

Students visit Clear Creek

to release salmon fry they've been raising in their classrooms.



When the children arrive at Clear Creek Trail on their assigned day, they split into four groups to learn about salmon habitat while they plant trees, test water quality, examine stream invertebrate, and release fish. The children are excited to plant and name their own tree, watch the water in their vials turn different colors according to pH and oxygen content, observe the many different kinds of life that can survive in the streambed, and name and release their own salmon.

Students from 33 elementary schools began tending their salmon eggs, donated by the Suquamish Tribe, this January when CK Kiwanis Club members delivered the eggs, aquarium, food, and educational materials to their schools. This week and next, nine field trips will bring more than 400 elementary students to Clear Creek Trail. Educators and volunteers from Clear Creek Task Force, Central Kitsap Kiwanis, and several county agencies and utilities will be there to provide a hands-on experience in habitat restoration. "Studying salmon helps students make the connection between what they do on the land and how it affects our waterways," said Pat Kirschbaum, Education and Outreach Coordinator for Kitsap County Public Works' Surface and Stormwater Management Program.



Salmon release field trips are "a hands-on way to teach young people the value of protecting Clear Creek," said Sandra Staples-Bortner of Great Peninsula Conservancy, the land trust which holds conservation easements on land around Clear Creek. One can already see the impact Salmon in the Classroom has made on the environment around Clear Creek Trail – and on the children who participate in it. "Our hope is that they remember what they've learned and choose to act on it in a positive way, to benefit our streams and environment, and pass their knowledge on to following generations," said Devon Steele, a Kiwanis volunteer.

The Salmon in the Classroom program has been a vibrant hands-on learning experience for Kitsap County students for 20 years. "I've seen parents who were on the field trips as children returning with their kids," chuckled long-time trail volunteer Randy Peterson. But, this year brings something very new to the program. Its leadership has changed dramatically.

In the past, Central Kitsap Kiwanis Club had single-handedly organized the entire program: providing tanks, salmon eggs, and support to elementary schools in CK, Bremerton, NK, and private schools. The wildly successful program had grown to more than 20 field trips a year to release salmon. Through it all, Kiwanis Club members scheduled the field trips with teachers, found volunteers to staff the stations, and obtained funding for bus transportation. Last year the club announced that it could no longer organize the program on its own and began looking for a partner to take it on. They approached many agencies including the schools, the county, and the Tribe. Without any takers, it was feared Salmon in the Classroom would be cancelled. That is something no one wanted to see.





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“The field trips had become such a large part of the program, teachers and students were clearly not looking forward to losing this experience,” Kiwanis program coordinator Bruce Van Woudenberg said. After some anxiety and some soul searching, the Kiwanis Club announced they were committed to continue to provide salmon eggs, aquaria, and support to teachers. The Suquamish Tribe was committed to continue to arrange for the Kiwanis to receive salmon eggs from their hatchery and

make required reports to Fish and Wildlife. But what about the field trips?

That question was on the minds of many of the partners who had previously played supporting roles in salmon release field trips. An informal leadership team began to take shape. Members of CK Kiwanis, Clear Creek Task Force, Kitsap County Health Department, Kitsap County Surface and Stormwater Management, Kitsap County Stream Team, Kitsap PUD, Bremerton Public Works Water Resources Division, and the community got together to come up with a plan.

This year, with Pat Kirschbaum of Kitsap County Public Works Surface and Stormwater Program serving as coordinator, the team offered 10 field trips on a first come, first served basis. No funding was available to offer bus transportation, so teachers have had to coordinate with their schools, their PTA, and their parents to find a way to get their kids to the creek. Teachers who are on the waiting listed for a field trip this year will have priority for one next year.

“It’s a step in the right direction,” said Clear Creek Task Force’s administrator Mary Zabinski. “Salmon in the Classroom is such a popular program that some of the 4th grade curriculum has been based around it. The hands-on learning that occurs on the field trips to Clear Creek is an essential, and very memorable, part of the program.” In the future, Zabinski hopes more field trips can be offered.

The Clear Creek Task Force is also concerned that some classrooms might have trouble transporting their students, whether because of lack of funding for buses or lack of parent volunteers to drive the children to the creek. The task force is seeking grants and donations to fund transportation for next year’s program. If you would like to get involved, please contact Mary Zabinski, Clear Creek Task Force administrator at 692-0929 or CK Kiwanis Member Bruce Van Woudenberg at 697-1026.



“This [program] is a wonderful opportunity for children”, said Staples-Bortner. “The dedication of Clear Creek Task Force and Kiwanis volunteers, with support from Kitsap County and public utilities, has made this program successful for so many years. We applaud the effort being made to continue the program.”