



Applying knowledge to improve water quality

Pacific Northwest

Regional Water Program

A Partnership of USDA NIFA
& Land Grant Colleges and Universities

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PNWWATER 178

Outstanding WSU Program:

Beach Watcher Program Receives Major Award



WSU Island County Beach Watchers monitoring with NOAA for juvenile Chinook salmon use of pocket estuaries.

When it comes to understanding the health of Puget Sound and its watersheds, Washington State University Extension Beach Watchers are among the leaders. For the past 20 years these dedicated volunteers have worked to improve watershed health of western Washington’s most precious and fragile resource – Puget Sound. In recognition of this outstanding public engagement program the Universities Council on Water Resources has chosen to recognize it with a “Public Service and Education” award at its annual conference in July, 2010.

WSU Beach Watchers are nearly 1,000 trained community members working in eight counties of northern Puget Sound. Receiving more than 100 hours of science-based training from top scientists and experts, organized by WSU Extension, they come into service ready for action as educators, scientists, and community leaders. They become the eyes and ears and mouths of Puget Sound.

They do this working hand in hand with many partners from local, county, state, federal, and private entities, all aimed at changing human behavior towards respecting water and natural systems that make up home in the Puget Sound basin.

WSU Beach Watchers educate and engage the public, especially shoreline and bluff residents, about how to improve water quality and aquatic ecosystems.

WSU Beach Watchers implement ecosystem-based and pragmatic local solutions to water resource problems. Here are a few examples:



WSU Beach Watchers participating in microplastics survey, South Beach, San Juan Island, WA.

- ◆ Protected nearshore and freshwater habitat by collecting data about algae blooms, invasive species, noxious weeds, water chemistry, shorebird, and marine mammal health.
- ◆ Mapped miles of Puget Sound shoreline for toxic creosote debris, subsequently removed by WA Department of Natural Resource crews.
- ◆ Taught thousands of children about marine life in classrooms and on beaches.
- ◆ Reduced unintended by-catch of species through a recreational crabber education program.
- ◆ Protected human health by collecting shellfish and water samples at public beaches for testing by accredited labs.
- ◆ Educated over 4,500 shoreline property owners about critical eelgrass habitat used by salmon, and engaged 1,000 in baseline surveys of their own beach property.



Pacific Northwest Regional Water Quality Coordination Project Partners

Land Grant Universities

Alaska

Cooperative Extension Service
Contact Fred Sorensen:
907-786-6311

<http://www.uaf.edu/ces/water/>

University Publications:

<http://www.alaska.edu/uaf/ces/publications/>

Idaho

University of Idaho
Cooperative Extension System
Contact Bob Mahler: 208-885-7025

<http://www.uidaho.edu/wq/wqhome.html>

University Publications:

<http://info.ag.uidaho.edu/Catalog/catalog.htm>

Oregon

Oregon State University
Extension Service
Contact Mike Gamroth: 541-737-3316

<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/>

University Publications:

<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/>

Washington

Washington State University
WSU Extension
Contact Bob Simmons:
360-427-9670 ext. 690

<http://wawater.wsu.edu/>

University Publications:

<http://pubs.wsu.edu/>

Northwest Indian College
Contact Charlotte Clausing:
360-392-4319

cclausing@nwic.edu or

<http://www.nwic.edu/>

Water Resource Research Institutes

Water and Environmental Research
Center (Alaska)

<http://www.uaf.edu/water/>

Idaho Water Resources
Research Institute
<http://www.boise.uidaho.edu/>

Institute for Water and
Watersheds (Oregon)
<http://water.oregonstate.edu/>

State of Washington
Water Research Center
<http://www.swwrc.wsu.edu/>

Environmental Protection Agency

EPA, Region 10
The Pacific Northwest
<http://www.epa.gov/r10earth/>

Office of Research and Development,
Corvallis Laboratory
<http://www.epa.gov/wed/>

For more information contact
Jan Seago at 206-553-0038 or
seago.jan@epa.gov

The Project

Land Grant Universities, Water Research Institutes, and EPA Region 10 have formed a partnership to provide research and education to communities about protecting or restoring the quality of water resources. This partnership is being supported in part by the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA).

Our Goal and Approach

The goal of this Project is to provide leadership for water resources research, education, and outreach to help people, industry, and governments to prevent and solve current and emerging water quality and quantity problems. The approach to achieving this goal is for the Partners to develop a coordinated water quality effort based on, and strengthening, individual state programs.

Our Strengths

The Project promotes regional collaboration by acknowledging existing programs and successful efforts; assisting program gaps; identifying potential issues for cross-agency and private sector collaboration; and developing a clearinghouse of expertise and programs. In addition, the Project establishes or enhances partnerships with federal, state, and local environmental and water resource management agencies, such as by placing a University Liaison within the offices of EPA Region 10.

WSU Beach Watcher volunteers are currently in Island, Skagit, Snohomish, San Juan, Clallam, Jefferson, Kitsap, and Whatcom counties. The program does not have a dedicated funding source and the grants that have sustained the program will expire by the end of 2010. Further funding is needed to continue this program in the current counties and to expand the program to all 12 Puget Sound counties.

More information can be found at <http://www.beachwatchers.wsu.edu>.



The 2009 WSU San Juan County Beach Watcher Class at Lime Kiln State Park.

National Water Quality Program Areas

The four land grant universities in the Pacific Northwest have aligned our water resource Extension and research efforts with eight themes of the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

1. Animal Waste Management
2. Drinking Water and Human Health
3. Environmental Restoration
4. Nutrient and Pesticide Management
5. Pollution Assessment and Prevention
6. Watershed Management
7. Water Conservation and Management
8. Water Policy and Economics

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