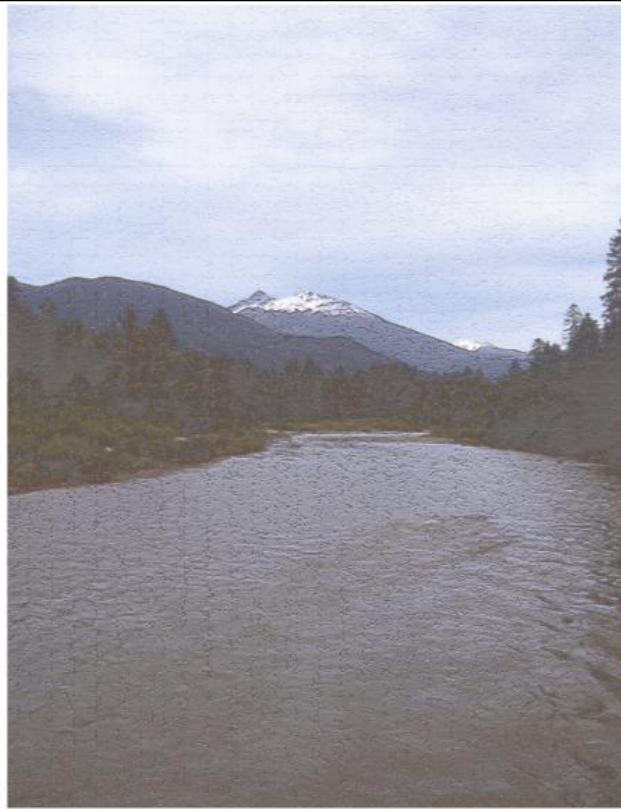


**Education & Interpretation
Needs Assessment
for the
Upper Skagit River Watershed**



prepared for the:

**Skagit Environmental
Endowment Commission**

2004

Bufo Incorporated & Studio Hanson/Roberts

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines the Needs Assessment for Education and Interpretation for the Skagit Environmental Endowment Commission above Ross Dam. The purpose of this assessment was to: ascertain and describe educational and interpretive programming relevant to the Skagit watershed; identify gaps, opportunities and unmet needs in the current activities; and suggest how SEEC might contribute to the filling of these gaps.

Initial information was collected by means of a questionnaire from 23 individuals representing 19 different groups and agencies. In addition, interviews and workshops were conducted with stakeholder groups in Hope, British Columbia, Sedro Wooley, Washington State, and Hozomeen Campground on Ross Lake. Workshop Participants were from a variety of backgrounds: Hope Mountain School, Hope School District, BC Parks, National Park Service (North Cascades National Park and Ross Lake National Recreation Area), U.S. Forest Service (Mount Baker District), Western Washington University, and the Upper Skagit Bald Eagle Festival Society.

Overall, within the study area, interpretation and education programs are at extremely low levels in Canada and at relatively healthy levels in the United States. Personal interpretation and education programming in British Columbia is almost entirely based on fee for service in the provincial parks, or help from SEEC grants which pay for both education programs like Hope Mountain School and Skagit Connections and part-time interpretive programs based at Ross Lake Campground. In Washington State, the National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, State Parks and North Cascades Institute provide almost year-round personal interpretation and education programming.

BACKGROUND

Since 1985, SEEC grants have assisted in building an infrastructure for, and supported the delivery of, educational and interpretive programming. SEEC's investment into education programs such as the North Cascades Institute (NCI), Hope Mountain School, and Skagit Connections, has been invaluable to these groups. North Cascades Institute has received substantial support from SEEC and developed a well-known and highly respected program for environmental education for all age levels.

The current grant system works acceptably because SEEC has not made the commitment to be a full partner and consequently is acting in the same manner as most granting agencies. At the same time, SEEC has made agreements with for annual funding with North Cascades National Park and BC Parks for a joint interpretive program, and with NCI for their educational work. While it is our conclusion that SEEC has received good value for these funding agreements, the Commission has limited means of evaluating this.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The SEEC goal for education is to increase understanding of, and support for, ecological and cultural values of the Skagit watershed upstream from Ross Dam. No specific needs are identified as part of this goal although examples of increasing understanding and support are provided. We have proposed a series of needs that reflect best practices for achieving education and interpretation goals. These needs reflect the range of activities that will reach the broadest interpretive or educational audience in a manner that addresses interests, learning styles and knowledge levels. Together with these needs are assessments of the extent to which they are achieved at present in the Skagit watershed north of Ross Dam.

The following table provides an appraisal of the interpretive and educational needs and a necessarily subjective appreciation of the extent to which they are met on both sides of the border.

NEED	Description	USA	CANADA
Education	Knowledge-based, primarily groups of similar age/interest, scheduled duration and known audience size, results are measurable, often involves fee for service		
Pre- & Post Visit Materials	Support for teachers to use in classroom	3	1
Curriculum-based Programs	Increases school support for visits	3	1
Site Visits	Hands-on contact with the Site and its features	2	1
Overnight Site Visits	Enhanced on-site experiences which permit additional learning, e.g. field projects	2	1
Education Center	Provides day or overnight in-depth exploration of subject, may be diploma or degree credit based	3	0
Adult Learning	Range of courses/experiences for adults interested in lifelong learning	3	0
Web materials	Provide critical planning information and follow-up materials for continued learning	2	1
Interpretation	Experience-based, primarily families with different ages and interests, free-choice learning, audience attendance varies with interest and other factors, <i>some</i> services are provided at no cost to participant		
On-site interpreter programs	Campfire presentations, guided hikes, demonstrations, living history, etc. scheduled at regular, convenient times and locations	2	1
Interpretive Signs	Provides interpretation when and where interpreters are not available	2	2
Self-guiding Trails	May use brochures or signs to provide a self-guided experience	2	1
Interpretive Center	Uses staff, displays, panels, multimedia to introduce and explore an area and its features in a comfortable setting and in ways which may not be possible on-site e.g. close-up views of wildlife	3	0
Takeaway Materials	Supplementary materials for additional learning which may be free handouts or brochures, or purchasable materials such as books, videos, CD-ROMs, etc.	2	0
Web Materials	Provide critical planning information and follow-up materials for enhancing the visitor experience and continued learning	2	1

Scoring System:

0 = Not available

1 = Very limited e.g. only occasionally offered or available, may not occur annually, limited in scope or numbers in the case of media

2 = Meets a basic standard in terms of availability to the public, e.g. school groups annually, interpretive programs seasonally, other materials available in some locations or on the web

3 = Full service, e.g. most services available at some level throughout the year, wide range of services offered at various locations, additional services offered during high season

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

SEEC needs to re-define their goals for interpretation/education. The current wording of the SEEC goals, vision and mandates are too broad. The words should strongly reflect what SEEC really feels its goals, mandates and vision are. The generality of the education and interpretation goals are such that virtually any interpretive facility could apply for funding. In the current goals, mandates and vision statements, the words “SEEC” or “Upper Skagit Watershed” could simply be replaced with any other place name or noun, which shows that the words are not specific enough to capture a real sense of place and of the agency.

SEEC lacks the capability at this time to be “full” partners for two reasons:

- virtually all land where interpretation takes place is public land already under control of a public agency so under present legislation, SEEC may advise, suggest or influence programs but has no decision-making authority for these lands
- SEEC has limited staff and resources for operations so that the on-the-ground work will always be done by others

STORIES

The Skagit story – and the related SEEC story - is significantly different between Canada and the U.S. both in terms of levels of educational and interpretive programming, and the stories that are told.

- In the United States, the main stories are wilderness, and the coexistence of recreation and power generation - controlling the river while protecting the environment.
- The main story in Canada is fishing, wilderness, and the Skagit River. Water supply and power generation stories in BC are focused in other portions of the Lower Mainland where they have stronger and more substantial stories to tell. Significant portions of the “wild” Skagit also occur in Manning Provincial Park and Cascade Recreation Area, and are available for interpretation and education.
- Shared by both countries is the “Save the Skagit” and the wise use of the river stories which are stewardship stories best told through education and interpretive programming at the Ross Lake/Hozomeen Campground complex.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The key question to be answered in this needs assessment is:

“What role can and should SEEC play in the future of environmental education and interpretation in the region?”

Participation and Evaluation

We recommend that SEEC:

- continue with two partnership arrangements currently in place
- retain some funding for short-term projects
- assess the potential for supporting new infrastructure and programming
- increase the Commission’s ability to evaluate and manage educational and interpretive projects, probably by means of new staff or contracting out

More Specifically, we recommend that SEEC:

- 1) Continue and enhance its role in programming at Hozomeen/Ross Lake Campgrounds, where the SEEC and Skagit story started.
- 2) Continue its relationship with North Cascades Institute.
- 3) Retain some portion of annual funding allocated for interpretation and education, for short-term or one-time grants both inside and outside the Skagit watershed north of Ross Dam, providing that supported projects relate in whole or in significant part to this area.
- 4) Investigate the development of a modest Skagit Visitor Centre located on or adjacent to the Canada/USA border to be shared by both country's staff and visitors.
- 5) Support the development of a modest environmental education facility in Canada within the Skagit watershed.
- 6) Identify/create a position or contract arrangement for co-ordinating, evaluating and managing interpretation and education programming in which SEEC has a significant level of participation.