NOOKSACK SALMON ENHANCEMENT ASSOCIATION

2025 IMPACT REPORT

Photo by Grant Kirkpatrick

MISSION

We engage our community to recover wild salmon for future generations.

VISION

We envision healthy watersheds that sustain abundant salmon.

BELIEF

We believe that salmon are essential to our environment, culture, and economy.

ABOUT NSEA

Focused on reversing the trend of declining salmon runs since 1991.

Salmon sustain ecosystems, cultures, and economies, nourishing forests, wildlife, and communities across the Pacific Northwest. But the rivers and streams they depend on have been altered and degraded. Recovery requires patience, dedication, and collective action. Salmon cannot speak for themselves. They need our help.
And we need to act now.

Since 1991, the Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association (NSEA) has worked alongside the community to restore salmon habitat. We partner with landowners, tribes, local businesses, volunteers, agencies, and other non-governmental organizations to help our community with valuable habitat restoration projects, education programs, and volunteer opportunities.

NSEA is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization.
Our federal tax-exempt number is 94-3140165.

All photos were taken by NSEA unless otherwise stated.

Read our 2025-2030 Strategic Plan

Dear Supporter,

As leaders of NSEA, it is an honor to work with you, our dedicated and engaged community, to take action to keep wild salmon here in Whatcom County for future generations. Thank you for the huge role you play in NSEA's success through your volunteer efforts, shared ideas, and donations. The level of passion and commitment we see in members of our community, the Board of Directors, and the staff is inspiring.

2025 was a year of growth and change for NSEA. Guided by the 2025-2030 Strategic Plan, staff and board forged an effective and solid working relationship to ensure that NSEA will thrive in the years ahead. Because of leadership transition and major funding shortfalls, the NSEA team dug in and got creative. New initiatives were implemented, staff and financial management were reorganized with integrity, and partnership opportunities increased our collective impact toward our mission. Through all that, you were our foundation and helped hold us up when we needed it most.

Please enjoy the accomplishments we made together in 2025 through this annual report outlining how our work meets each of our five strategic priorities set by the Board of Directors. The metrics and stories are full of examples of how our community continues to show up for one another, and for salmon, in generous and powerful ways, stepping up to create a healthy Whatcom County!

Rose Anne Featherston
Board President

Annitra Peck
Executive Director

Priority 1

Restore watershed habitat to recover salmon

The impacts of a warming globe, population growth, deteriorating water conditions, more extreme water quantity fluctuations, and habitat loss are more pressing than ever. This makes NSEA's work to restore habitat even more urgent for the well-being of salmon and people.

A restoration technician (5' 2") stands next to a spruce planted in 2019.

> *The fact that I get to help salmon as well as landowners is probably the most rewarding part of my job. I am proud that we benefit people from all walks of life. I truly enjoy meeting new people and coming up with solutions to help them as well as native salmon!*
>
> Eli DeWitt
> Instream Project Manager

2025 IMPACT

38,440 *Pounds of invasive vegetation removed*

33,367 *Native trees & shrubs planted*

3,612 *Salmon fry released*

65 *Restoration sites monitored*

39 *LWD installations*

Fish Habitat and Stream Stabilization

A coho salmon spotted in Kenney Creek after project completion.

Restoring resilient habitat is critical for the future of salmon and the health of our communities. One key strategy is reintroducing Large Woody Debris (LWD) into stream channels. Historically removed in efforts to "clean" streams and speed water flow, restoration science now understands that wood is essential for healthy rivers. LWD creates shelter for fish, scours deep pools, sorts sediment, and helps stabilize stream channels while dissipating the power of high flows.

In 2025, NSEA placed 39 pieces of LWD in Kenney Creek, a tributary to the North Fork Nooksack River, in conjunction with the removal of a fish ladder and perched culvert by Whatcom County and the installation of a 115-foot bridge to maintain access for residents and recreation. NSEA's work was funded by the Whatcom Conservation District and took place on property owned by the Whatcom Land Trust. This project demonstrates the impact of coordinated partnerships working toward shared watershed goals.

Kenney Creek is already responding. Wood structures that were nearly buried after installation are now fully engaged by the stream's flow. Spawning coho salmon were observed shortly after project completion, and steelhead trout have also returned to the reach. With fish barriers now removed, we anticipate that Chinook and pink salmon will also gain access to Kenney Creek and its improved habitat.

LWD is fully engaged in the stream after winter flooding occured.

Priority 2

Be a voice for salmon through outreach, education, and advocacy

Salmon need the support of a caring community. When people learn about salmon, they are more likely to care for and take action to protect our shared watersheds.

A student releases a salmon fry into Cedar Creek. Students write well wishes to say goodbye to the fish they raised.

> *Dear salmon, I wish you well,*
> *On this challenge you will tell,*
> *I hope you are one of two*
> *that will survive,*
> *I wish you well,*
> *I hope you thrive.*
>
> Central Elementary Student

Photo by Grant Kirkpatrick

2025 IMPACT

2,521 *Community members reached*

1,799 *Student scientists*

254 *Summer campers*

126 *Teachers*

77 *Field trips*

34 *Community outreach events*

We All Belong In Nature

For over 25 years, NSEA has ventured outside with fourth graders across Whatcom County in rain, sunshine, chilly mornings, and breezy afternoons to engage them with nature and place-based learning. Our Students for Salmon (SFS) program comes to life through these field trips, where each class studies a nearby stream to assess its health for salmon.

Students proudly show the problematic weeds they removed together.

When students arrive at their field site, the excitement is palpable. Many have personal ties to these places, sharing stories like, "I come here with my dad to go fishing!" while others are visiting for the very first time. Students then become salmon scientists and rotate through stations to study water quality, aquatic organisms, and native plants.

In every session, we work to ensure all students feel welcome and supported. This includes providing bilingual materials and translation tools. In one memorable moment, a student identified a leech, and the educator translated the word into their native language. The student lit up with recognition, exclaiming that leeches "sometimes stick to people and animals!" It was a joyful connection, bridging language, curiosity, and the natural world.

Each field trip ends with student-led restoration to improve the streamside habitat. Their pride and enthusiasm reflect the heart of SFS: learning outdoors, exploring through hands-on science, and taking action to restore local streams. We hope students will carry these experiences with them, creating a deep sense of belonging to their class, their community, and their local watersheds.

Priority 3

Engage community members to recover salmon

When people engage in salmon recovery efforts through impactful programs, their sense of stewardship grows. When we work together, we can accomplish more.

One of NSEA's regular volunteers beams with enthusiasm after a muddy day of planting trees and shrubs

> *Restoration isn't always glamorous. It often means braving cold rain, squelching through knee-deep mud, and wrestling with stubborn invasive vegetation. Yet volunteers and staff return time and time again, undeterred and full of purpose.*
>
> Sarah Brown,
> Stewardship Program Manager

Photo by Grant Kirkpatrick

2025 IMPACT

8,646 *Volunteer hours*

2,058 *Volunteers*

74 *Work parties*

70 *Landowner partners*

29 *Interns*

Terrell Creek: A Legacy of Stewardship

Terrell Creek cuts a quiet but vital path through the landscape of western Whatcom County, flowing through a tapestry of agricultural fields, neighborhoods, and even light industrial zones before reaching Birch Bay. This modest waterway plays an outsized role in supporting local wildlife, including coho and chum salmon, steelhead and resident trout, and over 170 bird species.

Terrell Creek has long been a source of both challenge and inspiration. NSEA's restoration work began here in the late 1990s. Since then, our relationship with the creek has deepened, both literally and figuratively. With partner agencies and volunteers, our work parties have focused on removing invasive vegetation, such as Himalayan blackberry and reed canary grass, and replacing it with native plants that stabilize streambanks, filter runoff, and provide shade to help keep water cool for fish. This creek has become a staple in our annual calendar, offering the public an ongoing opportunity to get their hands dirty for a good cause.

Every work party we're reminded that this is more than restoration – it's relationship building. With the land, with the water, and with each other. The creek has become a living classroom, a community gathering space, and a symbol of what's possible when people commit to caring for their corner of the world. Whether you've planted trees with us once or returned season after season, your fingerprints are on this landscape. And as Terrell Creek flows onward to Birch Bay, so does the legacy of everyone who has helped shape its course.

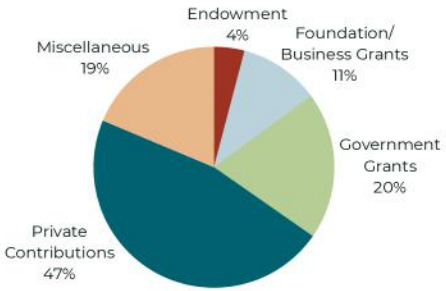
Photo by Luca Childers

Priority 4

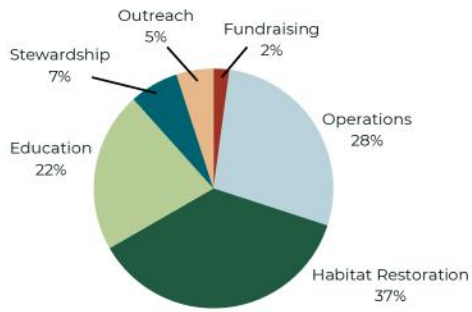
Grow NSEA's capacity to meet the demands for salmon recovery

NSEA's work is a long-term commitment. It is important to ensure necessary resources, staff, and funding to open new avenues for growth and impact in the world of restoration science and community collaboration. We must lay a strong foundation that can make progress toward our mission for the long-term.

REVENUE TOTAL: $3,458,834



EXPENSE TOTAL: $2,499,877



Additional revenue generated beyond expenses in 2025 was restricted for specific uses and investments by donors. Email info@n-sea.org if you would like to learn more about our financials.

Thank you to our funders:

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British Petroleum Foundation
City of Bellingham Public Works
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First Federal Foundation
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Lummi Indian Business Council
Mount Baker School District
Murdock Charitable Trust
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Recreation Conservation Office
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Tulalip Tribes Charitable Fund
U.S. Department of Defense Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
U.S. Forest Service
Washington State Conservation Commission
Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife
- Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account
Volunteer Cooperative Grant Program
Waste Action Project
Whatcom Community Foundation
- Celedo Fund
- HB 2078/Outdoor Schools for All
- Sustainable Whatcom Fund
Whatcom Conservation District
Whatcom County

The views and conclusions contained in this document are those of NSEA and should not be interpreted as representing the opinions or policies of our funders and their funding sources.

REGIONAL FISHERIES COALITION

Priority 5

Maximize impacts of salmon recovery efforts through partnerships

The challenges of our mission are beyond NSEA's capacity to accomplish alone. To maximize education, engagement and salmon recovery efforts, NSEA collaborates, coordinates and partners to amplify the results of our combined efforts.

Thank you to our supporters!

Your dedicated time, resources, and partnership are making Whatcom County a better place for salmon, wildlife, and our community. We are so grateful for you!

4th Corner Fly Fishers
Cady Adair
Adventures NW Magazine
Truman Affeldt
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Matthew Alford & Jenny Hurst-Alford
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Photo by Steve Lee

34 Years of Impact and Counting!

SINCE 1991

504,467 *Native plants installed*

408,883 *Volunteer hours*

105,340 *Pounds of invasive vegetation removed*

35,840 *Students engaged*

1,439 *Work parties*

147 *Miles of stream habitat opened*

NSEA's work across Whatcom County tells a powerful story of persistence, partnership, and hope for salmon recovery. What begins as a single tree planted or a student learning about salmon has grown into lasting, community-driven impact.

These numbers reflect more than milestones; they represent a community showing up, year after year, to ensure salmon and their habitat have a future.

Join our mission | **www.n-sea.org**

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