMENT & ENGAGEMENT

Everything we have accomplished as watershed stewards and advocates requires volunteers to bring skills, enthusiasm, and an ability to see jobs that need doing. As veteran volunteers look toward downsizing or moving on, we made great progress this year in recruitment, as well as offering fresh opportunities to existing volunteers. We posted a list of volunteer opportunities on our website, had it available to visitors during our open creek, and met right away with potential recruits. Newcomers who stepped up this year were

Dave Gershgorn, a journalist and photographer, is shooting our activities and reviving our Instagram presence.

Chaz Hastings, a habitat specialist with a keen ear for drumming and eye for tasks that need doing.

Ted Holmes, a retired salmon teacher, is now mentoring a new salmon teacher at our area high school.

Ryan Lewis, a restoration specialist now our liaison with EarthCorps and wildlife poster lead.

Julia Stavnitski, a retired teacher, is making the creek and park more available to preschool teachers.

John Sturtevant, a writing consultant with his hand up for anything having to do with the creek.

Jesse Todhunter, who started focusing on salmon while he took a break from program management.

HONORABLE MENTION

Patrick Sand, who with fellow *West Seattle Blog* publisher Tracy Record communicated all our newsworthy activities this year, including covering our salmon drumming just a few days before his sudden passing.

Tracy Randle and Sam To, colleagues who gave generously of their time and expertise to get our complex wayfinding project almost to the finish line this year.

Ben Vornbrock, his family, and fellow Scouts for designing, building, and installing our superb smolt traps.

Tom Trulin, who said yes every time we asked, including when we needed photos.

Kai Longmeier and her fellow Scouts for improving wheeled access to Fautleroy Park.

LOOKING AHEAD

With the fresh energy that comes with new volunteers and opportunities, we expect 2025 activities to include

- creating an informative and inviting **wildlife poster** for Fautleroy Park kiosks and our website.
- encouraging schools to include **special-needs students** in salmon-related learning and in releases.
- cooperating with the community and city toward the best possible design for **fish-passable replacement creek culverts**.
- maximizing the benefits of **digital wayfinding** in Fautleroy Park for students and other visitors.
- continuing to engage with the state toward a ferry-terminal design that protects the creek and nearshore habitat.
- continuing to **recruit volunteers** and enable them to contribute in satisfying ways.

COUNCIL BUSINESS

MEETINGS. The council met this year on second Thursdays in January, March, May, September, and November on Zoom. All meetings were open to anyone interested in stewarding Fautleroy Creek, Fautleroy Park, and other natural areas in the watershed. Judy Pickens and Dennis Hinton proposed agendas and tended to other matters between meetings

CHECKING ACCOUNT. We began the year with a balance of \$960.93 in our checking account at Washington Federal and, thanks to council members' picking up small expenses, closed with the same balance.

STEWARDSHIP FUND. Since 2018, EarthCorps has accepted tax-deductible donations to our Fautleroy Watershed Stewardship Fund to support maintenance needs for which grant funding is not available. We began 2024 with a balance of \$14,460.66 and over the course of the year received \$2,720 in donations. Expenditures, including a 15% administrative fee, totaled \$2,999.76 for one EarthCorps crew day maintaining restored habitat in the Kilbourne Ravine. The fund closed the year with a balance of \$14,180.90.

■ **To donate on line:** Go to earthcorps.org/donate/donate-now/ and check "This gift is in honor or memory of someone" and enter "Fautleroy Watershed Stewardship."

■ **To donate by check:** Write "Fautleroy Watershed Stewardship" on the memo line and mail to Development Office, EarthCorps, 6310 NE 74th St., #201E, Seattle, WA 98115.

<https://fautleroywatershed.org/>

Thanks to Tom Trulin, the West Seattle Blog, and Kevin Freitas for use of their photos in this report.