

## Miller/Walker Creek Stewardship Update: Fourth Quarter 2008 (Second Installment)

The fall quarterly update came out on October 8 but there's enough news that should interest you that I'm sending a second installment. Between quarterly updates, you can [find out what's going on in our creeks at the stream blog](#).

### Miller/Walker Creek Fish and People Make a Media Splash

The last two months have seen high profile news stories on the fish and people of the Miller and Walker Creek basin.

The Port of Seattle captured on video several coho salmon that migrated up to the reach of Miller Creek on Port property. This reach was among those restored as part of mitigation for construction of the third runway. Stories included:

- KING 5 TV: <http://www.king5.com/video/?z=y&nvid=302069>
- KOMO 4 TV: <http://www.komonews.com/outdoors/fishhunt/34625224.html?video=YHI&t=a>
- Port of Seattle video: <http://www.portseattle.org/seatac/index.shtml#salmon>

There were at least four stories focused on the third runway, which went into operation earlier this month, that referenced our fish and streams:

- KUOW radio: <http://www.kuow.org/program.php?id=16354>
- Seattle Post-Intelligencer: [http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/local/387805\\_runway14.html](http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/local/387805_runway14.html)
- Highline Times/Des Moines News: [http://www.highlinetimes.com/articles/2008/11/17/news/local\\_news/news02.txt](http://www.highlinetimes.com/articles/2008/11/17/news/local_news/news02.txt)
- CNN story on airport expansion at three U.S. airports included about 5 seconds of footage by the Port of the coho: <http://www.cnn.com/2008/TRAVEL/11/20/new.runways/index.html?iref=newssearch> (note: I saw this story broadcast on CNN but can't find the exact footage on the website)

Andy Batcho's work and his recognition by as a Conservation Hero by Field & Stream magazine led to the following stories in print and electronic media:

- Seattle Times: [http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/outdoors/2008253615\\_nwbatcho13.html](http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/outdoors/2008253615_nwbatcho13.html)
- KOMO 4 TV: <http://www.komonews.com/news/35049784.html>
- Field & Stream video profile: <http://www.fieldandstreamextras.com/heroes/videos.php>

Andy has been contacted by people around the Sound who saw these stories and were inspired to learn more so they can take better care of *their* creeks!

If you are aware of any stories not listed above, please let me know.

Let's hope this media attention generates more volunteerism and care for our creeks!

### Fish Returns Down

While the fact that coho salmon were able to migrate all the way up Miller Creek to the Port property was exciting and positive, anecdotal information suggests that returns this year are below average. Fewer than 50 fish have been seen at [the Cove](#) in Normandy Park so far, when normally 100-200 fish would have been observed. Anecdotal information I've obtained from elsewhere in the central Puget Sound area indicates that coho are returning in average or below average numbers on other streams and rivers. The fairly dry October probably did not help but there may be other factors, such as conditions three years ago when this generation was spawned/reared, at play as well.

The coho return is winding down and chum salmon are beginning their return. Coho salmon tend to predominate on Miller Creek whereas chum salmon tend to favor Walker Creek.

A good location to view the chum is on 13<sup>th</sup> Ave. S.W. ("Snake Road") in Normandy Park between the culvert and the fence of the Normandy Park Swim Club. Chum are less skittish than coho but approach the bank slowly to avoid disturbing them.

As always during spawning/egg incubation season (fall/winter), stay off the edge of the bank and do not walk on or in the creek.

Please send your fish observations to me. I have guidance on data to collect for carcasses (e.g., length, condition, etc.) – let me know if you want this e-mailed to you. We also are exploring how to better monitor adult fish returns in future years – see the article on stream monitoring below.

[The latest fish observations are always on the stream blog.](#)

## Volunteerism Up

For the last five years, the [Stewards of the Cove](#) have been attracting volunteers to restore Miller and Walker Creeks at the bottom of the basin, where they enter Puget Sound. This year was no exception, with monthly Stewardship Saturdays from March through October, and turnout as strong as in previous years.

This year, for the first time, there were multiple stream restoration opportunities upstream from the Cove across the nine-square-mile Miller/Walker Creek basin. Volunteers donated least 250 hours of labor at the following projects:

- 39 volunteers at three events at the Miller Creek restoration at S. 144<sup>th</sup> Way in Burien (project begun in fall 2007)
- 34 volunteers at four events at the Walker Preserve in Normandy Park (project begun in March 2008)
- 10 volunteers at one event to clean up trash from Fox Creek (tributary to Miller Creek) in Normandy Park

Volunteer restoration included tree planting, mulching, weeding – particularly ivy removal -- and trash cleanup. [The stream blog shows photos of the volunteers and lists nearly all by name.](#) These volunteers are investing in the health of our streams for the benefit of the people, fish, and wildlife that live along them – thank you!

These volunteer opportunities were made possible by shared financial support from the basin stewardship program partners: [City of Burien](#), [City of Normandy Park](#), [City of SeaTac](#), [King County](#), and the [Port of Seattle](#).

Look forward to more opportunities to make a difference in 2009. Events for the year will be posted by February at the [volunteer calendar webpage](#).

## Successes in the Battle Against Noxious Weeds

One of the great challenges of stewarding streams in urban areas is the continual intrusion of invasive weeds. Invasive weeds, particularly non-native weeds, typically grow in monocultures and crowd out native trees and shrubs. This, in turn, alters streamside ecology, causing negative effects to fish, birds, and wildlife.

Some of the most pernicious weeds include [Bohemian knotweed](#), [purple loosestrife](#), [policeman's helmet](#), and [giant hogweed](#). While not as common in our stream basins as English ivy and Himalayan blackberry, these other weeds are particularly worrisome because of their ability to spread. In addition, many

property owners do not recognize these weeds or have the ability to control them. Knotweed, for example, is very difficult to control without herbicide, which must be applied by licensed workers when control occurs alongside streams.

Fortunately in our basin, the [King County Noxious Weed Control Program](#) has been surveying and controlling infestations of these plants along Miller and Walker Creeks since 2005. [These Miller/Walker Creeks weed control efforts are summarized in a recently-released report](#) (Adobe Acrobat 1 MB). This success shows that weed control is possible. The recent work is reducing the acreage covered by these weeds, making future control more manageable.

These noxious weed control efforts were made possible thanks to funding from the [Port of Seattle](#), with additional financial support in the 2008 season provided by the [King Conservation District](#). I will be working with partner governments to find funding for control in future years to make sure that we do not lose ground in this important battle.

## **Next Monitoring Workshop: Participate on Thursday, December 4, 7 p.m. at ERAC in Burien**

Figuring out how healthy Miller and Walker Creeks are is an important task. As we take better care to avoid polluting stormwater runoff and improve streamside habitat, we want to measure our progress. Just one way to measure progress is to more methodically count adult fish returns, as noted above. Water quantity (flow), water quality, and habitat features also can tell us important things about the health of the land and water in Highline.

Interested citizens and city/agency staff are working together to answer these questions at a series of workshops. The first two workshops occurred on September 24 and October 29.

The next workshop will be on Thursday, December 4, 7 – 9 p.m. at the Educational Resource and Administrative Center, 15675 Ambaum Blvd. S.W., Burien.

The December 4 workshop will build on the discussion at the first two workshops. New participants are welcome and are encouraged to review the materials and summary from the first workshops so that they can participate effectively.

[View the materials and summary of Workshops #1 and #2.](#)

[View the stream blog entry for Workshop #1.](#) [View the stream blog entry for Workshop #2.](#)

Contact me if you have any questions or suggestions about monitoring water quality, stream flow, or habitat.

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[Green/Duwamish and Central Puget Sound Watershed Salmon Habitat Recovery \(WRIA 9\)](#)

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