

The Heron Herald



Rainier Audubon Society

November, 2019



Membership Meeting
7 pm November 18, 2019

“Secretive Wetland Bird Survey”

By Cynthia Easterson

Puget Sound Bird Observatory's (PSBO) Regional Wetland Secretive Bird Survey

PSBO has been studying birds across our regional wetlands for the past 3 years but made a significant expansion of the project in 2018 in order to begin truly assessing the population trends of four (4) under-detected, wetland obligate species American Bittern (*Botaurus lentiginosus*), Sora (*Porzana Carolina*), Virginia Rail (*Rallus limicola*), and Green Heron (*Butorides virescens*) and two (2) wetland associated species for which there are population concerns, Marsh Wren (*Cistothorus palustris*) and Willow Flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii*). We are looking to extend and implement this project throughout the Puget Sound trough. We feel the information and assessments are crucial to land management decisions for our regions wetland system. An area of results we feel may be of particular interest to land managers is the distribution of these species to wetland restoration sites. With this in mind, one of the key goals of this project is to make the data and analysis readily available through the Avian Knowledge Network data base.

Cindy Easterson has served on the Board of Puget Sound Bird Observatory since 2010 filling the roles of both Secretary and Treasurer. She is an advocate for engaging citizen scientists in projects to support

the documentation and assessment of local bird populations and wildlife habitat. Cindy currently manages Puget Sound Bird Observatory's (PSBO) Wintering Fox Sparrow Habitat Study and co-manages the Secretive Wetland Bird Monitoring project. Her experience includes conducting Breeding Bird Surveys, participation in Washington Audubon's Sagebrush Songbird Survey project, monitoring and support for Vaux's Swifts, Shorebird surveys for the Puget Sound Shorebird Count, and serving as an area lead for Pilchuck Audubon's annual Christmas Bird Count.

She has supported bird banding efforts with PSBO's Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship (MAPS) station at Morse Reserve and provided training assistance and skill development at workshops for bird identification, bander training and a variety of bird survey methods. Cindy has a passion for birds and finds gratification in studying their behaviors, habits and needs. In addition, she takes great delight in sharing her interest with others and mentoring citizen scientists.

Cindy holds an integrated Bachelor of Arts and Science Degree with a focus on Wetland Science from the University of Washington. She is a Certified Marbled Murrelet Marine Monitor, President for Pilchuck Audubon Society and a member of The Wildlife Society. Join us at 6:30 PM for conversation and refreshments.

Rainier Audubon programs are held at:
Federal Way United Methodist Church
29645 - 51st Ave. So.
Auburn, WA 98001

RAS Mission Statement: To conserve and restore natural ecosystems and protect birds and other wildlife for the benefit of humanity and biological diversity in South King County and the world we live in.

Upcoming Programs

- 12/16/2019 Photo Sharing and Brown Bag Aucution
- 1/20/2020 Jerry Broadus "Birds of Borneo"
- 2/17/2020 TBD
- 3/16/2020 TBD
- 4/20/2020 Kim Adelson "The Dinosaurs Amongst Us"
- 5/18/2020 Sally Vogel "Ethiopia Birds & Mammals"

Resources

- **Rainier Audubon Facebook Page** www.facebook.com/rainieraudubonsociety/
- **Heron Herald is Available Online** The current issue of the Heron Herald is always available to download from www.RainierAudubon.org. I will try to send an email on our mailing list as soon as it is posted.
- **Rainier Audubon Email List** - You can join our email list bu going to groups.google.com and searching for "Rainier Audubon". You can then request to join the group. Alternatively, you can sign up on the www.RainierAudubon.org website.

Rainier Audubon Society Directory

Position	Name	Board Member	Phone	email
President	Jay Galvin	Yes	253-939-3094	gigalvin@comcast.net
Vice President	Open			
Treasurer	Laura Lavington	Yes	253-941-7372	laura.lavington@gmail.com
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Publicity Chair	Open			
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Mailing	Debra Russell	No	425-802-4008	debrarussell94@comcast.net
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Lifetime Member	Erin Wojewodski-Prinsen	No	425-432-9965	

Cindy Flanagan Receives the Helen Engle Volunteer of the Year Award!

Nomination Letter below

Helen Engle Volunteer of the Year Award Nomination:

Cindy Flanagan, Rainier Audubon Society

For the past three years, Cindy Flanagan has been working tirelessly to preserve the wetlands, forests, meadows and undeveloped lakeshore of the former Weyerhaeuser corporate campus — frequented by some 120 bird species and endangered by 1.5 million square feet of proposed industrial development.

While spending literally hundreds of hours working in coalition with the Save Weyerhaeuser Campus (SWC) group, Cindy remains actively involved with her chapter.

- She is on the RAS Board and is Education Chair.
- She leads bird walks and hikes.
- She established a youth birding group that offers regular field trips and educational opportunities.
- She organizes the Christmas Bird Count and is a consistent contributor to the Heron Herald, Rainier Audubon's monthly newsletter.

Among the many attributes that make Cindy truly special are her kind and professional approach, a knack for digesting complicated documents and explaining them in layperson's terms, and her willingness to go the extra mile. These have included:

- Collaborating with key stakeholders: SWC, Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden, and Pacific Bonsai Museum.
- Testifying before the Federal Way City Council and King County Council
- Submitting comments to the city of Federal Way on the industrial development proposals.
- Working with Forterra and the Federal Way city staff as they apply for state and county grants to purchase the undeveloped lakefront.
- Serving as a liaison to the staff working on the King County Land Conservation Initiative
- Building relationships with the Puyallup and Muckleshoot Tribes (They commented officially on the campus warehouse proposals).
- Connecting with elected officials: Federal Way City Council and Mayor, King County Council, King County Executive staff, state Rep. Mike Pellicciotti, and state Rep. Kristine Reeves.
- Arranging/attending meetings with governmental agencies including: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife, Washington State Department of Transportation.
- Learning/disseminating key information about the campus wetlands, watershed and fish-bearing Hylebos stream system (whose east fork originates on the campus).
- Working directly with the SWC wetlands and hydrology experts hired by SWC in their legal challenge to the proposed industrial development.

To date, these efforts have resulted in over 3 years of project delays and allocations of \$3.5 million for potential acquisition:

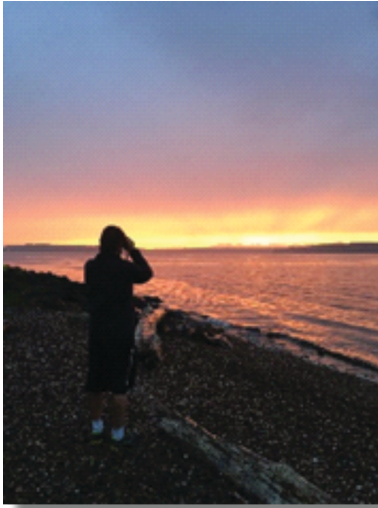
- **\$1 million** in Surface Water Management (SWM) funds from the city of Federal Way.
- **\$1 million** matching grant from King County Conservation Futures Tax (CFT) program in 2017 and a second CFT grant for **\$500,000** in 2018 <https://www.kingcounty.gov/depts/dnrp/newsroom/newsreleases/2018/May/23-LCI-Weyerhaeuser.aspx>
- **\$1.25 million** in grants from the state of Washington in 2018 and 2019; includes \$1 million for property acquisition and \$250,000 to Forterra for its work on open-space acquisition strategies on the campus.
- **Awaiting word** on the 2019 CFT grant application submitted by Forterra.

Cindy's efforts continue to be inspired by Helen Engle. For nearly three years, they regularly emailed or visited in person, talking at length about Audubon and the places needing protection. As Cindy wrote in the May 2019 edition of the Heron Herald,

“There was nothing better than getting a late-night email from Helen – action-packed, knowledge-filled, motivating and helpful.”

Jean Parietti: Save the Weyerhaeuser Campus
Dan Streiffert: Conservation Chair: Rainier Audubon Society

Seen & Heard by Calen Randall



I knew it immediately; how could I forget that distinct white rump patch? Sailing above me, was a male Northern Harrier. I gasped with astonishment and smiled at the owl-faced hawk. A decade ago, Northern Harrier roamed the Green River Valley, especially at Frager Road, a notable harrier haven. One Christmas Bird Count Charlie Wright exclaimed, “the real challenge isn’t seeing harriers, it’s deciding who saw what harrier. I’m sure they get double counted each year.” Those days are a far cry away; 2016 was the last time a Northern Harrier was sighted on the Rainier Audubon CBC and beyond a handful of sightings at Kent Ponds and 204th Street in Kent, harriers have been near impossible to find in the valley. Why was this raptor patrolling the fields of Frager Road this October of 2019? Would it stick around permanently? I did not know, but I hoped it was a sign of harriers reestablishing themselves back in the valley.

Northern Harriers are just one piece in the complex puzzle of

population shifts in the South King County and thanks to CBC records and more recently eBird data, we can analyze these patterns and postulate upcoming potential population changes. In 1994, Rainier Audubon featured an article in *The Heron Herald* about the influx of Barred Owls and their effects on the local Spotted Owl populations. Over the past ten years we have tracked the Eurasian Collared Doves’ explosion in population throughout the Puget Sound. Incidentally, when they first came to the area, Frager Road was also a stronghold for the species, but the large flock of 100+ individuals of Elliot Farms has since dispersed. More recently, we have watched Cackling Geese totals skyrocket in the Green River Valley. Every October night, I can hear their high pitched honks. On days of large migration pushes, it is possible to sight over 2,000 of them in the fields at M Street!



(c) Dan Streiffert 2007

In late September, at the Audubon Council of Washington in Vancouver, WA while talking with a couple from North Cascades Audubon, the topic of population shifts was discussed. The couple brought up the California Scrub-Jay (formerly Western Scrub-Jay) and how a few years ago a Scrub Jay sighting was a rarity near their home at Lake Samish, but now they are a routine sighting at a couple nearby locations. In the last decade, similar stories from Everett through Longview have been told as the Scrub Jays continuously expand their range north. The story got me thinking, what new species might we expect to become fixtures in the south King County region? Here are three species to keep an eye out for over the next few years:

Black Phoebe – Primarily a southern flycatcher, Black Phoebes are a common sighting south of Centralia, but there are several nesting locations outside their normal range. Since 2015, a suspected pair of Black Phoebes have been sighted around 204th and 212th street in Kent. Could this potential breeding pair be a sign of future Black Phoebe breeding grounds in the Green River Valley? It’s possible, as according to the North American Breeding Bird Survey Black Phoebes are increasing in population, especially in more urban areas.

Lesser Goldfinch – American Goldfinches may not be the only goldfinch in King County for long. For the past few years, Lesser Goldfinch have nested in the cottonwood groves along the Puyallup River in Sumner and Orting. This August, just across the border in Auburn, one was sighted at Garrett Haynes’ feeder; and this October, Lessers were sighted in Federal Way. With so many recent sightings from Sumner through Orting, it seems like only a matter of time before Lesser Goldfinch being nesting in the cottonwood groves along the Green River in Kent and Auburn.

Snow Geese – Unlike the last two southern residents, Snow Geese are visitors from the north and are far less uncommon than Black Phoebes and Lesser Goldfinch. However, with recent expansion of breeding grounds in Alaska, Snow Geese numbers have surged. Previously the Skagit Flats were prime Snow Geese grounds, but last year parts of King and Pierce County like Bonney Lake and Duvall were documented as new Snow Goose territory. In an article last year I noted that Snow Geese were starting to migrate along the Puget Sound; previously Snow Geese flying over salt water was a rare occurrence. This October there were even more reports of this pattern. Will Snow Geese become as prevalent as Cackling Geese? Who knows, but their population is one to watch in the very near future.

Recent Sightings:

September 28th Steigerwald NWR, Vancouver, Clark, Washington

This year, the Audubon Council of Washington was hosted by Vancouver Audubon Society. A highlight was visiting the Steigerwald National Wildlife Refuge on a field trip led by Ken Pitts, a Portland native and long-time Steigerwald visitor. We had a terrific day of birding and despite raw, cold, and downright blustery weather conditions, we sighted 50 species! With the wind blitzing down through the mouth of the Columbia River Gorge, raptors took to the skies. Numerous Northern Harriers skimmed around the mud flats and an American Kestrel seemed to be perched atop every tree. Our group was rewarded for braving the conditions when a trio of Peregrine Falcons soared around us, all in close view! Violet-green Swallow migration was in prime time as well over a thousand whirled above us. Other highlights of the refuge included a flock of American Pipit, a quartet of Wilson's Snipe, and a lone Green Heron. Only a single European Starling was sighted at the refuge, quite the cause for celebration! I highly recommend visiting the refuge if you are ever birding around the Vancouver, WA or east Portland region. Ken did mention that many updates and changes were planned for the refuge come 2021, with salmon spawning grounds the main focus, so it will be interesting to see how the nature of the refuge shifts in the upcoming years. Thanks again to determined leader Ken!

September 17th Renton, King, Washington

Marie West-Johnson's yard featured a new visitor this September when a male Chipping Sparrow stopped by. Often Chipping Sparrow reports in the Puget Sound turn out to be the rusty-capped immature White-crowned Sparrows, but Marie's bird had all the makings of our mountainous *spizella*. Excellent yard bird, Marie!

September, Seaside, Clatsop, Oregon

In mid-September my family took a trip out to the Oregon coast. Seaside, situated just north of the popular Cannon Beach, is home to an array of seaside trails and a long sandy beach from which we stayed just a block away. On our first morning there, we scoped in a long stream of southward-bound Sooty Shearwater from our balcony! Out on the beach we stumbled upon a group of immature Common Tern and a surprising flock of two dozen Whimbrel flapped past. We ventured down to Cannon Beach and though it was crowded with a plethora of people and dogs, we spotted Black Oystercatcher and Harlequin Ducks at the famed Haystack Rocks. On our way out of the town, we stopped at Seaside Cove, where the sandy beaches converge with the rocky shores of Ecola Point. Loafing on the rocky shores was a group of Heerman's Gulls with Black Turnstones and Surfbirds mingling amongst them.

September, Hood River, Oregon

Continuing on my family trip, it was hard to leave Seaside, but the stunning natural beauty of Hood River quickly abated any feelings of reluctance that we harboured. The town is located right on the turning point of west vs east. Travel ten minutes to the west and you will be surrounded by thick temperate rainforest. Journey ten minutes to the east and you will find golden grassy cliffs. To the south of the town, the orchard laden hills stretch up to the towering Mt. Hood. However, Hood River's most enchanting scenery is its convergence of coniferous and oak forest; a magical display of varied ecosystems coming together. Recently the town has put significant focus on its system of trails including the Indian Creek Trail which we ventured down. The beautiful oak forest component of the trail rang with the cacophony of Stellar's and California Scrub Jays shrieking at everything from us, to our dog, to each other. A large flock of Lesser Goldfinch enthralled us while zipping about and feeding on the asters.

September, Lyle & Maryhill, Klickitat, Washington

Do you like birds and wine? Klickitat County is a "must visit" for winery birding. On the Washington side of the Columbia River, Syncline Winery is the precipice where the rainy western Columbia gorge metamorphosizes into the semi-arid oven of the eastern gorge. This estate winery is enveloped in beautiful oak prairie. From gorgeous scenery to rare Washington state birds, this off-the-beaten-path gem is part relaxation part adventure. Heading east from Lyle, California Quail and Wild Turkey may greet you on Old Highway 8 as you turn onto Balch Road. Keep a careful eye out for Western Bluebirds and Lesser Goldfinch. Once you have arrived at the winery, dial your ears up for woodpeckers. We spotted six species while visiting! Our familiar Downy, Hairy, and Pileated could be found with a watchful eye, but you will barely need to look to see Lewis's Woodpeckers as they thrive in the oak habitat. Syncline's crown jewel is the Acorn Woodpecker, a common sight to the south in Oregon and California, but a rare occurrence in Washington. Supposedly there are several trees where the woodpeckers have stashed dozens of acorns!

Further east on Highway 14 is the village of Maryhill, population 92. The Maryhill Winery overlooks the town, Columbia River, and golden Columbia Plateau, a stark contrast to the wooded scenery at Syncline. In addition to great views from the winery and nearby Stonehenge Memorial and Maryhill Art Museum, birds like Swainson's Hawk, Western Meadowlark, and Lazuli Bunting can be seen. We even glimpsed a pair of migrating Hermit Thrush hiding in some bushes. Klickitat County may be an overlooked part of our state, both for birding and sight-seeing, but it is well worth the visit!

Bio: After 20 years of searching in his backyard, Calen has yet to find his quest bird, Blue-footed Booby. Currently a student in Atmospheric Science at the University of Washington, Calen has spent the last 9 years turning in overdue Seen and Heard articles (I promise this year will be an improvement!). Calen loves exploring new regions of the Pacific Northwest, but always looks forward to returning home to familiar hotspots in the South Puget Sound.

Field Trips - Barbara Petersen & Heather Gibson



Weekly Birdwalks at Nisqually

Wednesdays 8 AM to 12 PM

Leader: Phil Kelley

Join Phil Kelley on his weekly bird walks as he counts the birds at Nisqually NWR. The group walks over to an area near the visitors' center to view the entry road estuary, and then takes the boardwalk/trail loop out to the Twin Barns, and the Nisqually overlook area. From there, the group walks the dike, and back to the Riparian Forest.

Bring: Good walking shoes or boots, rain gear, water, snacks, and \$3 for entry fee unless you have a pass. Scopes are welcome.

Meet: At the Visitor's Center Pond Overlook.

Directions: Take I-5 south from Tacoma and exit to Nisqually NWR at exit 114. Take a right at the light.

Sign-up is not necessary. Call or email Phil Kelley if you have questions.

Phil Kelley, Lacey, (360) 459 1499, scrubjay323@aol.com

Please arrive at 7:45. We'll be birding for about two hours. This walk is for all ages and all levels of experience. See between fifteen and fifty species depending on the season. The Swan Creek Bird Walk occurs on the third Saturday of each month

Birding Weyerhaeuser Campus

Sat, Nov 30, 2019, 8:45AM to 11:30AM

Burien Wild Birds Unlimited Bird Walk

Join Barbara Petersen in exploring areas of the former Weyerhaeuser Campus, including roads and trails between and around the Rhododendron Species Garden and Pacific Rim Bonsai Museum, Weyerhaeuser Pond and meadows and North Lake.

Meet at 8:15 AM at the Wild Birds Unlimited store, 15858 1st Ave S, Burien, 98148, or at 8:45 AM in the large parking lot near the Pacific Rim Bonsai Museum on the former Weyerhaeuser Campus in Federal Way.

We can carpool to other spots as needed. We may walk one mile or more as we search for waterfowl, woodland birds and raptors, stopping at 11:30.

To sign up call the Wild Birds Unlimited store at 206 241 3201 and ask to be put on the list for the Nov. bird walk, or email Barbara at BPbatfan@aol.com

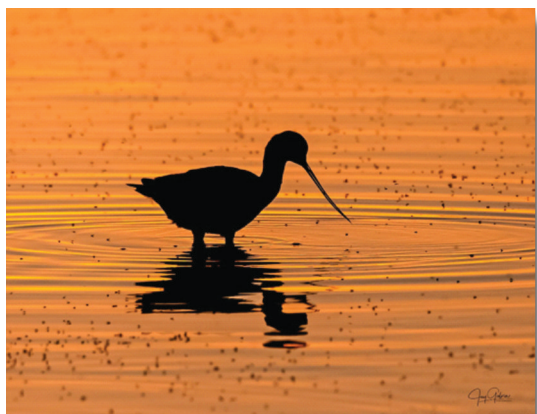
Guided Bird Walk at Swan Creek Park

Sat, Nov 16, 2019, 8AM to 12PM

Leader: Scott Saunders of Tahoma Audubon

Swan Creek Park, E 42nd St & Roosevelt Ave, Tacoma, 98404 Meet at the gazebo near the Community Gardens off 42nd St.

President's Corner - by Jay Galvin



As most of our members are aware by now, National Audubon has come out with a new report on the state of our bird populations. The last report, released in 2014, painted a dire picture of what the potential of Climate Change will have on our avian populations. Since then, the news has not become any better. The 2019 report represents the use of more reliable data from more numerous sources including Cornell University. Because of more accurate programs and data, the study can paint a more accurate picture of migration patterns, change in habitat, and other critical factors.

The 2019 report is an eye opener in that there are several species that are thought to have numerous members actually in serious danger of crashing in the coming years. Accelerated change in our climate is real and likely to continue. Because of this, National Audubon has heightened its actions to get the word out to Congress. The window to

do something to save our birds is getting smaller. Save our birds, save our planet. It's really is that simple. I urge all RAS members to go to the National Audubon Website (www.Audubon.org) to get a more in depth look at our dilemma.

It is not too late. We must become educated and share our learning with others to get out of this environmental mess.

Bird of the Month: Varied Thrush

Reprint Courtesy of Wild Birds Unlimited, Burien

The Varied Thrush is a beautiful, robin-sized bird. It is stocky with a round head, straight bill and long legs. It boasts richly colored feathers of blue-gray, black and burnt orange which are very distinctive. In summer, it eats insects and in winter, nuts and berries. It is a bird of the Northwest and frequents ravines and thickets especially near streams. It may also be found in yards and along roads.

The Varied Thrush behaves much like the American Robin but is more elusive and shy. Its song is a unique metallic melancholy whistle at different pitches. Males will sing to defend their territory usually at dawn, dusk or after a rain shower. The nest of the Varied Thrush is made of twigs, moss, leaves and bark pieces and is lined with soft grasses and roots. The female will build the nest in a conifer tree on a branch 5 - 15 feet above the ground. She will lay 3 - 4 eggs. Both parents help feed the young chicks.

The Varied Thrush forages on the ground hopping along moving leaves and debris. It will then fly up to perch and view the area it has just cleared searching for berries, seeds and acorns to eat.



The oldest Varied Thrush known lived to be 4 years and 9 months old.

Rainier Audubon 39th Christmas Bird Count Sunday, December 29, 2019



The Rainier Audubon 39th Christmas Bird Count will be on Sunday, December 29,

2019. It's easy to join fellow birders for this important and fun effort. Participate as a citizen scientist for the day and visit hot birding locations you did not know about! Over 120 species were recorded during last year's CBC count.

How do I participate?

Sign up to go out with a field team to explore and count birds in our official Audubon circle. Teams will bird by car and by foot from 8 AM to 4 PM. If you prefer a shorter outing, just caravan with the survey team and leave when you prefer. Can't go out with a team but want to count birds at home or at your feeders? Easy! Sign up to participate in our CBC Backyard Bird Count. Join us afterwards to tally the day's species and enjoy our Rainier Audubon Dinner. Please contact Ken Schroeder with any questions on how to participate.

Contact: Ken Schroeder, CBC Field Organizer, - kenschroeder@msn.com 253-939-7470

When is the CBC dinner celebration?

Our CBC Dinner is a great way to celebrate the Christmas Bird Count. Dinner is provided and will begin at 5pm, with doors opening at 4 PM. There are always interesting stories and sightings to share as we summarize the day's sightings. The dinner is held at the same location as our monthly general meetings.

Federal Way United Methodist Church
29645 51st Ave, Auburn, WA 98001

What Happens to Our Count Data?

The results of our Rainier Audubon count are published in our newsletter. Along with hundreds of Audubon chapters nationwide, our results are sent to National Audubon for compilation. Audubon scientists use the results to study bird distribution and population trends and identify conservation priorities. Our observations help to describe bird species' range, which are then used in climate models to project the effects of climate change and to identify conservation priorities.

A Watershed Ecosystem Recovery Plan that is for Our Birds

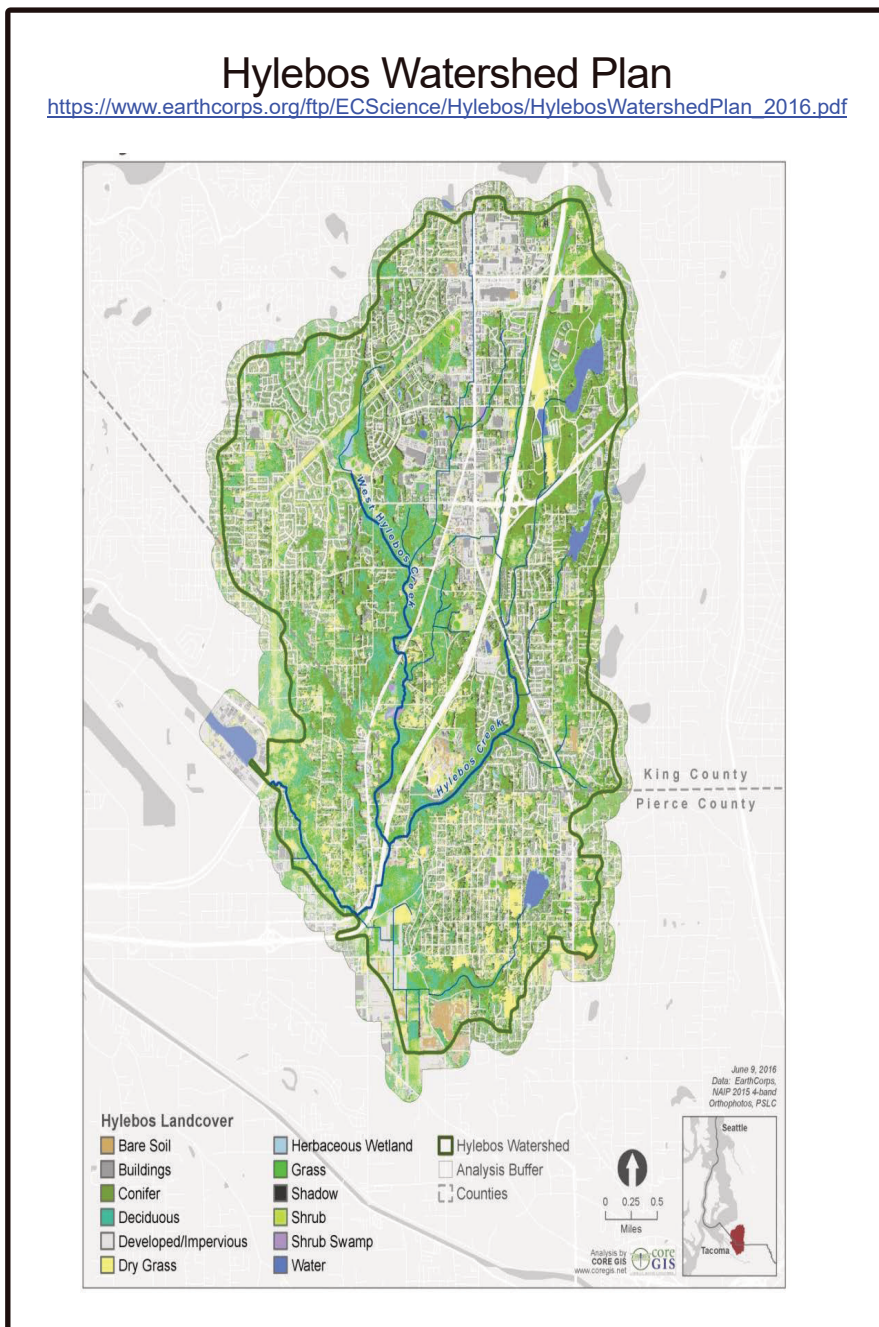
By Cindy Flanagan

Our Rainier Audubon's mission is to conserve and restore natural ecosystems and protect birds and other wildlife for the benefit of humanity and biological diversity in south King County and the world we live in. Washington Audubon's focus is "to inform National Audubon's policy and science staff, develop and manage our state conservation priorities and to work with its 25 local chapters to conserve and restore natural ecosystems for the benefit of humanity and the earth's biological diversity." National Audubon's mission is "to protect birds and the places they need, today and tomorrow, throughout the Americas using science, advocacy, education, and on-the-ground conservation." From the grassroots to the grassstops, our Audubon centers on conservation to make this place better for birds and wildlife and for humankind—now and for the future. One conservation component is protecting and managing our waters. Our Rainier Audubon has participated for over thirty years in the development and revision of our Basin Plans and Ecosystem Recovery Plans. These plans create the framework for water-management and water-quality not only for our counties but also our local agencies.

Rainier Audubon territory includes both south King County and North Pierce County stretching from Mount Rainier all the way down to the Puget Sound—a lot of precious water area to protect. The Watershed Resource Inventory Area (WRIA) is a Washington Department of Ecology created water management system that divides the state into 62 major watershed areas. We are in two Watershed Resource Inventory Areas: WRIA 9 Duwamish-Green Watershed and WRIA 10 Puyallup-White Watershed. Two unique areas that are in our territory in the WRIA 10 area are Mount Rainier and the Hylebos Basin.

Currently, WRIA 10 is developing its 5-year Ecosystem Recovery Plan (ERP) through Puget Sound Partnership and Rainier Audubon is a stakeholder. The purpose of the ERP is to develop and implement a plan that addresses everything from salmon and Orca recovery, to stormwater runoff, to farmland and forest conservation. Incorporating a holistic, watershed-based approach is key to ensuring the health and sustainability of the Puyallup-White Watershed.

While we are interested in best conservation and recovery for the entire WRIA 10 area, our Rainier Audubon also takes special interest in the Hylebos Basin. The Hylebos Watershed consists of three sub-basins: the East Branch and West Branch that start in Federal Way and meet in Milton, and the Lower Hylebos, which joins the East and West Branch and becomes Hylebos Creek and flows into the Hylebos Waterway into Commencement Bay. The lower mainstem as well as the lower West and East Forks course through Puyallup Tribal lands. The Muckleshoot Tribe maintains fishing rights on Hylebos Creek. In the 1980's, members of the Rainier Audubon took action to help conserve and protect the Hylebos and helped create nonprofit Friends of the Hylebos. Much conservation and salmon restoration has been done on the West Branch and Lower Hylebos; however, little



has been done on the East Branch. Unfortunately, the Hylebos, is the step-sister that is often overlooked. According to the Earth Corps Hylebos Basin Plan (2016), the Hylebos is an in-between region, divided between Pierce and King Counties, and is underrepresented by conservation organizations and resources, and is underserved in terms of environmental stewardship.

Historically, the Hylebos was one of the most productive small stream systems in southern Puget Sound supporting substantial runs of coho, chum, and chinook salmon, as well as cutthroat and steelhead trout (Kerwin, 1999, p. 82). With increased development, stream bank erosion and flooding, salmon numbers have diminished. Yet, according to Earthcorps (2016), “Despite these issues, however, Hylebos Creek continues to support salmon spawning, including threatened chinook, and has significant areas where well-preserved healthy and diverse riparian ecosystems have been conserved in the midst of urban development.”

The Pierce County and south King County area is one of the fastest growing regions in the nation, and development pressures and urbanization will put further pressure on the Hylebos Basin. An example is in the upland area at the headwaters of the East Hylebos where plans for commercial and residential development are in the works. The city of Federal Way has approved rezoning a 56-acre single family residential area to higher density residential. The environmental impacts of increasing development were not considered during the rezone phase, but instead will be reviewed piece by piece with each development proposal submission. Nearby, on the former Weyerhaeuser Campus, warehouse proposals for a total of over 2 million square feet of impervious surface are in the works. The stormwater from these 5 large scale warehouses, which would normally be intercepted by the forested area and dispersed on the campus will be channelized down the Hylebos. The challenge with these development proposals is that they are not being reviewed holistically—and the cumulative loss of upland forest and stormwater impacts are being piece mealed.

So, how could a watershed ecosystem recovery plan help the Hylebos?

Identifying further strategies and actions for protection and recovery of upland forest and specifically calling out the areas in the East Fork upland area in the ERP is how. Doing so would give WRIA 10 greater voice with local agencies like the city of Federal Way when a land use application in the identified upland area is under review.

Rainier Audubon’s involvement in the WRIA 10 ERP proactively helps to create better water conservation. And by focusing on water conservation, we can help our feathered friends. And if it’s good for the birds, we know it is good for us.

Interested in learning more about the WRIA 10 Ecosystem Recovery Plan? Check out their ERP webpage <https://www.piercecountywa.gov/6341/PWR-LIO>

Sources:

Earth Corps Hylebos Basin Plan (2016)

https://www.earthcorps.org/ftp/ECScience/Hylebos/HylebosWatershedPlan_2016.pdf

Kerwin, John, 1999. Salmon habitat limiting factors in the Puyallup River Basin. Olympia, WA

<https://www.kingcounty.gov/services/environment/watersheds/white-river/salmon-habitat-limiting-factors.aspx>
www.earthcorps.org/ftp/ECScience/Hylebos/HylebosWatershedPlan_2016.pdf



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“What is the use of a house if you haven't got a tolerable planet to put it on?”

— Henry David Thoreau, Familiar Letters

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RAS Chapter membership includes 9 issues of the Heron Herald annually but does not include AUDUBON magazine