SOUND WATER STEWARDS

2024 ANNUAL REPORT

EDUCATION | SCIENCE | STEWARDSHIP

Photo credit: Dan Hale

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

This report celebrates the many 2024 projects and accomplishments by our dedicated volunteers, persevering Board, and Board assistants, consistently supported by our talented staff. It highlights just a few of our ongoing education, science, and stewardship projects, including:

- Educating 300+ attendees at our 30th Sound Waters University (SWU) at Coupeville High School, our first in-person SWU since COVID,
- Welcoming 24 well-prepared graduates of our Volunteer Education and Training (VET) program, and
- Spotlighting the importance of salmon habitat to 600+ attendees at fun and educational "Baby Salmon Live Here" activities on Camano Island.

At the end of 2023, we said good-bye with gratitude to our long-time Camano Coordinator, Joan Schrammeck, and welcomed Hadley Beahan as our new Camano Coordinator. A heartfelt thank you to Hadley and our Whidbey Coordinator, Tabitha Jacobs-Mangiafico, the Board, Board assistants, and countless volunteers who stepped up all year to keep our organization running smoothly.

It was a pleasure to lead this organization in 2023/2024. As of January 2025, I've passed the baton to Robbin Boyatt and PaulBen McElwain as Co-presidents.

Paul Belanger, Ph.D., Geologist
President 2023 – 2024

WHO ARE WE?

Sound Water Stewards of Island County (SWS) is dedicated to learning about, protecting, and preserving our shoreline. We provide place-based learning, engagement, and community focused on the shoreline of Island County in collaboration with other like-minded organizations.

SWS just completed our ninth year as a nonprofit corporation, continuing the long tradition of Island County Beach Watchers (1989-2015). In an age where science lacks adequate funding, we are here to serve. Our volunteers attend 100 hours of training, which allows them to have a comprehensive view of the issues facing the Salish Sea. With that knowledge, they work to sustain a healthy Puget Sound environment through education, stewardship, and community science.

Many of our partners would not be able to complete their projects without help from our dedicated volunteers. Our partners include researchers, local schools, universities, Washington State parks, tribes, government agencies, and other nonprofit organizations that focus on understanding, preserving, and protecting the Salish Sea. They rely on SWS for data collection and to be the "boots on the ground" leading research and community engagement.

Photo credit: Dan Hale

OUR VISION

Engaged communities united in caring for our shorelines and the Salish Sea.

OUR MISSION

Protecting and preserving our coastal ecosystems through education, science and stewardship.

Photo credit: Lucius Andrew

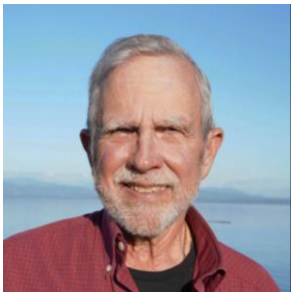
OUR STAFF

Hadley Beahan
Camano Coordinator

Tabitha Jacobs-Mangiafico
Whidbey Coordinator

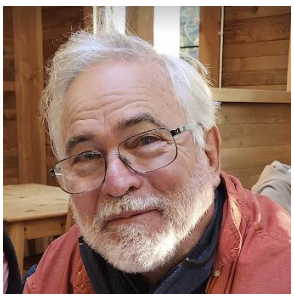
4,600+
hours of staff work, supporting community events, volunteer training, organization administration, and partner engagement

BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Paul Bellanger (W)
President

Robbin Boyatt (W)
Vice President



PaulBen McElwain(W)
Treasurer

Gaylen Heacock (C)
Secretary

Scott Chase (C)
Board Member

Jeanie McElwain (W)
Board Member

Allison Hiltner (W)
Board Member

Lee Badovinus (W)
Board Member

(C) = Camano Island, (W) = Whidbey Island

Board Highlights

Thanks to outgoing 2023 board members Stacey Thompson, Jim Husting and John Welsch for their years of service to SWS.

Thanks to Lee Badovinus for her 3 years on the board ending in 2024, and to Paul Belanger for leading us as board president in 2023 and 2024.

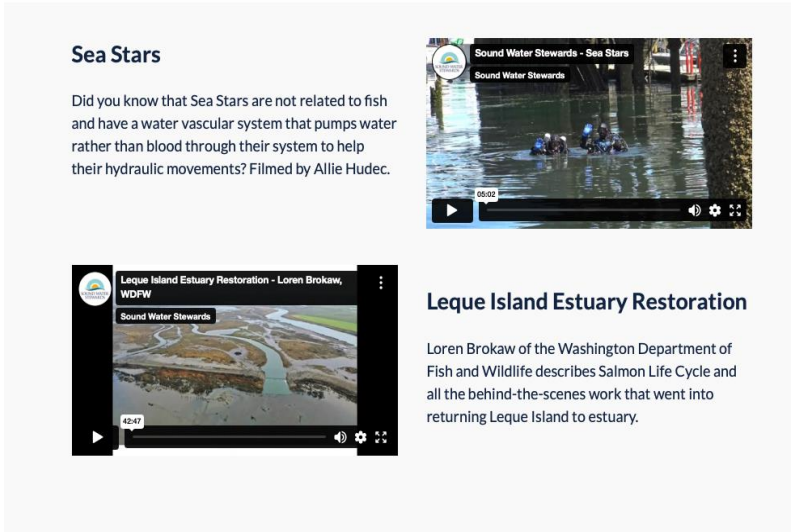
We are excited to welcome 4 new board members in 2025: Sean Duffy (W), Suzanne Shwetz (W), Fran Horvath (C), and Mark Commins (C)

DIGITAL RESOURCES

Media Gallery

40+ videos produced and posted by SWS on our work supporting the Salish Sea

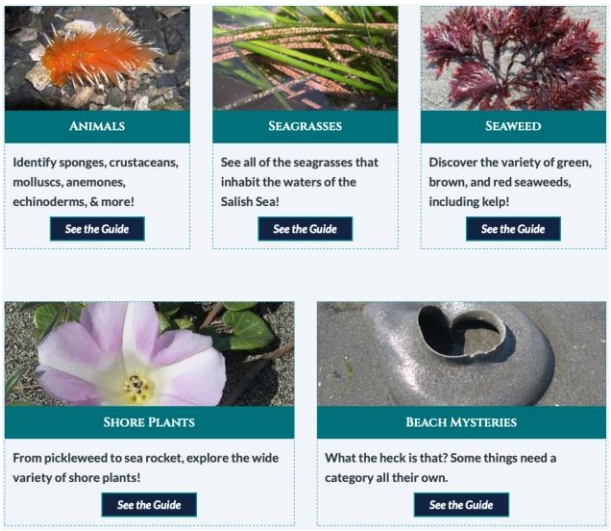
https://soundwaterstewards.org/education-center/media-gallery/



Marine Species ID

Interactive resource for identification of much of the marine flora and fauna found locally

https://soundwaterstewards.org/education-center/marine-species-identification/



Outdoor Tools & Resources

A collection of resources to help Island County residents better understand, support and enjoy our shorelines

https://soundwaterstewards.org/education-center/tools-resources/

Our work in numbers:

29
active projects

26
Pigeon Guillemot sites monitored

170
acres of bull kelp monitored

14
lbs of monofilament collected

70+
phytoplankton species observed

20,000
SWS Volunteer Hours

EDUCATION

Volunteers and staff share their passion about the natural world, teach children the wonders of island habitats, engage people of all ages to look carefully in tidepools, respect all forms of marine life, and live gently on our planet.

In 2024, we continued partnering with State Parks to lead beach walks and school field trips. Our volunteers conducted community education at festivals, low tide exploration events, a trivia night, our comprehensive Volunteer Education and Training (VET) Program, and our one-day Sound Waters University.

1,896
Education hours in the field

1,010
Ongoing education hours

386
VET committee hours

Photo credit: Dan Hale

Educational forest walk in Camano Island State Park with Dr. Linda Brubaker.

EDUCATION SPOTLIGHT

BABY SALMON LIVE HERE

Sound Water Stewards volunteers and staff hosted 13 events on Camano Island during the summer of 2024, including 8 in collaboration with Washington State Parks, 1 community festival, and 4 SWS-sponsored events, educating the public about salmon fry (baby salmon).

600+ residents and visitors attended ranger talks, educational events, and an open to all trivia night where they learned about this valuable species and its habitat, and how to protect and preserve it for generations to come. This program was made possible through community-raised funds through SCGive and the Stanwood-Camano Area Foundation.

13
Events

600+
participants

113
Volunteer Hours

EDUCATION SPOTLIGHT

VOLUNTEER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Twenty-four students graduated from our highly-acclaimed 2024 Volunteer Education and Training (VET) program, which included 7 classes held in-person at multiple locations, with most including a field trip, 8 classes on Zoom, and 5 additional field trips. As in past years, students gave rave reviews to the robust curriculum and the high quality speakers.

The class theme for 2024 was the interconnectedness of our island ecosystems, and how each of us plays a part in connecting with and protecting our natural environment. Class topics included the geology, hydrology, flora and fauna of our islands, with a focus on marine ecosystems and intertidal life. Field trip topics included the geology and biology of our bluffs, shorelines, wetlands, and forests.

Photo credit: Allison Hiltner

COMMUNITY SCIENCE

Trained Stewards support critical research in partnership with universities, government, tribes, scientists, and data managers across the Salish Sea. Stewards monitor flora and fauna on Island County beaches, observe Pigeon Guillemot colonies, collect data on marine debris, bluff erosion, and many more scientific endeavors. And, in our very own SWS Intertidal Monitoring program, we collect data on 23 beaches in Island County and share our findings with researchers at the University of Washington.

OUR DATA MAKE A DIFFERENCE The data collected by our Pigeon Guillemot, Sound Toxins, and Forage Fish Egg Survey volunteers are used by the Puget Sound Partnership as Vital Signs to track the health of Salish Sea bird populations, threats to healthy and harvestable shellfish beds, and the health of forage fish populations in the Salish Sea.

May 2024 Intertidal Monitoring at Utsalady Bay with Sound Water Stewards volunteers.

23
beaches monitored

2,338
volunteer hours

91
volunteers

COMMUNITY SCIENCE SPOTLIGHT

FORAGE FISH EGG SURVEY Several forage fish species lay their eggs on our beaches. They are a key link in the marine food web supporting salmon and other predator species. Protecting and restoring healthy spawning habitats for forage fish is an important component of salmon restoration.

In 2024, 10 SWS volunteers reported 246 hours collecting samples at four sites on Whidbey Island and one on Camano Island. A new beach we are sampling this year is Keystone Farm, which has recently undergone habitat restoration. Our efforts help the Island County Marine Resources Committee and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) track the presence of eggs, indicating whether forage fish are returning to restored beaches to spawn.

Photo credit: Kristin Galbreaith

EUROPEAN GREEN CRAB DETECTION SWS has partnered with Washington Sea Grant and WDFW since 2015 to monitor 7 sites in Island County for the invasive European green crab. In 2024, 12 SWS volunteers reported 143 hours on early detection to help WDFW remove these destructive crabs before they can get established in a new area.

In 2024,we expanded this effort to include 3 public education workshops with 20+ attendees on how to look for green crab molts (discarded shells), including hands-on practice on the beach. The molt search survey protocol allows many more people to participate in this early warning detection system.

COMMUNITY SCIENCE SPOTLIGHT

PIGEON GUILLEMOT SURVEY SWS member Frances Wood started the Pigeon Guillemot Summer Breeding Survey 20 years ago on Whidbey Island and it has been growing ever since. Today surveyors monitor colonies in 7 regions throughout the Salish Sea. 57 SWS surveyors monitored 23 colonies on Whidbey Island in 2024. SWS started a Camano Island survey in 2020, and 23 SWS surveyors monitored 3 Camano colonies.

Volunteers visit their colonies once a week throughout the summer and record the number of birds, number of visits, and number of prey deliveries to their burrows in the surrounding bluffs.

Photo credit: Lachlan Pope

SOUND TOXINS Throughout the year, SWS volunteers can be found with plankton nets on the dock at Camano Island State Park. Under the microscope, they identify all the plankton they find and count the harmful algae *(Alexandrium, Dinophysis, and Pseudo-nitzschia)*. 22 dedicated SWS volunteers worked over 1700 hours collecting and evaluating samples.

Sound Toxins is a Washington Sea Grant program providing an early warning system for the presence of harmful algae in our waters. In 2024, our volunteers found the largest *Alexandrium* bloom they've seen since monitoring began 7 years ago. WDOH closed the area for shellfish harvesting when toxin levels reached a critical level.

STEWARDSHIP

Our volunteers get out to the beaches and nearshore habitats to help remove unwanted marine debris, pull invasive plants, collect hazardous fishing line, plant native plants, and clean interpretive shoreline signs.

The simple act of removing items like plastic litter prevents birds and marine life from mistaking it for food, choking them or clogging their intestines. Marine mammals like sea lions and seals need a clean beach to rest, molt, breed, and give birth. Our efforts provide them a safe habitat and contribute to a healthy marine environment.

200+
volunteer hours cleaning Island County beaches

STEWARDSHIP SPOTLIGHT

CRABBER EDUCATION: Over 12,000 crab pots are lost in Puget Sound every year, where they continue to trap and kill crabs.

SWS volunteers handed out educational materials to over 100 people at boat launches and other locations throughout the crabbing season to teach crabbers how to minimize damage to our crab population.

KNOW YOUR WEEDS: SWS volunteers, in collaboration with Island County and several other organizations, held informational workshops at 3 locations on Whidbey and Camano Islands.

Participants learned to identify noxious weeds, such as Scotch broom and tansy ragwort, how to remove them safely, along with a work party to practice their skills.

SOUND WATERS UNIVERSITY 30th

Spawning Sunflower Seastar, Keystone, Whidbey Island by Tabitha Jacobs-Manglafi

Sound Waters University, the largest educational and outreach event and the largest annual Sound Water Stewards fundraiser, is held annually on the first Saturday in February.

On February 3, 2024, we returned to an in-person format at Coupeville High School for our 30th annual Sound Waters University. The theme was *You, Me and the Salish Sea: Responding to a Sea of Change*. Expert speakers enlightened the audience with the latest research on sunflower sea stars, forage fish, whales, octopus, kelp, plankton, tides, bluffs, and many other topics.

In 2024, the educational experience was enhanced with field trips focusing on beaches, bluffs, farms, forests, restoration sites, and winter birds on Camano Island and Whidbey Islands and in Skagit County.

309
attendees

24
educational talks

7
field trips

1,000+
volunteer hours

Camano/Stanwood

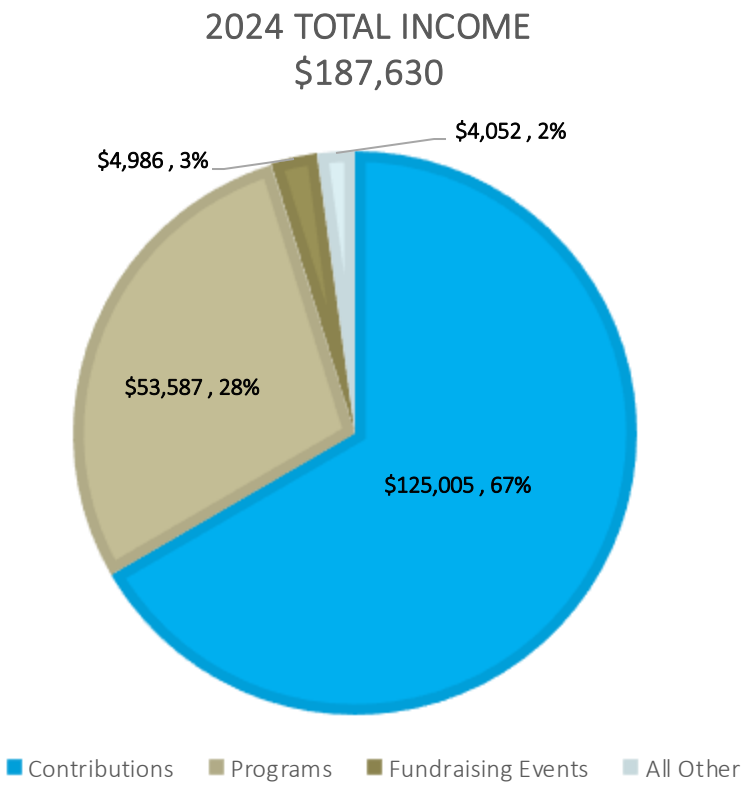
Lucius Andrew
Ralph Chubelashvili
Melissa Cole
Mark Commins
Art Evjen
Laura Fox
Barbara Gallagher
Stephanie Hamilton
Tina Henrickson
Fran Horvath
Dennis Johnson
Lois Ruskell
Debbie Shiozaki
Erica Sutehall

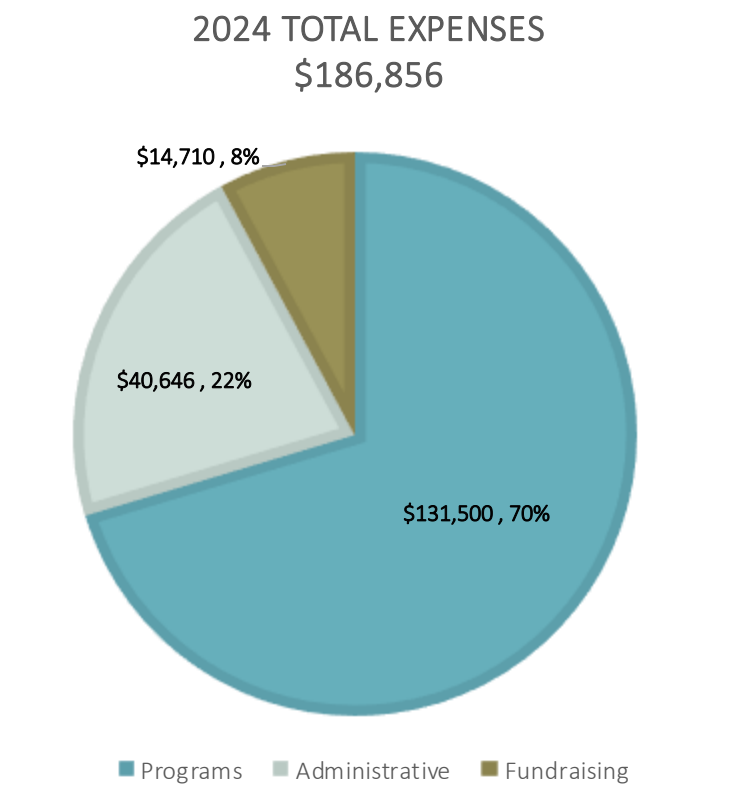
Whidbey

Heather Anson
James Boyle
Tito Craige
Sean Duffy
Judy Fihn
Kelsie Walker
Ashley Hironimus
Raymond Stowell
Leslie Thurston

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR 2024 VOLUNTEER EDUCATION AND TRAINING GRADUATES!

Photo credit: Will Sperling





2024 FINANCIAL RESULTS

2024 Income

Individual, corporate, and foundation donors comprised two-thirds (66%) of SWS income. Program revenue was 29% from SWU ticket sales, VET training, and book sales. 5% was from fundraising events, interest income, and inventory adjustment.

2024 Expenses

SWS dedicated 70% of its funding to program expenses for our staff to work with volunteers in advancing our education, science, and stewardship programs. Administrative expenses of 22% supported staff, accounting, and insurance costs. 8% covered fundraising events and donor management expenses.

Community Sponsors

Whidbey Community Foundation

Victor B. Scheffer Foundation

Lighthouse Environmental Programs

SCGive

Stanwood-Camano Area Foundation

Sound Waters University Sponsors 2024

Muckleshoot Indian Tribe-Charitable Fund

Island County Dept of Health

Whidbey Telecom

Island County Tourism : Embrace Whidbey & Camano Islands

Island County Lodging Tax Advisory Committee (LTAC)

Tulalip Tribes

Port Townsend Marine Science Center

Sno-Isle Group Sierra Club

Whidbey Island Bank - Freeland/Heritage Bank

Whidbey Island Kayaking Co.

Camano Island Chamber of Commerce

Puget Sound Energy

Whidbey Sun and Wind

Citizens Climate Lobby of Whidbey Island

Whidbey Audubon Society

Whidbey Watershed Stewards

Greening Congregations Collaborative of Whidbey Island

Whidbey Climate Action

Northwest Association of Networked Ocean Observing Systems (NANOOS)

Langley Whale Center (Orca Network)

Whidbey Island Maritime Heritage Foundation

Whidbey Environmental Action Network (WEAN)

THANKS TO OUR PARTNERS, SPONSORS, AND FRIENDS!

SOUND WATER STEWARDS

Education • Stewardship • Science