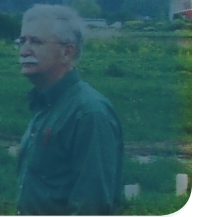




Conservation in Washington: Powered by People



MAKING AN IMPACT:

- *27 contiguous landowners planted riparian buffers.*
- *Summer water temperatures in Tenmile Creek dropped and are consistently below the threshold for salmon.*
- *Tenmile Creek is now the only lowland Nooksack River tributary that regularly meets goals for fecal bacteria set to protect the Portage Bay shellfish beds downstream.*

WHATCOM CONSERVATION DISTRICT - COMMUNITY OF LANDOWNERS RESTORE TENMILE CREEK

Tenmile Creek in Whatcom County was typical of many westside streams in agricultural areas: no buffers, high fecal bacteria levels, and water temperatures high enough to kill salmon. The Whatcom Conservation District (WCD) started working in the watershed ten years ago by establishing an advisory group of locals and a voluntary stewardship program to enlist landowners to improve the streams.

FINDING A COMMON PATH WCD secured funding, hired a watershed resident as project manager, and put together a diverse group of residents and other stakeholders to find solutions for long standing water quality problems. Landowners identified three goals for their watershed: improve drainage in agricultural areas, improve riparian (streamside) buffers by planting native trees or shrubs, and monitor water quality for improvements.

RESULTS ON THE GROUND Twenty-seven contiguous landowners agreed to plant riparian buffers following drainage maintenance. Eventually, 12.5 miles of stream bank was restored with native tree and shrub plantings, large wood was placed in the stream for fish habitat,

and culverts that blocked fish passage were repaired. Once the major stream was totally shaded, water quality improved rapidly. Summer water temperatures dropped markedly and are now consistently below the threshold required by salmon. Fecal bacteria levels also dropped dramatically due to buffer installation and better stewardship. Tenmile Creek is now the only lowland Nooksack River tributary that regularly meets goals for fecal bacteria set to protect the Portage Bay shellfish beds downstream. The “Tenmile model” is now frequently used as a template for positive change on a watershed scale. Landowners there know what watershed they live in and understand the importance of stewardship for their downstream neighbors.

A prerequisite of asking landowners for change is to listen to their needs. In this case landowners were interested and willing to improve their water but first needed to address drainage. Once their needs were addressed, a sense of community was created and real lasting changes were initiated.

“We understand the stream needs to be a maintained system,” said Dorie Belisle, Project Coordinator and landowner. “This is true for every stream running through productive agricultural land. Protecting fish and farming is an ongoing project using adaptive management to meet the needs of both farmers and the natural resource.”

Tenmile Creek before (left) and after landowners worked together to restore stream bank (right)

