

FISH STORY



Fish returned like a herd of buffalo to Denny Creek this afternoon. Though summer rainfall continues lean into fall and the creek only trickles, King Salmon by the hundredpound litter the upper reaches with their worn and weary carcasses.



Walk up the creek, from the lake, through the Holmes Point culvert, through the wetlands, under the fallen tree bridges, through the boulder pool ladder, under the old cement bridge, and further, into the lovely meandering shallows, through the Coho incubation site at horseshoe bend, and then further than hikers usually go. Only coyotes follow the trail here and houses are far up the hillsides. Now you will unmistakably smell a solid wave of something rank and ripe.

As the sliver of creek threads sword fern and salmonberry, you will begin to see them, shocking in size and stench, spent silver bodies strewn in pools and eddies and sidechannels. Every ten feet for hundreds of yards, a fish. Some are taut and lovely, 16 inches long and silver. Many are four feet long, bloated and battered, their flanks designed in brown and red. Each curves and cuddles moistly into its niche,

What disoriented this herd of mixed species and ran them all the way up a creek one eighth their body size? What moved this mass of fishy nitrogen to coat the edges of the creek as their ancestors did in days of yore? What ghoulish ghost dance is this?

Brought to you by the Denny Creek Alliance, another Jim Sproull special, oh neighbors up the hills of 72nd Avenue NE. These fish, a donation of the hatcheries, will quickly decompose, tatter, tear, strew and be strewn downcurrent as the rains raise the waters and the woodland wildlife discovers an unexpected feast. When our incubated coho return (we hope) to their natal stream this spring (?) they will find it loaded with nutrients spread out from the bodies of their anadramous relations.

Imagine the fish stories: The first sharp eyed eagle will return to its mate, "Honey, you won't believe what's upstream." Tonight, the cats and dogs and coyotes and raccoons will follow their noses to bounty. Some will gorge, some will bury, some will neatly wash their hands before tasting, and the golden retrievers will roll and roll in mud and fish egg stew. Tomorrow, kids

taking the shortcut home will discover the smell, then the hugest fish that lie close to the 132nd St cut-through. “Mom!!” and Mom will call King County whose biologists will report the return of the Chinook, in buffalo quantities, to Denny Creek.

By Ellen Haas

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