

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: BELL CREEK

Volunteers and staff of the Eight Streams Project collected quarterly data on water and habitat quality between July 1997 and April 1999. Streamkeepers of Clallam County, which inherited the responsibility for volunteer stream monitoring begun during the 8 Streams Project, then coordinated with volunteers to produce a summary report on the Eight Streams data. This citizens' summary report combines volunteers' data with other information on stream health collected from local resource professionals. It represents an initial assessment of the condition of the creek, and is intended to help educate fellow citizens of Clallam County, as well as elected and appointed officials.

Monitoring history:

Bell Creek has undergone some of the most comprehensive restoration efforts in Clallam County, yet its monitoring history with the 8 Streams Project was spotty at best. A stable team of volunteers didn't gel around Bell Creek until after the time-period covered by this report. Consequently, the stream was monitored only sporadically over the life of the 8 Streams Project. Although five monitoring reaches in the lower two miles were planned, only three sites were actually established. In addition, Bell Creek was monitored by a number of different groups rather than by one consistent team. Dave Hasenpflug's 4th grade class at Helen Haller Elementary School monitored Reach #4, within walking distance of the school. A group of volunteers began to monitor Reach #5, but found that this reach seldom had water in it and gave it up. Another group led by a staff member of the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe monitored Reach #1. No reach was monitored consistently or comprehensively, and no Eight Streams volunteer knew enough about the creek to write an executive summary. This section has been written by the current leader of the Bell Creek Streamkeeper team (see Preface and Acknowledgments), along with Streamkeeper staff.

Description of watershed:

The headwaters of Bell Creek are on Burnt Hill, which is forested with some houses. Near the bottom of the hill, at the four-mile mark, there is a pasture with livestock that has access to the creek. After reaching the flat valley, the creek travels through pastures bordered by grassland and houses, until it reaches Highway 101 and the City of Sequim. Through Sequim, the creek is pretty much a narrow ditch with sparse riparian vegetation consisting mostly of grasses and blackberries. Most of the creek tends to go dry in the summer. However, the ponds in Carrie Blake Park do support fish, even when water is not flowing in the creek. From Carrie Blake Park to Spath Landscape Supplies, streamside vegetation is brushy, with cottonwoods and poplars the primary tree species. The creek at Spath Farm is overgrown with reed canary grass. From Schmuck Road to the mouth, the stream is fenced to keep the cattle out and has good canopy cover. State records show fish to stream mile 3.8, which is well upstream of the often-dry Reach #5 (stream mile 2.4).

Projects:

At Maple View Farm, just upstream of Reach #1, the creek has been remeandered and installed with large woody debris and stream bank vegetation. Livestock has been fenced off, and farm waste runoff is kept out of the creek. Similar work has been done on the State Dept. of Transportation property just upstream of that farm, and at Carrie Blake Park at approximately stream-mile 1.3. A 1998 project at the mouth removed some dikes and restored the estuary to a more natural state.

Conclusion:

Over the past few years, more than ten groups have carried out more than a dozen restoration projects affecting Bell Creek, making it one of the most focused-on streams in Clallam County. Most of these restoration groups sit on the technical advisory board to Streamkeepers of Clallam County. These advisors recently restated the importance of monitoring Bell Creek, to provide a baseline on the creek's condition and track the progress of restoration efforts. Streamkeepers successfully recruited a team to perform regular monitoring at three sites on Bell Creek, beginning in the summer of 1999.