



OCC inmate crew member places a wheelbarrow full of gravel in the creek. Photos David Hahn

# Inmates and others help create salmon habitat

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By David Hahn

Would you believe me if I told you you're looking at the newest part of the Sol Duc River, and for two weeks in August what became the most important gravel pile in America?

<https://www.forksforum.com/news/inmates-and-others-help-create-salmon-habitat>

While the mother Orca Whale was carrying her dead calf 1,000 miles along the Strait of Juan de Fuca and to the Olympic Coast there were people 40 miles inland trying hard to improve her food supply.



A wider view of the project.

The Southern Resident Orca Whales feed on salmon: 80 percent Chinook salmon and 20 percent other salmon. They only eat salmon and they are starving to death. Washington state is in an “Orca emergency” because we lack enough salmon to feed them. While WDFW will primarily focus on the Chinook salmon all other salmon will be at the top of the list.

That’s where our gravel pile became important. This gravel pile started out as an idea two years ago at a meeting with the Olympic Forest Collaborative and their pilot project with USFS at the H to Z thin site. A small part of the stewardship funds from that forest project went to pay for 40 yards of spawning gravel from the Hillcar gravel pit.

That gravel came to Eagle Creek Springs as replacement gravel. This 800-foot-long creek supports three different species of salmon along with being a wintering over creek during high water in the Sol Duc River. Eagle Creek Springs became one of 46 SSHEAR sites (Salmon Habitat Enhancement and Restoration) for WDFW in 1999. Part of the enhancement was 130 yards of spawning gravel for a Coho salmon gravel bar.

Over the 19 years of use that gravel bar has worn out and is now too small to support spawning.

After setting at the creek edge for three months, waiting for the rain to clean it, the gravel pile was still too dirty to pass inspection by WDFW Habitat biologists. With salmon fry in the creek from last years Coho salmon spawn this gravel had to be cleaned. So a couple of meetings later and a brand new Hydraulic Work Permit work began to clean it using a pressure washer and local high school students.

And, it still did not pass inspection. Who ya' gonna call next? The Pacific Coast Salmon Coalition brought in The Outside work Crew from OCC (Olympic Corrections Center), the guys that can do anything. For two days those guys cleaned the gravel and it finally passed inspection by both WDFW and USFS salmon biologists. Most of that gravel was then placed in the creek with a little left over for next year. We now have a 40-foot- long newly enhanced gravel bar ready for salmon spawning. Thanks Pacific Coast Salmon Coalition and the work crews from OCC.

