

# Stillaguamish Tribe Keeps Eagle Eye Out

With several homes nearby and a healthy dose of traffic, a tree grove along Frank Waters Road near Stanwood is not the place one would expect to find prime habitat for an endangered species. The occasional 747 roaring overhead contributes to the semi-urban effect.

Just as dusk settles, though, something even more majestic than a 747 in flight swoops through the trees, almost noiseless, casting a shadow on the moon. It's one of several dozen bald eagles that will return here this evening, resting overnight in the branches.

These eagles are being watched – for their own good – by researchers from the Stillaguamish Tribe as the birds return home from a long day of feeding. This December, tribal crews began surveying the areas eagles use along the North Fork of the Stillaguamish River.

Since starting its eagle survey program in 2003, the Stillaguamish Tribe has been studying the endangered national symbol. This year, tribal researchers are watching two prominent roosting sites, studying how many eagles are using the perches and for what purposes.

“Documenting where the roosts are is very important. It helps us learn more about what eagle populations need to thrive, and it helps us support policies that protect eagle habitat,” said tribal biologist Jen Sevigny.

The Frank Waters Road roost is a prime example. With pressure to log the surrounding area, being able to prove with sound science that eagles were roosting in significant numbers here was essential to preserving bird habitat.

“This place looks fairly suburban,” said Stillaguamish natural resources technician Robbie Hutton. “But if you just watch for a while, you see how many eagles rely on this site for survival.”

“We want to be sure that our forest practice policies are adequate to protect the eagle,” Sevigny said. “The surveys should help us get an idea of what the regional wintering populations are doing once they migrate here from British Columbia and Alaska.”

The bald eagle is listed as “threatened” under the federal Endangered Species Act, but scientists say what it needs to recover is no great secret. Like most wild creatures, eagles re-



As night falls, Stillaguamish tribal natural resource technician Robbie Hutton watches for eagles to begin roosting. *Photo: J. Shaw*

quire an expanse of quality habitat, an abundant food source, and a safe place to breed and raise young.

Before those places can be safeguarded, though, they must first be identified. Stillaguamish crews are seeking out critical areas in their local watershed. Regionally, other tribes and non-tribal organizations are joining in the effort.

The survey work is being done in cooperation with the Tulalip and Sauk-Suiattle tribes, as well as the National Park Service and The Nature Conservancy. – *J. Shaw*



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## ***Tribe’s Land Purchase Protects Critical Habitat***

The longest journey begins with a single step, and the Stillaguamish Tribe took a major step this fall on the way to safeguarding an essential ecosystem.

The tribe acquired 137 acres of land along Squire Creek, one of the most important tributaries of the Stillaguamish River. This is the first in what the tribe hopes will be a series of land purchases designed to protect areas vital for fish and other wild creatures.

“Squire Creek contains some of the most important habitat for salmon and wildlife in our watershed,” said Shawn Yanity, Stillaguamish tribal chairman. “We have to be sure that the creek and the places surrounding it are protected.”

Squire Creek is a key contributor to the Stillaguamish River’s North Fork, draining a watershed of 25 square miles. It offers habitat for chinook, pink, chum and coho salmon as well as steelhead.

The area around the creek is also of cultural significance to the Stillaguamish. Besides preventing destruction of habitat, the tribe aims to preserve the acreage for traditional uses, such as gathering traditional plants.

While significant in and of itself, the purchase of this parcel is just the beginning. Ultimately, the tribe would like to acquire about 2,000 acres of land in the watershed.

“We’d like to do something similar to what the Nisqually Land Trust has done,” said Yanity, “acquiring land in order to be sure it is preserved for the next generation.” – *J. Shaw*