

SALMON WATCH 2019 REPORT

Article for the West Seattle Blog

Salmon Watch 2019 on Fauntleroy Creek closed Nov. 4 with a total of 19 coho spawners. The first made its way into the spawning reach on Oct. 21 - a day after the annual drumming to call them in.

Later that week, volunteer watchers spotted 30 robust fish schooling near the creek mouth due south of the ferry pier in Fauntleroy Cove. Watchers also spotted a thicket of sea grass in the channel and called on State Fish and Wildlife to get the owner's permission to have a contractor, aided by volunteers, clear it. At the same time, an adjacent owner shifted logs on his beach that were also a barrier.

Spawners came in daily until the last arrived on Oct. 27. Given the fact that several were immature males, only one pair likely spawned and volunteers will monitor the spot in mid winter to see if "home hatch" emerge from the gravel.

Visitors during this "silver anniversary" of spawning on the creek included 27 students from Taproot School, 67 people of all ages during an Oct. 25 "open creek," and another 31 area residents on other days.

"In my opinion, all who witnessed these spawners have a remarkable emergency effort to thank," said long-time watcher Dennis Hinton. "From the watcher who saw spawners in distress to the team from Garden Cycles who dropped what they were doing to weed the channel to the donors that made paying the bill possible from our stewardship fund, it came together like clockwork."

Next up will be January delivery of eyed coho eggs from the Soos Creek Hatchery to West Seattle schools in the Salmon in the Schools program, for release as fry in May.

Notes from veteran watcher Dennis Hinton

Steve and Joey from Garden Cycles saved the spawning season on Fauntleroy Creek by spending four hours to remove vegetation, clear space around logs, install matting on a muddy bank, and remove debris from the mouth of the creek to enable fish passage. Donations to our Fauntleroy Watershed Stewardship Fund paid the bill.

With the 11.2 high tide that day, 16 vigorous spawners sprinted up the creek past the workers. By 5 pm, five had advanced to the spawning reach, some of which watchers documented above the first bridge - farther up than any spawners were seen last year. That gave purpose for an open creek along the spawning reach on Saturday, Oct. 25, which attracted 67 visitors. Other visitors included 25 students from Taproot school. Watchers witnessed the only spawning pair (upstream of the first bridge). The loving couple included a hatchery female and a feisty jack with an adipose fin, which means it could be one of ours. The watch officially ended on Nov. 4 after no rain and not seeing any spawners for a week.