



Vancouver Lake Open House attendees and Franklin Elementary 5th graders on a bird scavenger hike at Vancouver Lake, April 20, 2015

Experience Vancouver Lake

Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership

*Year 1 Final Report
May 2015 – April 2016*

The Experience Vancouver Lake project engaged Vancouver area students and community members in a comprehensive watershed outreach program that built community awareness and appreciation for Vancouver Lake. Estuary Partnership staff grew relationships with Vancouver area schools and partners to create connections and a sense of ownership between the Vancouver area community and Vancouver Lake through education, engagement, and direct on-the-water experiences. The program built a constituency of people committed to ensuring Vancouver Lake remains a valued regional community treasure and environmental resource. The positive response to the project by students, teachers, parents, community members and partners has been over overwhelming. This report outlines the results of the project between May 2015 and April 2016 by task.

Task A. Educate – Vancouver Area Students

Goal: Our annual goal was to work with approximately 270 Vancouver area students (9 classes), providing approximately 1,900 hours of instruction on an extensive Vancouver Lake education project.

Final Outcomes: A total of 342 students from 13.5 classes received three, one-hour classroom lessons and one, four-hour field trip to Vancouver Lake. We provided 2,394 hours of instruction.

We recruited teachers to participate in the Experience Vancouver Lake Project from five Vancouver schools: Franklin Elementary, Fruit Valley Elementary, Hough Elementary, Lincoln Elementary, and Washington Elementary.

The following table provides details.



Fourth graders from Washington Elementary remove invasive blackberry, October 6, 2015.

School	Number of Classes	Grade	Number of Students	Parent Volunteers
Franklin Elementary	2	5 th	48	2
Fruit Valley Elementary	2	4 th /5 th	47	3
Hough Elementary	1.5*	5 th	42	0
Lincoln Elementary	3	5 th	84	12
Washington Elementary	5	4 th /5 th	121	12
Total	13.5		342	29

*5th graders from a 4th/5th split class were involved along with one full class of 5th graders.

The three one-hour classroom lessons covered a variety of watershed related concepts that are designed to introduce students to the components of healthy watersheds, plant populations within the watershed, and the interconnectedness of all living things. In lesson one, Estuary Partnership educators taught students how water moves through a watershed from the land to a network of streams and ultimately the ocean, and they were introduced to animals in the watershed and issues that affect watershed health. During lesson two, Estuary Partnership educators taught students about native and invasive plants and how native plants increase stream health and habitat in our watershed. During the third classroom lesson, Estuary Partnership educators helped students explore the direct and indirect connections between organisms in the ecosystem and used these connections to evaluate the impact humans can have on the environment. Lessons are about 60 minutes in length and involve hands-on activities and discussion. All lessons addressed key Washington State Standards in Social Sciences and Science. By the end of the classroom lesson series, students were excited and prepared for their field experience because they realized their actions would have a direct impact on fish and wildlife habitat.

The four-hour field trip to Vancouver Lake is designed to stimulate students' curiosity for their watershed, reinforce and further develop their understanding of concepts learned in the classroom, and directly engage them in fish and wildlife habitat restoration activities. The outdoor setting provides learning opportunities that are not available in the classroom, and supports students who learn better through direct experience. Most importantly, field trips were designed to create a sense of place for students. Ultimately, place based connections help students become more environmentally aware and promote behavior that benefits fish and wildlife. Students have fun exploring outdoors, while natural area restoration is more successful when students and the community use these areas and have personal connections to them. Each field trip to Vancouver Lake involved two classes, their teachers, and parent volunteers. Students took part in a service project where they removed invasive Armenian blackberry from around the lake and spent time exploring the natural area during a nature hike, birding, and plant activities.

Task B. Engage –Vancouver Lake Events For Community Members

Goal: Our annual goal was to conduct five community events and engage a total of approximately 100-130 community members in a planting, invasive plant removal, birding hike or clean up event.

Final Outcomes: We organized and lead four community engagement events involving 225 people:

- July 17th - Litter Pick-up Event - 37 volunteers collected 30 bags of trash.
- September 12th - Litter Pick-up Event - 47 volunteers collected 60 bags of trash.
- September 26th - EcoBlitz Event - 70 volunteers, 16 ID experts, and 8 event helpers identified over 150 species. (Assisted)



Volunteers gather litter during the September 12, 2015 litter pick-up event.

- November 21st - Volunteer Planting Event - 47 youth and adult volunteers planted 270 native trees and shrubs at Vancouver Lake.

All events connected local youth and adults to Vancouver Lake and offered a way for them to give back. The Estuary Partnership worked closely with partners to organize and lead each event, recruit volunteers, provide all necessary materials, and provide site information during the event.

Task C. Experience – Vancouver Lake Through On-Water Recreation Paddles

Goal: Our annual goal was to engage up to 120 people in an on-water Vancouver Lake experience using either two annual paddle events and/or hosting an annual 11-mile community paddle from Vancouver Lake to Ridgefield, Washington, to highlight opportunities and issues along Lake River – a key input to Vancouver Lake.

Final Outcomes: We led seven paddling trips with over 160 people, including trips with the Skyline Housing Authority, Girl Scouts, and community members.

In related work, but distinct and separate from Experience Vancouver Lake Program, the Estuary Partnership received funding from REI to improve a non-motorized boat access point on the Lewis River-Vancouver Lake Water Trail at the Port of Ridgefield Boat Ramp. We organized and held a project stakeholder meeting; secured a property survey of the site; hired a landscape architecture firm to create a concept design; solicited and synthesized initial stakeholder feedback on the concept design; coordinated the development of a revised concept design; met with Ridgefield City staff to discuss the project and secured their commitment to pay for project permitting; and began to solicit public input on the revised concept plan at the Vancouver Lake Open House.

We created the framework and entered sites from the Lewis River-Vancouver Lake Water Trail Paddling Guide (Paddle Guide) into an on-line, interactive mapping page on the Estuary Partnership’s website. Making the Paddling Guide interactive allows more people to access and plan trips on the Lewis River-Vancouver Lake Water Trail, and through that, to experience Vancouver Lake through on-water recreation paddles. We also developed a plan to install river mile markers along Lake River. Subsequently, with assistance from Ridgefield city staff and others, we installed river mile markers at approximately 10 sites.

Task D. Exchange – Communicate to Support Vancouver Lake

Goal: Our annual goal was to use various communication strategies to implement the “Experience Vancouver Lake” program by promoting events, building community engagement and engage further with existing Vancouver Lake users to enhance and build on cross promotion opportunities. We also said we would work with the City of Vancouver, Clark County, the Port of Vancouver, and other community partners to develop and host a one-day Vancouver Lake focused forum designed to engage members of the Vancouver Lake Watershed Partnership, other key stakeholders, and the community in a day of Vancouver Lake focused updates and discussion.



EcoBlitz participants explore Vancouver Lake, September 26, 2015



Vancouver Lake paddle with Skyline Housing Authority, July 13, 2015

Final Outcomes: The Estuary Partnership employed multiple strategies to promote Vancouver Lake litter pick up, volunteer planting, community paddle, and other events through social media, press releases, flyers, webpages, and newsletter articles. We also worked closely with the City of Vancouver, Clark County, the Port of Vancouver and other community members to host a successful Vancouver Lake Open House for the community.

Over the past year, we created and distributed five press releases: 1) “Experience Vancouver Lake” Project, 2) Vancouver Lake Eco-Blitz, 3) Vancouver Lake volunteer planting event, 4) Student education program activities at Vancouver Lake, and 5) Vancouver Lake Open House. The press releases resulted in six news articles or mentions in the Columbian and other local newspapers, including a front page article in the Columbian in June 2015. We created an “Experience Vancouver Lake” webpage on the Estuary Partnership website to promote Vancouver Lake community activities. To further advertise these activities, we posted activities 37 times on Facebook, tweeted 37 times on Twitter, and created 13 news articles or event announcements that appeared in the Estuary Partnership’s newsletter and Executive Director e-update. To build community engagement, we also reached out to local business, including Columbia Sportswear, Whole Foods, REI, New Seasons and other corporate partners to engage them in volunteer activities at the lake. The Estuary Partnership created event flyers for both the community paddles and the volunteer planting, and widely distributed them to community and corporate partners, Girl and Boy Scout councils, community event calendars, the Intertwine, friends groups, Vancouver high school career counselors, and many others.

The Estuary Partnership also worked closely with the City of Vancouver, Clark County and the Port of Vancouver to plan, promote and implement the Vancouver Lake Open House on April 27, 2016, at the Water Resources Education Center. Sixteen different community organizations/groups hosted tables at the open house, providing information on current education, recreation, conservation, and research activities happening around the lake. These organizations included including Salmon Creek Watershed Council, Sierra Club/Loo Wit Group, Vancouver Lake Aquatic Center, Vancouver Lake Sailing Club, City of Vancouver Public Works, Clark Public Utilities, Clark County Parks, Port of Vancouver, Washington Department of Ecology, US Geological Survey, Washington State University, and the Susan G. Komen Foundation. Dave Warner, teacher from Fruit Valley, and a couple of his students were in attendance and shared their recent involvement in the Vancouver Lake education program. The two-hour event attracted nearly 100 community members who enjoyed a brief program from the Estuary Partnership, a raffle, and light refreshments.

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

The Estuary Partnership quantifies results of our education and community engagement programs. We continually adapt our programming to meet current needs of teachers, curriculum requirements, students, and community partners to develop and deliver programming that achieves measurable results. Our six-person Education Team are highly qualified and experienced staff – five have Masters Degrees, including three with Masters Degrees in Teaching and teaching licenses. The team has over 72 years of experience teaching environmental education and leading volunteer activities.

Student Assessments. The Estuary Partnership conducted student pre and post project surveys to assess the effectiveness of our Education Program, including their watershed knowledge and affinity for nature. Student assessments are independently evaluated by Dr. Paul Michael, an Associate Professor of Psychology at Pacific University, who helped the Estuary Partnership create the survey and annually works with us to fine-tune it. Dr. Michael’ analysis of Experience Vancouver Lake assessments showed a statistically significant increase in student watershed knowledge and attraction to nature. Project outcomes included:

- 45% of students hadn’t been to Vancouver Lake before.
- 84% of students want to return to the lake with friends and family.
- 78% of students feel more comfortable spending time in nature.
- 82% of students have an increased interest in local plants and animals.

Complete student assessment results are attached.

Teacher Surveys. Teachers participating in the Experience Vancouver Lake project receive a post-program survey to provide feedback on the project and guidance for curriculum and project refinement. These assessments allow us to adapt our programming to meet current teacher curriculum needs and state benchmarks requirements, and ensure our programs are expanding and complimenting existing work. Both the teacher surveys and direct teacher feedback about the project were excellent. Some of the teacher comments include:

- “The classes were a wonderful extension to the science curriculum that we currently use. There is simply not enough time in the day to fit in the science that we would like to teach. Your program allows us to cover some of the science standards that are not taught throughout the elementary school years.”
- “The outdoor experience was fantastic. Due to the demographics of our student population, many of our kids do not get the chance to experience the outdoor spaces and nature of Vancouver. This trip allowed them to see and experience different ecosystems present in Vancouver.”

Community Members. We informally communicate with community members after each paddle event to recognize their involvement and solicit feedback. We send an email with photos, website and Facebook links, and future engagement opportunities. For this project, we received excellent feedback on our community paddle trips. All participants thought the paddle was very enjoyable, educational and informative. Here are a couple of the comments we received.

- “We had our 3 grandchildren, ages 5, 7, and 9. There were interesting lessons for all of them and we all really enjoyed it.”
- “It was wonderful to view trees, and birds from the water.”
- “Andy is a very good guide, pointing out all the birds and nature along the way.”
- “It was the right amount of information, with time to just relax and enjoy the sights.”

Vancouver Lake Open House. Following the Vancouver Lake Open House we sent an event evaluation to table hosts and open house attendees, soliciting feedback of the event. Overall, the table hosts found the event to be worthwhile and would participate if the event was held again. Open house attendees also enjoyed the event, although a few attendees expressed disappointment that there was not more information what is being done to take care of the lake. *Complete Vancouver Lake Open House survey results are attached.*

A Closing Note

The Estuary Partnership enjoyed this project immensely. I was a pleasure to work with so many partners who are so committed to this great resource and making sure it is enjoyed and protected by the community as a whole. Teachers were eager to have our programs and engage students in the Lake activities. Community members came out in numbers we didn’t expect.

We appreciate the support and confidence of the funders in us and working so closely with us to make this project a success.



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