



# Puyallup River Tales

A newsletter of the Puyallup River Watershed Council

Volume 1, Issue 4

July 2006

## BioBlitz Documents Diversity of the White River

The BioBlitz, organized by the Puyallup River Watershed Council and the Pierce County Biodiversity Alliance, was just the second event of its kind held in Washington. The Washington Biodiversity Council and Point Defiance Zoo Society jointly sponsored the project that was under the direction of Michelle Tirhi, urban biologist with the state's fish and wildlife department.



Members of the "amphibian team" check a trap during the Bioblitz on the Lower White River.

Professional biologists volunteered their time to lead the field surveys along the 10-mile stretch of river. The crew of experts came from the University of Puget Sound, Bats Northwest, Wilderness Awareness School, Pierce County, and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. They donned chest waders and rappelled off cliffs to reach isolated wetlands and used sophisticated electronics to identify bats by their distinctive ultrasonic calls. They identified over 600 different types of plant and animal life during the 24-hour time period.

### **What did we learn?**

We learned that the Lower White River corridor is a remarkably intact area that includes pristine sections of forested riparian and wetland habitat. We met some wonderful property owners who care passionately about their land and highly value the beauty and wildlife of this special place. We also encountered elected officials who appreciate how special this section of the Lower White River is and want to conserve that biological diversity for future generations.

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*The Puyallup River Watershed Council is a forum which promotes and implements programs that restore, maintain, and enhance the watershed in order to protect its environmental, economic, and cultural health.*

# Protecting Farmland, Protecting Natural Resources

There are many interests common to both the watershed council and the Farm Advisory Commission. The Watershed Council focuses on the entire river drainage system. The Commission focuses on a subset of the watershed, in particular the agricultural resource lands. Not only the land is an important concern, but so are the food production and other agricultural activities that support livelihoods.

*Dick Carkner*  
**Personal  
Perspective**

The most important and valuable agricultural lands are in the Puyallup River valley floor. Only about 3,000 acres of the best farm land remains and this is under constant pressure from development and annexation.

The Advisory Commission's role is to advise Pierce County government on agricultural policy issues. We have drafted a right to farm ordinance that protects farmers from nuisance lawsuits and have hosted a number of agricultural summits for agricultural commission advisors throughout Washington. The Commission also introduced developing an agricultural strategic plan for Pierce County and hopes to play a role in its implementation. The Commission advocates for economically viable agriculture and supports programs like Puget Sound Fresh that promotes local agriculture products and Harvestfest, which connects urbanites with local farms.

Protection of the underlying land resource is essential for farming. Agriculture must be economically viable for farmers to stay in business. This is why the Commission is also involved with market development. Reliance on the market for agricultural products is essential but not sufficient to protect farmland. The real estate market will not provide enough farmland to meet society's needs, especially if all the attributes

of farmland are not considered.

Those that think in terms of watersheds know that farmland provides much more than the fresh fruit and vegetables humans need to survive. It also provides wildlife habitat, floodwater storage areas, ground water recharge areas and scenic vistas. It is also understood that farmland is far better for salmon than subdivisions and warehouses.

Out of all the recommendations in the agricultural plan, the Commission placed the most importance on protecting farmland in the form of Purchase of Development Rights and Transfer of Development Rights programs. Once adopted, ordinances to implement these recommendations will allow Pierce County to accept existing matching grants from state and federal sources. Fortunately plans are underway to complete such an ordinance. It is also important for the County to establish specific goals to protect farmland. The goals need to be specific in terms of the number of acres and target locations for resource land protection.

While we are working around the edges with nuisance protections, supporting the purchase of local agricultural products and other programs, irreplaceable farmland continues to be lost to development. We must continue to support market development for local agricultural products, but protecting the resource land base is essential for agriculture to exist and must be a priority.

The Commission would like to work with the Watershed Council in joint activities to protect the watershed's resource lands and all the public goods they provide.

*Dick Carkner is chair of the Pierce County Farm Advisory Commission.*

For more information and volunteer opportunities, visit our Web site: [www.piercecountywa.org/PRWC](http://www.piercecountywa.org/PRWC)  
Or, send an email to: [PC-PRWC@co.pierce.wa.us](mailto:PC-PRWC@co.pierce.wa.us)

The Puyallup River Watershed Council meets on the fourth Wednesday of each month, 5-7 p.m., at Sumner City Hall, 1104 Maple St.

# Healing Clarks Creek

Clarks Creek was selected by the Puyallup River Watershed Council and Pierce County Water Programs as a high priority area for improving water quality in the Puyallup River Watershed. Water quality problems include stream bank erosion, excessive sediment and nutrients, lack of streamside vegetation, invasive plant species, and illegal dumping. The Clarks Creek Initiative will address these problems through several actions: (1) a streamside (riparian) restoration, (2) education and technical assistance focused on nutrient and pesticide/herbicide management, and (3) a project that shows how storm water retrofitting improves water quality.

This is a cooperative effort between county Water Programs, the Puyallup River Watershed Council, City of Puyallup, WSU-Puyallup, Pierce Conservation District, Puyallup Tribe of Indians, Friends of Clarks Creek, and others. It will also will rely on partners, landowners, and watershed residents working together.

The kick-off for the initiative was a tree planting along Clarks Creek on the WSU-Puyallup site. Over 160 trees were planted by 25 volunteers. Fall planting events are planned at both WSU-Puyallup and Clarks Creek Park in Puyallup in October. They will enhance habitat, stabilize banks, and shade the creek. We are also looking for streamside landowners to plant vegetation along the creek. Free trees and shrubs are available for this purpose.



A program is planned to educate streamside landowners about gardening that protects water quality and improves garden health. This includes landscaping and selection of native plants, proper use of chemicles, and controlling non-native plants.

The last part of the initiative involves retrofitting storm water discharges to improve water quality of the creek. Many older areas were developed before storm water management techniques were required. A demonstration project is planned involving treatment and/or infiltration of runoff. For more information, contact Lorin Reinelt (253) 798-3096 at Pierce County Water Programs.

## *Volunteer groups involved in watershed health*

### **Citizens for a Healthy Bay**

<http://www.healthybay.org>  
253-383-2429

### **Friends of the Hylebos Wetlands**

<http://www.hylebos.org/>  
(253) 929-1519

### **Friends of Clarks Creek**

(253) 864-6042

### **Fennel Creek Preservation Group**

<http://www.fennelcreek.org/>  
253-863-5867

### **Pierce Stream Team**

<http://www.piercecountycd.org/streamtm.htm>  
(253) 845-2973

### **South Puget Sound Salmon Enhancement Group**

<http://spsseg.org>  
(360) 412-080

### **Friends of Swan Creek Watershed**

[sueb.@prodigy.net](mailto:sueb.@prodigy.net)  
253-472-7264

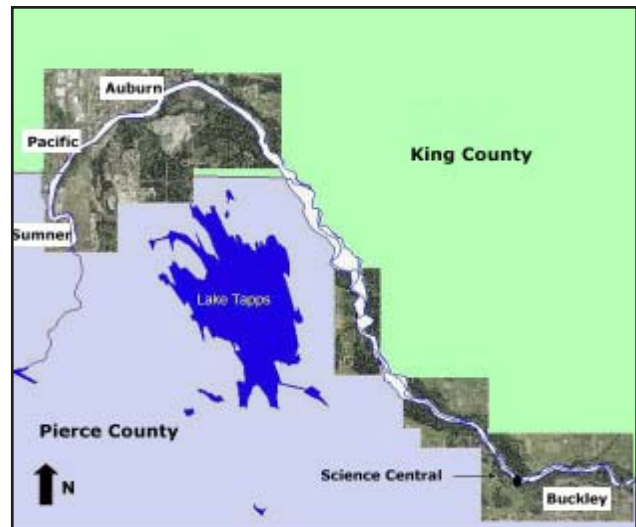
## Bioblitz, from Page 1

### ***Why should we care?***

The fact that there are so many different varieties of birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates, and plants that live here tells us that these ecosystems are working well! They're harboring a wide variety of wildlife **AND** they're helping to sustain people. It means that wetlands still exist to help store the water from heavy winter storms and supply clean drinking water to our wells. It means that stands of plants, from the largest cottonwood to the smallest algae, find a place to live among us and clean the air of pollutants. And it means that river channels still meander within a flood plain and provide critical habitat for salmon.

### ***What will happen next?***

Thanks to the backing of the Washington Biodiversity Council, and now with the support of the EPA's Regional Geographic Initiatives program, our work will expand with the help of a part time coordinator. John Stern has accepted the position of



Conservation Coordinator for the Pierce County Biodiversity Alliance. John will help guide the next phase for the Alliance that includes working with the community in the development of a stewardship plan for the Lower White River. John will also be helping property owners get involved in voluntary conservation incentive programs on their land.

For more information, contact: John Stern, [jstern@westpk.com](mailto:jstern@westpk.com)



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