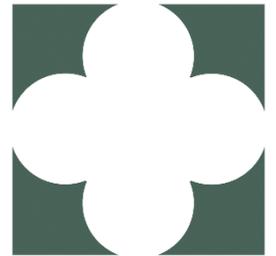


Saving the Resource – I'm Still Around

By Richard Lunt



seattle first baptist

I grew up in West Seattle, after we came there from New Jersey in 1947. I can remember my Dad, who had come out here in the 30's, taking us clam digging and fishing. The digging was good and so was the fishing, and we caught flounder, rockfish, pollock, true cod, hake, black cod and perch. We even fished for sea run cutthroat, but never got into salmon fishing. That came later after returning from Viet Nam and catching my first salmon, a twelve pound Coho, in 1970 just down from the Spokane Street bridge. After that I was hooked, and have been salmon fishing ever since, my biggest so far locally being a 24-pound chinook, in 2009 off Jeff Head.

Now in the Seattle area there is no more clam digging due to pollution and marine toxins, and the pollock, true cod, hake and black cod are gone. Rockfish are protected and only two flounder can be kept. Ling cod and cabezon are scarce and tightly regulated, and the salmon fishing is severely restricted. I keep on fishing year-round, weather permitting, and at 77 just love to get out there and away from it all, and if I don't get out, I don't feel right. I don't know if any of the species that have disappeared from around here will ever come back, or if we can ever dig for clams in the local Seattle area again. The salmon are still returning every year but nothing like it used to be. All these marine creatures mentioned need all the help they can get, that's for sure.

Overfishing, pollution, marine mammal predation, loss of habitat due to the relentless push of civilization, and with it more and more impervious surface, plus dams and culverts blocking returning salmon from their spawning habitat, all are taking their toll. It may never be the same again. Should we just give up? I for one will never give up. In my small boat, surrounded by the beauty of Puget Sound, breathing the salt air, watching birds, dolphin, seals, sea lions, and occasionally whales, how can anyone think of giving up all this beauty and the life it supports?

I guess we don't have much control over the groundfish coming back. Maybe it is a change in water temperature, but I also suspect overfishing by us and by marine mammals. As far as the salmon are concerned, removing obstructions we have put in place like dams and culverts can go a long way towards restoring spawning and rearing habitat. Much talk about taking out the dams on the Columbia and the Snake, for example, has been heard. But remember salmon have always used the smaller local streams too, and they add up to considerable numbers if utilized. So many of these streams have been taken out of production by stormwater runoff, dams and culverts, that if they were fixed it would add up to a big improvement.

I have always tried to fish locally and so have also had an interest in many of the small local streams. I can think of several that have problems with culverts blocking the passage of salmon that used to populate them. Willow creek in Edmonds, Fauntleroy creek in Seattle and Salmon creek in Burien are three of them.

Willow Creek was blocked by an underground culvert when the marina was built in the 1960's. Now efforts are being made to daylight the creek, which has one of the few estuaries along Puget Sound. Private land is being donated and the City of Edmonds is spearheading this effort. There is also a hatchery on the creek run jointly by the city and Trout Unlimited, but the young salmon must be placed

in other creeks in the spring to allow outward migration. When the creek is finally daylighted, miles of spawning and rearing habitat will be open once again.

Fauntleroy Creek in Seattle runs through private property along the beach and then through a short culvert under Fauntleroy way. The property owner agreed to enhance the stretch through their yard to allow fish passage, the culvert under Fauntleroy is level enough to allow fish passage, and so a run of Coho salmon has been established, largely through the efforts of the neighborhood group. Now the City of Seattle is cooperating with plans to remove another culvert upstream so as to create even more access.

Salmon Creek in Burien is another local stream that once produced fish, hence its name. The upper regions of the watershed have long since been lost to streets and houses, but the lower stretch is still there in a greenbelt, part of the city's park system. Much of the stormwater has been also diverted in an old sewer line so the creek itself is much less subject to extreme flows during rainy periods, leaving the stream itself with a good flow of clean groundwater year-round. The area was logged in the past, but there is a good canopy of trees and vegetation, resulting in a cool shaded environment year-round. Sadly, a concrete culvert was installed in the 1950's at the lower end which has completely blocked fish passage.

Also, a dam at the mouth further blocks fish passage. In the 1980's I spoke with the property owner of that time who told me he built the dam because fish were dying on his property. I can only speculate this was happening because the fish could go no farther upstream because of the culvert.

Efforts to get the culvert removed by local folks have been unsuccessful so far. To me that is a shame because it is a gem that could be a great addition to the resource, as well as a community enhancement for kids growing up to learn and help with fish enhancement and conservation.

Puget Sound needs all the help it can get. Our future generations should have the most opportunities possible to grow up helping enhance and learn about their surroundings. And when I am out on the water and have seen the orcas more than once hunting for salmon, I am reminded that we should be doing everything we can to keep this great system alive.

So, let's do all we can to restore the local fishery. It may never be like it was when only native people were here, but it can sure be a lot better than it is right now, if we bring back the small local streams that cumulatively add a big punch to the resource.