



How Washington
Communities
Are Restoring
Salmon Runs

Restoration

NARRATIVES

Washington State
Community Salmon
Fund Grant Program
2000-2006

Creating a Stewardship Corridor

"Protecting the health of the Nisqually watershed translates directly into economic, cultural and ecological benefits — not just for visitors to Mount Rainier National Park, but for all of us who live here; that's why we're pleased to see the community's growing commitment to the Stewardship Corridor."

DAVID UBERUAGA | SUPERINTENDENT
MOUNT RAINIER NATIONAL PARK



IMAGE: (L to R) Jim Wilcox of Wilcox Farms; David Burger of Stewardship Partners; and Billy Frank Jr. of the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission at Wilcox Farms. Photo by Gerald Lewis.

David Burger points through the fog and promises, "Mount Rainier's right there, you just can't see her at the moment."

Downstream from the fabled peak, along the Nisqually River, the director of Stewardship Partners tours a dairy operation and considers the future of the region. "We're fortunate," David observes. "For the most part, our watershed doesn't need restoring, so we can focus on conserving what's here." With help from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, his organization is facilitating community efforts to reconceptualize the watershed as a "Stewardship Corridor," a place where economic development and conservation are mutually beneficial.

The need for a practical strategy to protect natural resources in the area is evident. Towns with easy access to Olympia and Tacoma are spilling into some of the last and best salmon habitat in Puget Sound. Farmlands and working forests that also provide food and shelter for wildlife, panoramic views of Mount Rainier and buffers for the area's celebrated water quality are at risk. Billy Frank Jr., a Nisqually Indian elder, chairman of the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission and longtime conservation partner, says, "More people are coming, and we need to find ways to take care of this place."

To help address the challenge, three years of NFWF-funded civic engagement have transformed an outdated land-use plan into a comprehensive blueprint for protecting the ecological integrity of private properties located between large sweeps of public land — the headwaters of the Nisqually River on Mount Rainier and its outlet at the largest undeveloped delta in Puget Sound, the Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge. "Landowners are the best stewards; by working with them, we'll achieve much more for much less," David says.

As part of the plan, community partners inventoried and mapped critical habitat for fish and wildlife and crafted conservation guidelines for development, agriculture and forestry. In the process, Stewardship Partners has provided training and resources for the hiring of full-time directors for two volunteer-based organizations, the Nisqually River Council and the Nisqually Land Trust. They also helped the

Nisqually Tribe hire and launch staff to manage a computerized mapping system.

The most innovative aspect of the plan, however, is its suite of stewardship incentives, which will be activated in the next phase of the project. "This is more than a paper plan," David says. "This is a conservation and development 'how-to' manual that catalyzes fresh approaches. And, thanks to two decades of leadership by the Nisqually Tribe, the River Council and many others, people here can now focus on implementation."

To demonstrate how conservation incentives can leverage outcomes in the Nisqually, Stewardship Partners has introduced a NFWF-supported ecolabeling and marketing program called "Salmon-Safe" as part of its statewide rollout. Wilcox Farms, one of the largest landowners in the area and a major regional producer of fresh milk and eggs, is the first in the Stewardship Corridor to be certified "Salmon-Safe." CEO Jim Wilcox and his family have committed themselves to a series of voluntary measures on behalf of water quality. "We've gone a long way in recognizing that the river needs to be protected. We've changed our practices because we needed to do our part." In return, Wilcox Farms benefits from the label's enthusiastic reception by Northwest consumers who recognize that they can aid conservation practices with their purchasing power.

Of course, local support for Jim and his family's efforts is expressed in some ways that cannot be quantified. Jim's longtime friend and neighbor, Billy Frank Jr., claps him on the back. "We need to take care of each other in this watershed, to think about how we make a difference — to be proud of it."

"The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation believed in our stakeholder-driven process. They had confidence in our partnerships and in a voluntary, landowner-based approach to conservation. And their support was the spark for other funding."

DAVID BURGER | DIRECTOR
STEWARDSHIP PARTNERS

Projects: Nisqually River Stewardship Corridor, Salmon-Safe Certification

NFWF Grantees: Stewardship Partners, Salmon-Safe

Results: Stewardship Partners worked with stakeholders in the Nisqually watershed to develop an incentive-based multispecies conservation plan that includes guidelines for green building, low-impact development and architectural design;

recommendations on preserving working forests and agricultural lands compatible with economic development; and capacity-building of local conservation organizations. Stewardship Partners also expanded its certification and labeling program for farm products produced in accordance with salmon-friendly management practices. "Salmon-Safe" has grown to a statewide retail effort representing products from 23 farms covering nearly 4,000 acres.

Partners: Associated General Contractors of Washington, Fort Lewis, King County, Lewis County, Nisqually Indian Tribe, Nisqually Land Trust, Nisqually River Council, Nisqually River Foundation, PCC Natural Markets, Pierce County, Tacoma Power, Thurston County, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. National Park Service, Washington State Department of Ecology, Wilcox Farms

Grants: \$133,740
Local Match: \$209,558

See the appendix for other Stewardship Partners projects supported by NFWF.