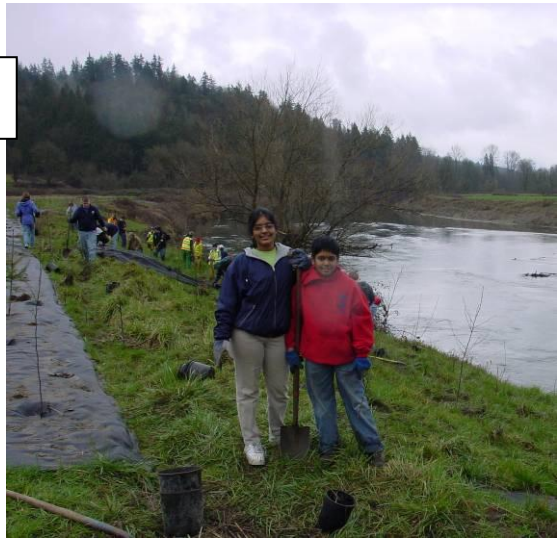
Pioneers in Conservation:

Stories from the Field

Progress Report for the Pioneers in Conservation Farms-Salmon grants program 2007-2009

Full Circle Farm – site of a Salmon-Safe project of Stewardship Partners funded by Pioneers

Salmon volunteers working at Oxbow Farm on the Snoqualmie River - another Pioneers Project



Pioneers in Conservation is a program of:

Washington State Conservation Commission

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

Pioneers in Conservation:
Washington's Partnership for Farms and Salmon

By 2005, Washington salmon recovery planners had come to an important conclusion about the relationship between agriculture and salmon recovery – namely that **saving farms is good for salmon, and that saving salmon is also good for farms**.

With funding assistance from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), this simple conclusion led Shared Strategy for Puget Sound to propose a new grants program exclusively to fund innovative salmon restoration projects on private farms – with the requirement that the projects would not only help save salmon, but would also help strengthen the farm business. After two years, the fledgling Pioneers in Conservation grants program had become so popular that the 2007 Legislature joined NFWF in funding this program through the Washington State Conservation Commission. Initially limited to Puget Sound and to farms, in 2007 Pioneers grants also became available for projects on private forest lands. And by 2008, it was extended to cover farms and forests throughout the State of Washington.

This report briefly describes some of the projects currently underway or completed through Pioneers funding. We believe these stories illustrate the power of the farm/forest – salmon recovery partnership now being implemented through the Pioneers program.

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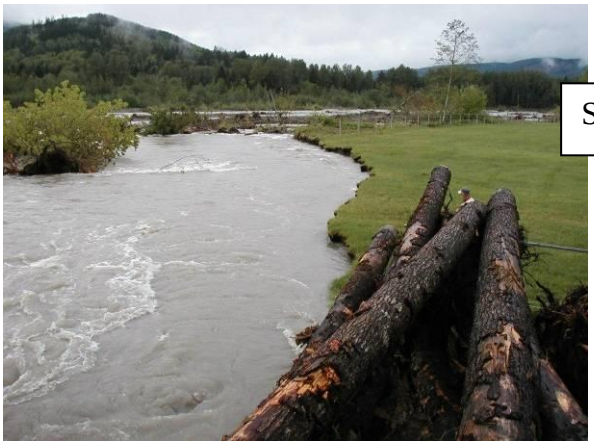
Woodlands Farm Bank Stabilization and Habitat Enhancement

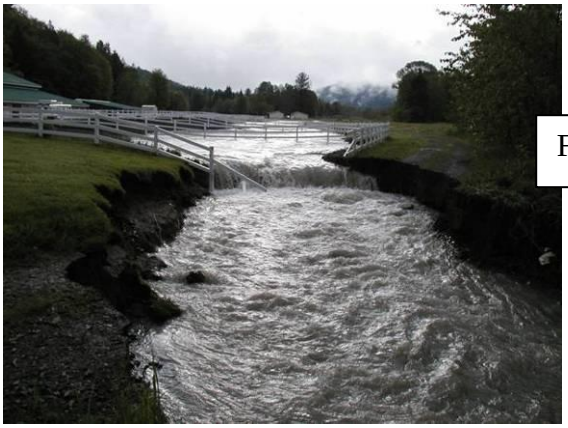
Saving Salmon and Protecting a Family Farm

The Bennett family's Woodlands Farms in Kendall, WA, had experienced considerable loss of land due to bank erosion over a period of some five years before applying to the Pioneers program. And winter floods had inundated several farm buildings and hampered farm operations. In early 2008, the Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association (NSEA) received a Pioneers grant of $34,260, matched by other funding of $19,296, to restore and protect a productive side-channel of the North Fork Nooksack River and create a new overflow channel for high flow events. The project involved planting riparian vegetation along some 2600 feet of stream bank and placement of large woody debris to prevent erosion and create improved habitat. As a result of this work, conditions for fish were greatly improved, stream bank erosion was reduced, and flooding of adjacent pastures and farm buildings was diminished helping the farm business. Elementary students form the local Kendall Elementary School will be using this site for education through the NSEA "Students for Salmon" program.



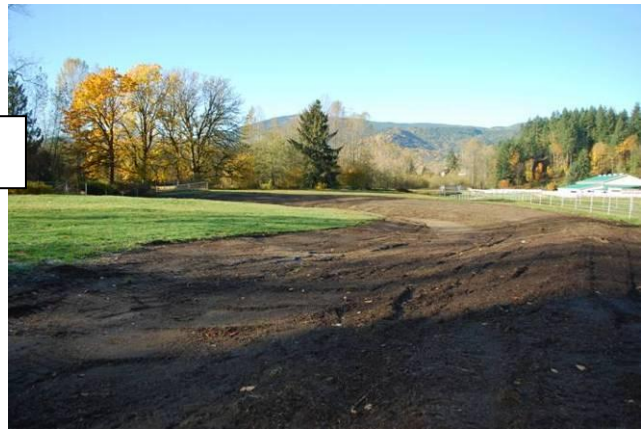
Stream bank erosion at Woodlands Farm

Stream bank protection work



Flooding prior to project

New Woodlands Farm overflow channel



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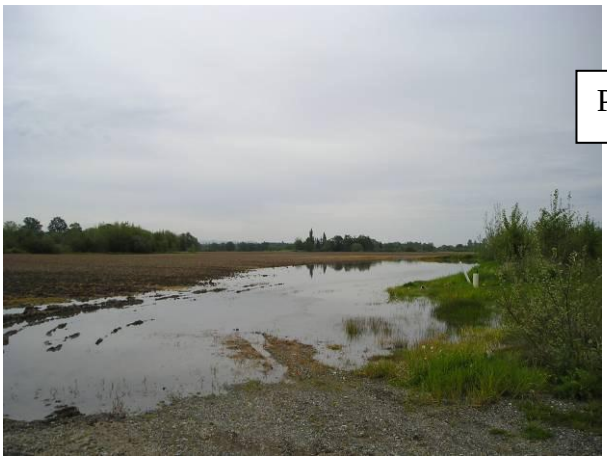
Schneider Creek Fish Passage and Riparian Restoration

Improving riparian fish habitat while preventing farm damage from floods

Some 450 acres of good farmland along Schneider Creek – near its confluence with the Nooksack River – is vulnerable to spring floods. Two hundred and sixty of these acres are planted each year in a potato-corn rotation by Dick Bedlington Farms. But for this land to be properly farmable, Bedlington and his neighbors need the protection of a floodgate maintained by a small diking and drainage district (DD#4). Local farmers can be suspicious of encouraging salmon on their land for fear of future regulatory requirements but Bedlington and his neighbors took leadership in allowing establishment of riparian buffers on their land. The existing flood gate, however, was an old, rusty, cast iron affair that hardly opened, was ineffective and providing needed drainage, and equally important, created a barrier preventing the passage of fish upstream to some 5 miles of high quality rearing and spawning habitat.

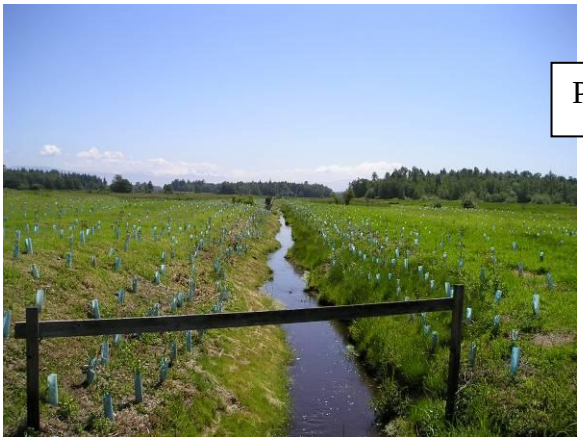
Rather than try to repair the existing flood gate, Whatcom Conservation District used a grant of $33,406 from Pioneers, and matching funds of $18,400 (including $8,000 in cash from DD#4), the Schneider Creek project to replace this old, ineffective flood gate with two new fish-friendly side opening, self-regulating gates that will allow fish access upstream while greatly improving drainage of the farmers' fields. To further enhance the area for fish, 9,800 feet of riparian buffer

was protected and planted with native trees and shrubs. It is anticipated that this project will demonstrate to local farmers how saving salmon can also be a big help for local farms.



Potato fields in planting season before project

Installation of new flood gates



Planting at Schneider Creek riparian site

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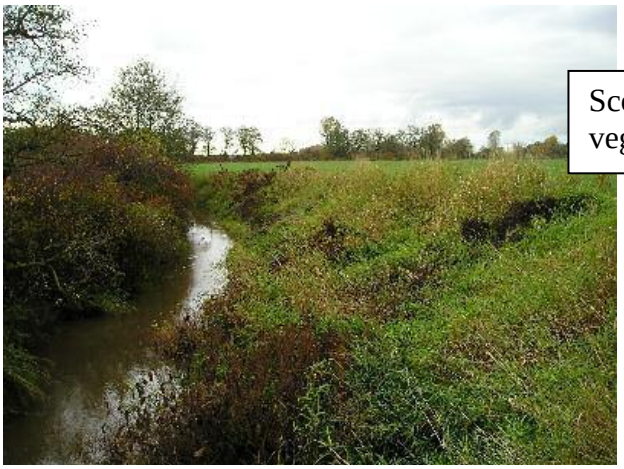
Scott Ditch Confluence Bank Stabilization Project
Improving riparian fish habitat while preventing farm damage from floods

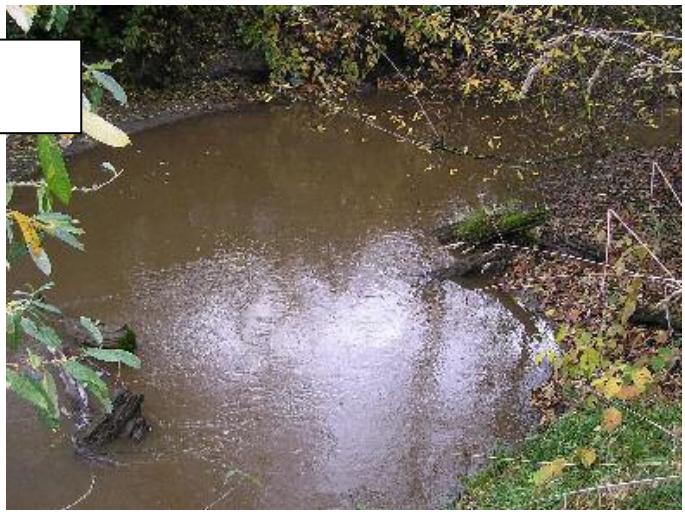
The Blok Evergreen Dairy is a large family farm located in lowland Whatcom County at the intersection of Scott Ditch and the Nooksack River. Annual Nooksack River floods damage the farm as well as some 5,000 feet of riparian salmon habitat which needs vegetation and habitat improvements. Stabilizing this bank will protect the dairy and cropland from damage and improve drainage. And it will provide greatly improved habitat for several salmon species that reside here.

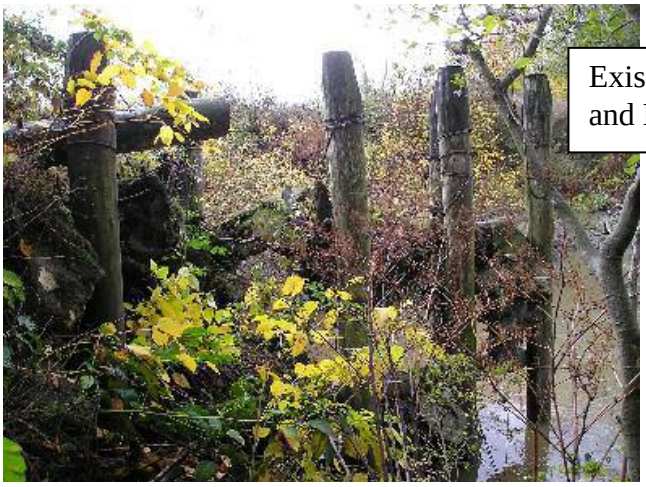
This Whatcom Conservation District project takes advantage of funding and volunteer labor partnerships with the Whatcom County Flood Control Zone District, the Whatcom County Drainage Improvement District #21, the Whatcom Sheriff's Office, the Whatcom County Public Works River & Flood Division, Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife, Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association, and The Blok Evergreen Dairy and the Lloyd Elenbaas Farm.



Scott Ditch on Blok Dairy Property. Left bank is vegetated and stable, right bank prone to erosion

Pool formed by single piece of large wood on Blok Dairy property





Existing piling jam at confluence of Scott Ditch and Nooksack River on Blok Dairy property

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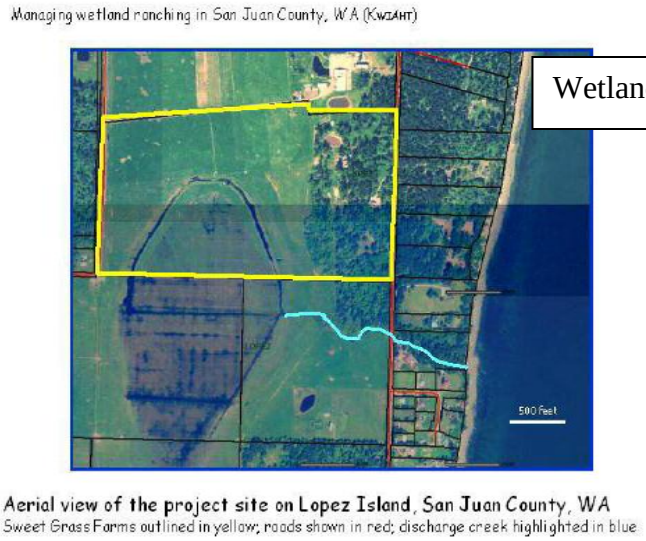
Managing Wetland Ranching in San Juan County

Improving wetland function while also improving productivity for livestock

San Juan County ranching has focused on shallow wetlands for 150 years. And innovative rancher Scott Meyers has been experimenting for several years with ways to reduce his livestock impacts on wetlands while actually improving their productivity for agriculture. Meyers has discovered that seasonal wetlands on his property can provide hugely productive grazing for his cattle during the dry season if these same wetlands are nurtured and protected during the wet months. This is one of the reasons his farm is called: "Sweet Grass Farm." In the winter, Meyers excludes his cattle from the wetlands, carefully manages for optimal vegetation development, and is reintroducing native vegetation. These actions can help both his cattle and the wetland function, diversify wetland vegetation, improve water quality that flows into nearby salmon near shore salmon habitat and prey areas. The project will help demonstrate a potential conjunction between improving wetlands and managed agricultural production.



Aerial view of the project site on Lopez Island, San Juan County, WA
Sweet Grass Farms outlined in yellow; roads shown in red; discharge creek highlighted in blue

Wetland ranching area at Sweet Grass Farm

A Pioneers Progress Report – June 2009

Some statistics:
Since its inception in 2005, 90 applications have been received for grants through the Pioneers in Conservation program requesting a total of $5.4 million. As of June of 2009 we had been able to provide funding for 32 projects totaling $1.4 million in total grants – with an additional $260,000 expected to be provided prior to the end of the current biennium for a likely 5 additional projects. Thus, since the start of this program, out of requests totaling roughly $5.4 million, we will have been able to fund about $1.7 million in grants. And, out of an estimated 90 applications, we anticipate having funded about 37. The four funded projects described in some detail above are simply examples of these 90 individual projects that will, by July 1, 2009, have sought assistance from this program. Each of these 90 applications represents, in its own right, a unique effort to save salmon while strengthening private agriculture or forestry and each of them demonstrates the power if a simple but powerful idea: That *saving farms and saving salmon can and must go hand-in-hand*.

Application process and review:
The Pioneers program is administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) with support from Evergreen Funding Consultants and American Farmland Trust and with funding from NFWF and the Washington State Conservation Commission. Our process has been to announce each upcoming grant round and publish the Request for Applications, application forms, and other information at least one month in advance. We directly distribute the RFP to likely applicants, agencies, non-profits, tribes, etc., broadly distribute these materials through community, agriculture, environmental, and other relevant e-mail lists, and post materials on the web at two sites – the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation site at: www.nfwf.org/Pioneers and the American Farmland Trust site at: www.farmland.org/Pioneers. We also make direct presentations about the program to likely and interested groups around the State and distribute a color brochure that describes and promotes the program. In 2008, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation instituted an on-line application form that is included at their web-link, above.

After a preliminary review by staff, applications are examined by a volunteer expert "Review Team" that evaluates them in accordance with criteria established to guide their decisions. They meet to discuss the applications and, based on the criteria, assign points to each project. When there are questions, staff will follow-up and inquire further with the applicants. The Review Team's recommended rankings along with their comments, questions, and responses to their questions are forwarded along for final decision by our two funders, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the Washington State Conservation Commission.

Over the past two years, there have been only a few changes in our Review Team membership. As of our most recent round, completed near the end of 2008, the following people were included on the Review Team and deserve our considerable appreciation:

- David Troutt, Nisqually Indian Tribe
- Shirley Solomon, Long Live the Kings and Skagit Watershed Council
- Jay Gordon, Washington State Dairy Federation & dairy farmer
- Chuck Warner, The Nature Conservancy
- Jason Paulson, the Methow Conservancy

- Millie Judge, Bear Creek Law Group
- Ron Wesen, Skagit County dairy farmer and new County Council Member
- Dick Carkner, Puyallup area farmer and retired WSU Agricultural Economist
- Wade Troutman, Douglas County farmer
- Jane Grant, Othello area farmer
- Carol Smith, Washington State Conservation Commission

A current (4th) round of 2007-09 Pioneers proposals is now in review. So there will be additions to be list, below. The following 15 projects are already funded during the current biennium. About 5 more are expected by July 1, 2009.

Pioneers Grants – July 2007- June 2009

Jefferson County Conservation District
Compass Rose Farm Stream - $63,173.00
Restore a portion of Snow Creek and its surrounding wetlands through relocation of the creek back to its original channel, construction of new channel where necessary, addition of stream crossings and exclusionary fencing, and restoration of the streamside buffer. The work will improve the farm value of the land and greatly improve access to fields which is currently limited by intervening wetland areas.

Whatcom Conservation District
Schneider Creek Fish Passage and Riparian Restoration Project - $33,405.63
Replace a fish blocking floodgate with a fish-friendly, self-regulating gate that will restore salmon access to over 26,000 feet of habitat and will establish 9,800' of riparian area upstream of the floodgate with native trees and shrubs. Eroding banks will be stabilized protecting adjacent fields and flood damage will be greatly reduced to fields and farm structures.

Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association
Woodlands Farm Bank Stabilization and Habitat Enhancement Project - $34,259.00
Improve salmonid habitat in a North Fork Nooksack River side channel while increasing stream bank stability and reducing erosion and soil loss in the adjacent pasture. Project partners will set back approximately 600' of livestock fence, install 8 LWD structures and plant 2,600' of stream bank with native vegetation.

Northwest Chinook Recovery
New Haskell Slough Ponds - $43,000.00
Expand and improve the off-channel rearing and over-wintering habitat on Haskell Slough, the largest off-channel habitat in the Skykomish River, through the construction of a one-acre pond and new 300 foot channel section. Project will also include restoration and replanting on Haskell Slough near the pond connections to improve flows. The ponds will provide the landowner with access for stock watering and for piped irrigation.

Stewardship Partners
Salmon-Safe Farming and Restoration on PCC Farmland Trust Properties - $60,456.00
Restore fish habitat on three PCC Farmland Trust properties. Restoration will include: riparian work along a 1,000' section of the Snoqualmie River at Ames Creek Farm, replacement of an

open irrigation ditch with a buried irrigation pipe to reduce water loss in the Dungeness River at the Delta Farm, and removal of invasive species and planting of native trees on a 1/4-mile section of a tributary to the Carbon River in the Orting Valley Farm. Additionally, this project will develop stewardship plans based on Salmon-Safe certification standards on the three properties and help create markets for the farmers' products.

Clallam Conservation District

Matriotti Creek Enhancement - $37,800.00

Remove two 90-degree bends in Matriotti Creek, a tributary of the Dungeness River, and improve instream and riparian habitat along approximately 2,000' of the stream that is currently void of riparian forest vegetation. It will improve drainage and the forested buffer will reduce soil erosion from flooding that has increased in recent years due to upstream development. It will also allow the landowner to enroll in CREP which will provide revenue to offset losses from land removed from production.

Skagit Conservation District

Maddox Creek Hedgerow Planting Project - Phase II - $54,422.97

Build on the success of a previously funded pilot and establish 9,000' of riparian hedgerow along Maddox Creek. This project will demonstrate to local agricultural producers that hedgerows take little agricultural land out of production and allow drainage system maintenance while still providing great benefits towards improving fish habitat and water quality.

Skagit River System Cooperative

Thomas Creek Riverine Wetland Restoration Project - $53,979.00

Expand the 2-year available floodplain along Thomas Creek by ~2.3 acres and provide ~6 ac-ft of increased temporary flood storage; enhance off-channel and riparian habitat through native re-vegetation, installation of LWD and bank re-grading. The project will implement a Drainage and Habitat Improvement Measure as a part of the community's Drainage and Fish Initiative Agreement that helps both farms and fish, and, by providing increased high flow storage, it will reduce flooding of farm fields in the area of the improvement as well as downstream.

Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association

Sterk Tenmile Creek Flood Control and Habitat Enhancement Project - $25,504.40

Restore riparian habitat along 1,800' of Tenmile Creek while improving water storage and conveyance in the stream channel, reducing flooding and soil loss on two adjacent dairy farms. Improved drainage will also greatly improve productivity of soils. Restoration will include creation of a more natural channel cross section, removal of Reed canary grass and re-establishment of native riparian vegetation.

Marshland Flood Control District

Batt Slough Tide Gate Replacement - $44,000.00

Replace a conventional tide gate with a fish-friendly tide gate, re-connecting ~5,500' of off-channel habitat and improving the rate at which flood waters drain off of 500 acres of cropland currently in hay, silage, corn, pumpkins, and nursery stock. This project will also make installation of this type of fish and farm friendly tide gate more visible to other agricultural producers.

Jefferson County Conservation District

Finn River Farm Bridge Construction - $24,123

Construct a bridge over Chimacum Creek to facilitate direct access for livestock and equipment crossing and to protect coho, steelhead, cutthroat habitat, water quality in critical stream reach, and support local food production. The farmer is putting the land in a conservation easement to protect it for both farming and salmon.

Educational Service District 113

Chehalis River Restoration along Boistfort Valley Farm - $34,599

Chehalis Basin Education Consortium students, Chehalis River Council, Chehalis River Basin Land Trust volunteers and Boistfort Valley Farm will restore 2,500 plus feet of riparian corridor along two rivers. The project protects the farm from debris and erosion damage from flooding while improving water quality and habitat for salmon.

Whatcom Conservation District

Scott Ditch Confluence Bank Stabilization Project - $35,000

The project will stabilize 5,000 feet of stream bank and place 8 large woody debris arrays to benefit riparian habitat for several local salmonid species. Stabilizing the bank will protect the adjacent dairy farm and cropland from frequent erosion and drainage problems.

KWIAHT (Center for the Historical Ecoloby of the Salish Sea)

Managing Wetland Ranching in San Juan County - $22,130

San Juan County ranching has focused on shallow wetlands for 150 years. This Lopez Island rancher has been experimenting for several years with ways to reduce his livestock impacts on wetlands while actually improving productivity for agriculture. This project will test, refine, and promote rancher developed methods for reducing impacts on near shore water quality and salmon prey base while demonstrating the benefits of those methods for livestock production.

Cascade Land Conservancy

Wilson Creek Restoration and Grazing Innovation Project - $71,956

This project will combine innovative management of grazing (flash grazing) in riparian areas to test and demonstrate the potential benefits for fish habitat, noxious weed control, and animal agriculture. It will, hopefully, provide a viable, fish friendly alternative strategy that can allow farmers to extract natural resource value in riparian areas while also providing benefit for fish habitat.

Attachments:

- Recent Request for Applications
- Pioneers in Conservation Brochure