

North Cascades and Skagit Watershed Eco-facts

THE SKAGIT RIVER

The Skagit River begins in southern British Columbia and flows 120 miles to Puget Sound, passing right by the Learning Center as Diablo Lake. In volume of water, it is the third largest river on the west coast of the contiguous United States. It is fed by over 3,000 streams and drains the largest watershed in the Puget Sound basin, an area roughly the size of Delaware. The Skagit is the only river system in Washington that supports all five species of salmon: Chinook, chum, Coho, pink and sockeye. It is home to six of the region's 22 populations of threatened Chinook salmon and contains the largest listed bull trout, pink salmon and steelhead stocks in Washington. The Skagit Delta also supports huge concentrations of waterfowl, shorebirds and raptors, including trumpeter and tundra swans, snow geese, gray-bellied brant, rough-legged hawks, peregrine falcons and one of the nation's largest gatherings of bald eagles.

NORTH CASCADES MOUNTAINS

Thrust up from the ocean floor in a tectonic collision millions of years ago, the North Cascades have been chiseled by glaciers into a jagged mountain realm full of sharp, stony peaks, deep valleys and long lakes. The North Cascades are part of the American Cordillera, the mountain chain that stretches more than 12,000 from Tierra del Fuego to the Alaskan Peninsula. Mile for mile, the North Cascades are steeper and wetter than nearly any other range in the conterminous U.S., and they are the most glaciated American mountains outside of Alaska. Because North Cascade peaks intercept frequent water-laden storms sweeping in from the Pacific Ocean, the range receives large amounts of rain and snow. This constant watering supports luxuriant vegetation on the west side of the range and a swarm of glaciers and snowfields on the higher peaks. It is not unusual for western valleys to receive up to 160 inches of precipitation a year, and the world record for the most snow in one year was recorded in the winter of 1998-99 at Mount Baker: 1,140 inches, or 95 feet!

NORTH CASCADES NATIONAL PARK

While the first formal proposal for creation of a national park in the North Cascades was made in 1906, it took 62 years before this vision became reality. Championed by the legendary Senator Henry M. Jackson, the North Cascades National Park Service Complex was established when President Lyndon Johnson signed the bill establishing the park on October 2, 1968. The "Complex" contains North Cascades National Park, Lake Chelan National Recreation Area, and Ross Lake National Recreation Area, and 93% of the park is designated wilderness.

Long before North Cascades National Park was established, this area was home to many Native American tribes and was a trade gateway between the Plateau tribes to the east and the Coast Salish tribes to the west. More recent settlers came to establish homesteads, mine gold, trap furbearing animals and build and maintain the dams that provide Seattle with much of its electricity. Gary Snyder and Jack Kerouac, legendary Beat writers, both tenured here as fire lookouts in the early 1950s. Since then, the range has been an increasingly popular area for hiking, climbing, camping and canoeing and other recreational pursuits.