

# The Leader

## Salmon grow on trees

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At the 10th annual Plant-A-Thon, 175 volunteers from five schools planted 3,000 trees to improve salmon and wildlife habitat at the Tarboo Wildlife Preserve. Participating students were from the Port Townsend School District's OCEAN program, Port Townsend High School's Students for Sustainability club, Chimacum High School Pi Program, Swan School and Jefferson Community School. Photo by Charles Espey

The Northwest Watershed Institute Plant-A-Thon celebrated its 10th anniversary with another large-scale planting event at the institute's Tarboo Wildlife Preserve.

On Feb. 14, 175 youth and adult volunteer tree planters (45 were teenagers) helped to restore salmon and wildlife habitat, as well as mitigate climate impacts, by planting 3,000 native trees.

With the sound of a traditional drumbeat, Port Gamble S'Klallam tribal spiritual leader Gene Jones and his wife, Suquamish leader Marilyn Jones,

gathered attendees together in a circle on the Tarboo Wildlife Preserve east of Quilcene. Jones, a founding board member of Northwest Watershed Institute (NWI), welcomed participants with stories and a song.

“It’s really exciting to see such a fine group of people out here today – the big ones and the little ones, especially the little ones,” Jones said. “It’s important that we take care of our environment, and tree planting is part of helping to keep our waterways here clean and clear.”

Jones sang a traditional Suquamish prayer song by intertribal Chief Dan George to a spellbound crowd. With that, the group of children, teens and parents, dressed in colorful rain gear and mud boots, picked up shovels and broke into groups to learn the new techniques to be used to plant native trees near Tarboo Creek.

Since 2005, hundreds of students, parents, teachers and friends from seven local schools have participated. Collectively, they have planted more than 33,000 trees along Tarboo Creek while earning more than \$125,000 for school programming, said Jude Rubin, NWI director of stewardship.

This year, participating school groups include Port Townsend School District’s OCEAN program, Port Townsend High School’s Students for Sustainability, Chimacum High School’s Pi Program, and Swan School and Jefferson Community School in Port Townsend.

## STREAMSIDE FORESTS

The plant-a-thon is an education and outreach effort coordinated by NWI as part of the Tarboo Watershed Program, a long-term effort involving 40 organizational partners to protect and restore salmon and wildlife habitat from headwaters to bay in the Tarboo-Dabob watershed. Since 2004, more than 2,000 acres have been preserved, and more than 600 acres have been re-meandered, replanted and restored.

This year’s plant-a-thon returned to the Tarboo Wildlife Preserve, a 490-acre wildlife refuge managed by NWI. This was the second time that volunteers have tackled a challenging section of Tarboo Creek and nearby wetlands that is dominated by invasive nonnative reed canary grass, with the purpose of reviving native shrubs and trees. Streamside trees provide

shade, stream structure for shaping salmon spawning and rearing areas, and is the vegetative base of the food chain that supports young coho salmon during their first year of living in the stream before migrating to sea.

Innovative planting methods used successfully last year were expanded, Rubin noted. The methods include live-staking willows through cardboard to shade out the invasive reed canary grass. Rubin said another technique being used is based on the natural example of conifers growing on nurse logs in wetland forests. Volunteers planted spruce and cedar in hollow log rounds and constructed planter boxes to establish trees above the wet soils.

Although these special methods are both labor- and materials-intensive, she said that they had excellent survival rates. Standard methods of planting bare root seedlings and potted plants were also used, Rubin said.

## SPONSORSHIP

Funding for the plant-a-thon varies from year to year. The costs of trees, field supplies and staffing were funded by Jefferson County Public Health's Water Quality Division, with funding from the Hood Canal Clean Streams grant from the Washington State Department of Ecology. (See all the sponsors on a "Thank you" advertisement on this page.)

Many businesses contributed field supplies, and other businesses donated lunch to the participants. Port Townsend Students for Sustainability funded a bus to the event with proceeds they had earned from previous fundraisers. Transportation enabled 45 high school students – a record number – to participate, Rubin noted.

Students have raised about \$15,000 this year by selling "tree cards" with the artistic image "Infinite Moment(um)" by Jesse Joshua Watson, which depicts a child holding up a tree seedling within a swirl of salmon at all life stages.

## SALMON GROW ON TREES

Last November, before selling tree cards or planting any trees, students in participating schools studied “How salmon grow on trees, and trees grow on salmon,” gaining the big picture of the interdependence of salmon and temperate rainforests. They needed this information in order to talk with friends and family about the project, and to understand their role in restoring Tarboo Creek.

On the morning of the plant-a-thon, a trained team of 20 high school students and 10 adult mentors taught groups of volunteers to identify native trees and shrubs, use several different tree-planting methods and follow safety protocols before heading to their planting areas.

Grace Webb, an 11-year-old student at Swan School who began planting “in preschool,” checked up on her past plantings to find that most had survived, but a few of the older trees by the creek had been flooded out. “That’s OK,” Webb said. “It is still good, because salmon need wood in the stream to improve their habitat.”

Russ Yates, Swan School director, said the plant-a-thon has become a focal point for the school’s natural science curriculum. “Swan School has participated in the plant-a-thon for 10 years, and each and every one of those years has been incredible,” Yates said, with the event offering “a chance for our community’s young people to learn that when working together, each individual can make a difference, that we can make the world a better place.”

In late spring, student teams will return to monitor tree survival through hands-on projects aligned with math and science core curricula.

“The plant-a-thon gave me hands-on experience of what I might be doing if I pursue an ecology/conservation path,” said Aelf Wiklun, a returning youth crew leader and a Chimacum Pi Program student. “But the plant-a-thon is more than an everyday tree planting; it is a quantifiable gesture of love for our planet.”

Some of the youth crew leaders for this year’s event, such as Jack Pokorny, president of PTHS’s Students for Sustainability club, have been planting trees since they were in second or third grade. Sisters Melanie and Nicola

Pieper from Chimacum's Pi Program anticipated following the example set by Dylan Nichol, who returns from college each year to help lead the event.

Krishna Pithva, an AFS-USA exchange student from India in her senior year at Jefferson Community School, was a crew leader who had never seen anything like this event. "It's wonderful," she said, "I just can't believe it."

Daniel Molotsky, lead teacher for Port Townsend School District's OCEAN program, seemed to summarize the feelings of many participants when he said, "Plant-a-thon is a really powerful experience. Being out there, working together with so many people who care what happens to the natural world ... it gives me real hope for the earth."

NWI is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation founded in 2001. NWI's mission is to provide scientific and technical support to protect and restore fish and wildlife habitats and watershed ecosystems of the Pacific Northwest.

Those interested in supporting the 2016 NWI Plant-A-Thon may contact Jude Rubin at 385-5358 or [jude@nwwatershed.org](mailto:jude@nwwatershed.org).