

Additional information on activities in the Skagit River Basin

For information on additional activities, dining, or lodging, visit the Web pages of the area's Chambers of Commerce at www.wcce.org/skag.htm.

North Cascades National Park Wilderness Information Center

Information on backcountry hiking and backpacking in the national park. • **ADDRESS:** 7280 Ranger Station Rd, Marblemount, WA 98267 • **CONTACT:** (360) 873-4500 www.nps.gov/noca/permits.htm

Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest

Information on Mount Baker Recreation Area, Mount Baker Wilderness, and hiking and camping within the national forest and wilderness areas. • **ADDRESS:** 810 State Route 20, Sedro-Woolley, WA 98284 • **CONTACT:** (360) 856-5700 www.fs.fed.us/r6/mbs/

Skagit River Float Trips

Lists of companies offering raft trips on the Skagit and its tributaries can be found at: www.skagiteagle.org/, www.marblemount.com/ and www.upper-skagit-valley.info/attractions/rafting.html.

North Cascades Institute

This environmental education group offers an extensive selection of seminars, outings, retreats, youth programs, teacher workshops, and publications focused on the North Cascades and Skagit Basin area. • **ADDRESS:** 810 State Route 20, Sedro-Woolley, WA 98284 • **CONTACT:** (360) 856-5700 or www.ncascades.org.

United States Geological Service

Publishes guides for three geology-oriented field trips in this area. • **VISIT** <http://geology.wr.usgs.gov/docs/usgnps/noca/map.html> for more information.



Joan Fish

birding on the Skagit Delta

Skagit Audubon Society

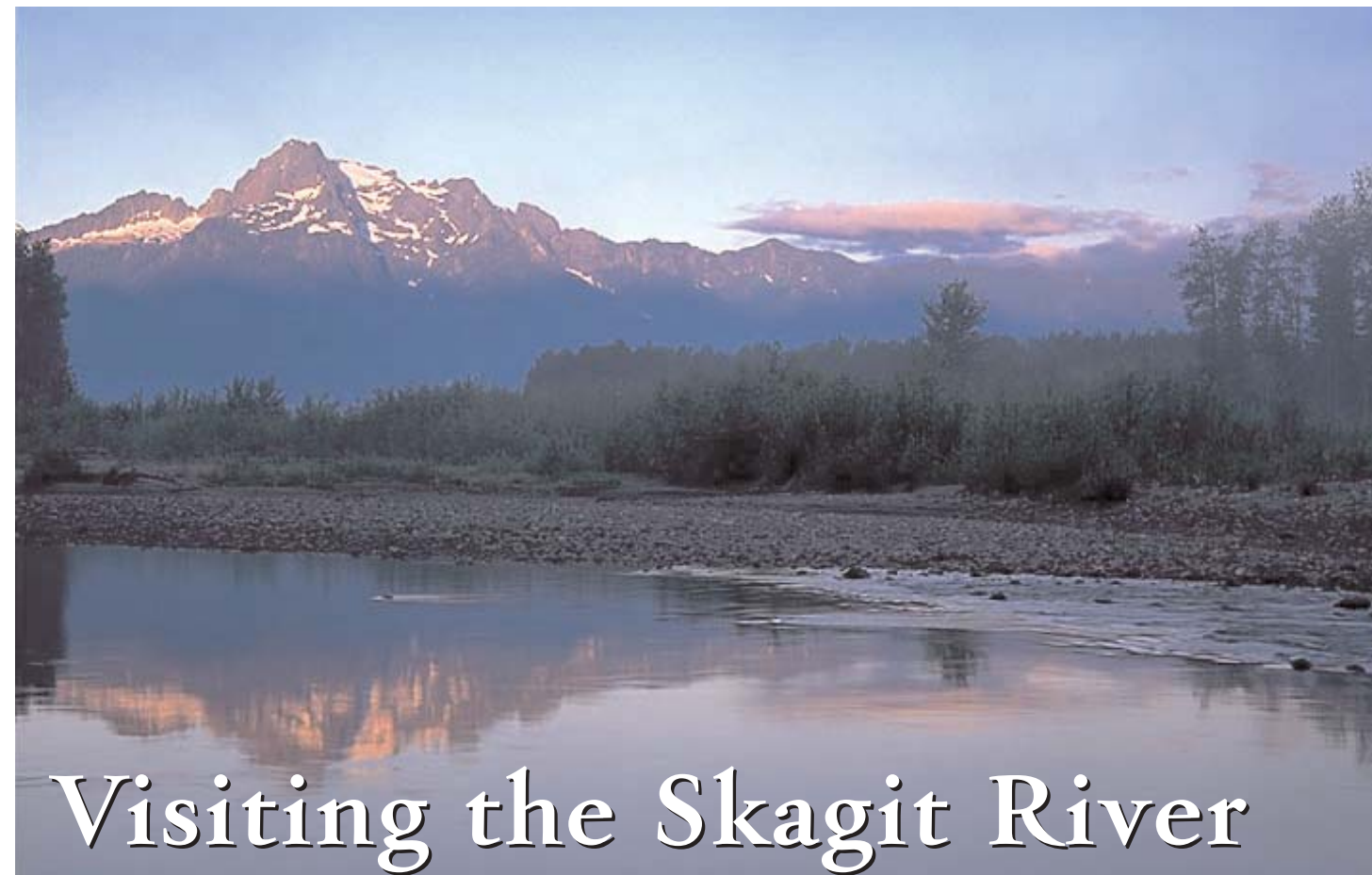
Arranges trips for birdwatching in the Skagit region. • **ADDRESS:** P.O. Box 1101, Mount Vernon, WA 98273 www.fidalgo.net/~audubon/

Skagit Valley Tulip Festival

This popular annual festival is held in April. • **ADDRESS:** P.O. Box 1784, Mount Vernon, WA 98273 • **CONTACT:** (360) 428-5959 or www.tulipfestival.org

Seattle City Light

Seattle City Light offers tours of its hydroelectric facility and Diablo Lake. • **ADDRESS:** 500 Newhalem Street, Rockport, WA 98283 • **CONTACT:** (206) 684-3030 www.seattle.gov/light/tours/skagit/



Keith Lazelle

The Skagit is one of the Northwest's mightiest and most beautiful rivers—a long and sinuous corridor that begins in the mountains of British Columbia and empties, 120 miles later, into Puget Sound. Along the way, it nourishes a 3,000-square-mile watershed—the largest basin in the North Cascades and one of the Northwest's signature landscapes. Not surprisingly, it provides habitat for countless animal species, including some that are considered icons of the Northwest.

Hundreds of bald eagles congregate along the river and its many tributaries. Bears, cougars, elk, pileated woodpeckers, osprey, and many other species make their home in the forested uplands. The estuaries and bays nourished by the Skagit and the adjacent Stillaguamish and Samish rivers support hundreds of thousands of shorebirds and waterfowl. And perhaps most important, scientists studying regional salmon declines consider the Skagit the most critical salmon-producing river in the Puget Sound.

The Nature Conservancy has been working in the Skagit for nearly 30 years. And as our understanding of this complex ecosystem has evolved, so too has our work. What started out as an eagle preserve in 1976 is now a seas-to-summit program, a vision to safeguard the entire watershed and coastal ecosystem in a way that allows both human and natural communities to thrive. The Conservancy, working closely with multiple partners, has helped put into protection more than 10,000 acres—lands that encompass forested uplands, the main stem of the Skagit, Sauk, and Suiattle rivers, and estuarine habitats.

This visitor's guide will help you experience the wonder of the Skagit River Basin. It suggests driving tours and hikes, campgrounds and rafting outfitters. It also lists several community events that will enrich your visit. The Conservancy works closely with a wide array of partners in the Skagit, and all of the places identified in this guide are owned by public agencies. We hope you'll take the time to visit the Skagit—from its delta to its forested uplands. And if you'd like to help us protect this remarkable landscape, please call us at 206-343-4344.

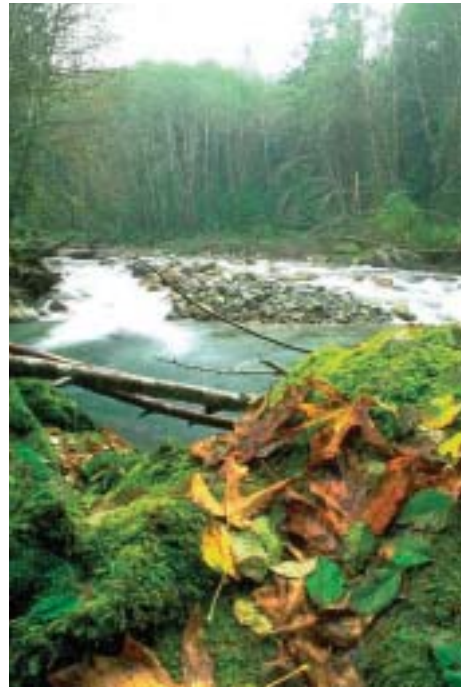
Exploring the Skagit's forest and rivers

Rafting and fishing are activities that enable you to explore the heart of the Skagit region while relaxing and having fun. You can set up your own trip or use the permitted outfitters listed at www.skagiteagle.org/outfitters.html to create a trip for you.

Bald eagles begin returning to their wintering grounds along the Skagit River in mid-November. Gradually the population builds to several hundred, peaking in mid-January. This gathering coincides with the spawning runs of chum salmon, since the carcasses of the spent fish are a major food source for the eagles. Local communities host an annual eagle festival during this time in Concrete, Rockport, and Marblemount. An eagle interpretive center is open during the winter months in Rockport, and volunteers staff popular viewing sites on weekends in late December, in January, and during the festival.

• **DIRECTIONS:** Rockport, in the heart of the viewing area, is about 40 miles east of Interstate 5 (I-5) on State Route 20 (SR 20). (The North Cascades Highway over Washington Pass is closed in winter, east of Newhalem.) • **MORE INFORMATION:** Contact the Upper Skagit Bald Eagle Festival at (360) 853-7283, or visit www.skagiteagle.org/.

Rockport State Park (Washington State Parks Department) provides short, mostly level hikes in a 670-acre old-growth grove. Here you can see the structural complexity typical of the forests that once flanked the Skagit. Ancient Douglas-firs stand among younger, moss-draped trees that took advantage of openings created by winds and landslides. Deer, bears, coyotes, mountain beavers, and other mammals live in these low-elevation forests, as well as dozens of bird species. The park is along the Skagit River. • **DIRECTIONS:** The park entrance is west of milepost 96 on SR 20 (just east of Rockport). A \$5 parking fee is required. The park is closed from the end of October until the beginning of April. • **MORE INFORMATION:** Contact the Washington State Parks Department at (360) 902-8844 or visit www.parks.wa.gov.



lowland forests and rivers

Keith Lazelle

The Old Sauk River Trail (Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest) allows you to visit a luxuriant riparian forest and view the dynamic processes of the Sauk River, the Skagit's largest tributary. Unlike many Northwest rivers, the Sauk has no dams, and as a result, its gravel bars erode, build up, and shift as the river crests and recedes. Your best

opportunity to see migrating fish is in late summer and fall. • **ONE WAY:** 3 miles • **ELEVATION GAIN:** none • **DIRECTIONS:** The entrance is at milepost 50 on the Mountain Loop Highway, approximately five miles southeast of Darrington. A Northwest Forest Pass is required. • **MORE INFORMATION:** Contact the Darrington Ranger Station at (360) 436-1155 or visit www.fs.fed.us/r6/mbs/recreation/activities/trails/drd/drd_0728.htm.

Exploring the high country

Cascade Pass (North Cascades National Park) is a stunning sub-alpine meadow beneath glaciated peaks at the meeting place of two beautiful valleys. Such mountain sites provide

the headwaters that feed the Skagit and its tributaries. Melting snows furnish abundant flows in late spring and early summer, while glaciers ensure a steady water supply in late summer and fall. Life in these high altitudes has adapted to deep snows and short summers. When the snow leaves (typically mid- to late-July), wildflowers and heather rush into bloom. You may see the marmots, pikas, and ptarmigans native to the area. • **ONE WAY:** 3.7 miles • **ELEVATION GAIN:** 1,800 feet • **DIRECTIONS:** Take SR 20 to Marblemount and turn east onto Cascade River Road by taking the bridge across the Skagit River. Follow this road 23 miles to the trailhead. (The last few miles are gravel road.) A Northwest Forest Pass is required. A number of trails offer further hiking beyond the pass. • **MORE INFORMATION:** Contact the North Cascades National Park Visitors Center in Newhalem at (206) 386-4495, ext. 11. Or visit www.nps.gov/noca/cascadepass.htm.

The Sauk Mountain Trail (Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest) provides, on a clear day, a 360-degree view of the entire Skagit River system: The Cascade range that is

its source, the river and its tributaries through the basin's mid-elevation forests, and the Puget Sound. At the top of the mountain, an outstanding show of wildflowers occurs after the snowmelt. • **ONE WAY:** 2-plus miles • **ELEVATION GAIN:** 1,200 feet • **DIRECTIONS:** Turn north at milepost 96 on SR 20 (just east of Rockport) onto the gravel and twisty Sauk Mountain Road (Forest Service Road 1030). After seven miles, turn right onto FS Road 1036 and follow it to the end. (A Northwest Forest Pass is required to park.) • **MORE INFORMATION:** Contact the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie Ranger Station in Sedro-Woolley at (360) 856-5700 or visit www.fs.fed.us/r6/mbs/recreation/activities/trails/mbrd/mbrd_0613.htm.

Exploring the Skagit delta

The Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve protects 11,000 acres of the Padilla estuary. The reserve includes several near-shore and upland habitats, including extensive mudflats supporting almost 8,000 acres of eelgrass meadows, the largest in the Sound. Such estuaries are among the most biologically productive places on our planet. Padilla Bay provides a nursery for salmon, crab, and herring, as well as habitat for millions of invertebrates that feed the bay's abundant herons, otters, and other animals. An interpretive center (closed Mondays, Tuesdays, and holidays) provides information on the bay's ecology. A 2.25-mile interpretive trail follows the shore, and a 0.8-mile trail explores near-shore meadows and forests. • **DIRECTIONS:** Take SR 20 west from I-5 (use exit 230). Following signs to the reserve, turn right onto Farm to Market Road, then left onto Josh Wilson Road, and then right onto Bayview-Edison Road. The interpretive center is on the right approximately a quarter

mile past Bay View State Park. • **MORE INFORMATION:** Contact the reserve's interpretive center at (360) 428-1558 or visit www.padillabay.gov.

The Skagit Wildlife Area (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife) protects 13,000 acres of tidelands and intertidal marshes, including the now-rare estuarine scrub-shrub wetlands once common in Puget Sound. It supports 180 bird species and is an important wintering area for waterfowl and shorebirds on the Pacific Flyway. Beaver ponds in the less saline waters create habitat for juvenile salmon and sticklebacks. Other common mammals include black-tailed deer, raccoons, coyotes, and muskrats. Popular activities include hiking, birdwatching, hunting, and canoeing. Hunting season runs from September to March.

• **DIRECTIONS:** To reach the area's headquarters, take Exit 221 on I-5 and head west on SR 534. After less than a mile, turn right onto Fir Island Road and travel 1.8 miles. Turn left onto Wylie Road and follow it to the end of the road. An Access Stewardship Decal is required to park and can be obtained anywhere state hunting and fishing licenses are sold (but not at the parking lots themselves). • **MORE INFORMATION:** Contact the Skagit Wildlife Area at (360) 445-4441 or visit [ww.wdfw.wa.gov/lands/r4skagit.htm](http://www.wdfw.wa.gov/lands/r4skagit.htm).

North Cascades National Park Visitors Center

Interpretive center, naturalist programs, and information on activities accessible by car in the national park.

• **LOCATED ON:** SR 20 near milepost 120 and the town of Newhalem. Open weekends mid-November to mid-April and daily the rest of the year. • **CONTACT:** (206) 386-4495, ext. 11 www.nps.gov/noca/pphtml/facilities.html.



Peter Murray

shorebirds along Skagit tidelands



Scott Church

spawning runs of chum salmon