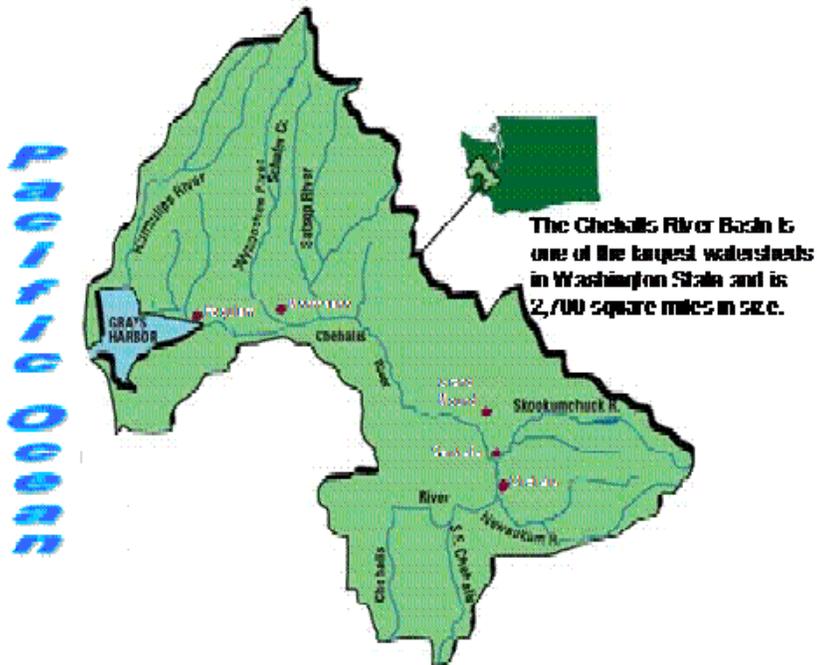


Chehalis Basin Education Consortium

Educating Teachers, Students, and the Community



Introduction

Ever feel like kids in school today know more about the environment than you do? Ever wish someone provided hands-on tools to make learning about our environment easier? Did you know the Chehalis River Basin is the largest river basin in western Washington?

Since 1999, the Chehalis Basin Education Consortium has raised the awareness of teachers and students about water quality issues in the Chehalis basin. Students are given the opportunity to learn about the environment and are provided with hands-on experience in water quality monitoring, riparian restoration, and other projects that help protect and improve water quality.

Problem

Many water quality problems in the Chehalis basin are caused from nonpoint source pollution. Agricultural runoff, on-site waste disposal, timber practices, and residential land use all contribute to a variety of documented water quality problems. Problems identified on the 1998 303(d) list include temperature, fecal coliform, dissolved oxygen, and pH in tributaries and mainstream reaches throughout the upper watershed. The 303(d) list is a list of water bodies in the state, submitted to EPA every two years, which do not meet state water quality standards. Grays Harbor is listed for not meeting fecal coliform water quality standards. Sources of potential bacteria pollution include septic system failures, livestock operations, dairy, agriculture and hobby farms, urban areas, industrial operations, and wildlife.

The Chehalis River Education Consortium's work focused on education and awareness of these water quality problem areas to help citizens address them.

Project goals

A few of the project goals were to:

- Increase shade along the Chehalis River by restoring a 200-foot wide, one-mile long forest on a former cattle ranch now owned by the city of Centralia Utilities and home of their new wastewater treatment plant.
- Involve 300-400 elementary, middle school, and high school students along with Centralia College students and other community volunteers to plant up to 6,000 native trees and shrubs.
- Conduct at least ten field studies annually for local school children to learn about the importance of healthy riparian zones for water quality.

- Encourage the continued participation of 120 students, teachers, and community members in the annual Chehalis Basin Student Congress. Actively engage school children along with Grays Harbor College students in the ongoing riparian restoration and cleanup of Alder Creek.



Milestones and outcomes

More than 8,000 riparian trees and shrubs (19+ species) were planted along the Chehalis River, Black River, and along Vance and Cozy Valley creeks. In the first two years after the planting along the Chehalis River there was an impressive 90 percent survival rate.

As students conducted trash cleanups at each monitoring site, they commented about the apparent disregard for the environment based on the amount of trash they picked up. They also removed invasive Scotch Broom and English Ivy. Students in the Chehalis River basin learned that they have the knowledge and the power to protect and enhance water quality.



Project highlights

Water quality monitoring training events were held each year along the Chehalis River Discovery Trail in Centralia for teachers from the upper watershed and at Shafer State Park in Satsop for teachers from the lower watershed. Each year, 750-1,100 students were involved with water quality testing. The Chehalis Basin Student Congress was held annually at Grays Harbor College to provide an opportunity for student delegates “to share and analyze their water quality data.” Students also shared water quality displays and works of art and poetry.

The December 2007 flood can also be viewed as a learning exercise. Students saw, first-hand, the damage caused by the floods and the need to replant upwards of 2,000 trees and shrubs along the Chehalis River Discovery Trail.

Partners

The Chehalis River Council partnered with the Educational Service District 113 (ESD 113), the city of Centralia, the Chehalis River Basin Land Trust, and upwards of 1,100 local school children and college students along with school districts from Aberdeen, Adna, Boistfort, Centralia, Chehalis, Elma, Mary M. Knight, Montesano, Napavine, North Beach, Lake Quinalt, Ocosta, Onalaska, Rochester, and Tumwater. The wastewater treatment plants in Centralia and Elma ran the fecal coliform samples. Grays Harbor College and city of Hoquiam Americorps volunteers assisted with the Chehalis Basin Student Congress. Thanks to people like Kathy Jacobson, coordinator with ESD 113, this project was a success.

Funding

This project was funded in 2005 by a grant from the Clean Water Act Section 319 Nonpoint Source Fund. At the end of the project, the total overall cost was \$315,485 and the grant amount was \$235,298 through the Department of Ecology.

For more information

Kathy Jacobson, CBEC Coordinator
Educational Service District 113
360-464-6722
kjacobson@esd113.k12.wa.us

Tammy Riddell, Project Manager
Water Quality Program
Southwest Regional Office
360-407-6295
trid461@ecy.wa.gov

Rob Schanz, Chairman
Chehalis River Council
360-807-0764
crc@crcwater.org

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