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The Bellingham Eco-Heroes

By [Maryruth Belsey Priebe](#) on May 24, 2010



Last April, six intrepid environmental advocates were chosen to receive the Environmental Heroes Award (PDE) from [RE Sources](#), a nonprofit environmental education organization in Bellingham, Washington. Their incredible work has made a significant positive impact on their local environment and so we wanted to find out what they're up to now and how their success has impacted their advocacy work.

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Mike and Elaine McRory



The McRory's took their love of the outdoors and passion for fishing and turned it into a nonprofit organization which is known today as the [Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association](#) (NSEA) established 20 years ago. Through educational programs, fundraising, direct advocacy, volunteer organizing, collaborating with local farmers, and more, they have made tremendous progress toward substantial streamside restoration.

Current Projects

Though Mike and Elaine have cut back on their direct involvement with NSEA, they remain committed to the cause and continue to champion it. Elaine is currently working on a project to upgrade the educational placards used to identify species of plants and fish along streams, and Mike continues to work with the executive of NSEA to develop a strong board and gain funding for future projects.

“Educating the public is one of the most valuable things we do because when they get in local politics and have an understanding, it does make a difference,” comments Elaine.

Advice for Aspiring Eco-Heroes

The pair had plenty of advice for newcomers to the world of environmental advocacy: “Have patience and persistence and commitment; it's gonna take years and years and years.”

“It generally takes one person that is just a bulldog (that’s Mike) that will just push and push and people realize you’re not going away.”

“It takes a community to do this kind of work, and gradually you build trust with people and organizations.”

“The thing is that if people say, “Gosh, it’s almost too late to save this or that,” but then it’s gonna be worse if you wait another year. There’s no time like right now, so you just have to do it! Before you know it, 20 years go by and if you hadn’t started 20 years ago, you’d be in much worse shape.”

**BEFORE****AFTER**

Barry Wenger

During his more than 20 years with the State of Washington’s [Department of Ecology](#), Barry Wenger has defended environmental measures like the Growth Management Act, Shoreline Management Act and Whatcom County’s Critical Areas Ordinance. He was also instrumental in putting together funding and volunteers for a project to remove creosote logs from area beaches. Re-developing shoreline areas such as the old mill site are also important to Wenger in his position. “One of the things that the community appreciates,” explains Wenger, “is that I speak up at hearings and meetings and try to give them the best guidance and scientific information that’s available about their local ecology.”

Current Projects

Today, Wenger is working in collaboration with Western Washington University, Bellingham Technical College, Northwest Indian College, and the Lummi Nation Natural Resources on an innovative project to develop new educational programs as part of the new Northwest Center for Advanced Environmental, Fisheries, and Aquaculture Sciences. The site for this educational facility will be along Bellingham’s Whatcom Creek where students can be trained in habitat restoration, species recovery, and renewable energy research (including biofuel research). The project will reclaim a brownfield site and an old fisheries hatchery facility.

Advice for Aspiring Eco-Heroes

“Do some careful research before they get too far. There are a lot of well-organized, thought-out advocacy groups out there that they may be able to collaborate with. But they should follow their heart and passion and make it fun!”

Kyle Morris

Kyle Morris gave up his vehicle when he moved to Bellingham, a lifestyle change that morphed into work as the administrator of [The Hub](#), a community bike cooperative in Bellingham where locals can come and fix their own bikes, recycle old bikes and parts, and buy used cycling gear. Through his cycling advocacy at The Hub, Morris has established a low-income bike dispersal program as well.

Current Projects

“The shop has got me hog-tied,” says Morris. “It’s a busy place, a living, breathing beast that has got a lot of needs and requires a lot of feeding and time.” But Morris has been working on ways to recycle old gear into functional items like bike racks and

cargo racks. He also tries to lead by example, helping others make greener lifestyle choices in everyday ways.

Advice for Aspiring Eco-Heroes

“Just do it!” encourages Morris. “I don’t take no for an answer, and if no is the answer, I find a way to create dialogue and make compromises, and otherwise just steamroll it. Go for it! And for me it’s a matter of being diplomatic, tactful, and making an attractive case. Market whatever you’re doing as cool, functional, and practical so that people like the idea and so that you don’t turn people off right away.”

Gordon Scott

As an integral member of the [Whatcom Land Trust](#), Gordon Scott has been passionately working to restore wildlife habitats, open spaces, and parks in the local area.

Current Projects

Scott’s work in habitat restoration is ongoing, with several initiatives focused on protecting existing salmon habitat in the Nooksack river basin. He has also recently been involved in restoring the shoreline on the Puget Sound, a project that involves buying up land that’s in good habitat condition and preserving it.

Advice for Aspiring Eco-Heroes

“I’d say you can start with the personal or just being aware,” suggests Scott. “Learning about the functions, process, and limitations of the local environment is important. Learn as much as you can about your watershed. Volunteer with a nonprofit conservation group and give financial donations to those that you believe in.”

David MacLeod

As one of the key organizers behind [Sustainable Bellingham](#) and the City of Bellingham/Whatcom County Energy Resource Scarcity/Peak Oil Task Force, David MacLeod has worked hard to bring organizations together to work on environmental issues large and small.

Current Projects

MacLeod continues to be involved in a wide variety of environmental movements, including an [Energy Resource Scarcity/Peak Oil task force](#) appointed by the City of Bellingham and Whatcom County, a networking site called [Transition Whatcom](#), [Sustainable Connections Future of Business](#) conference, and a project to produce a sustainability toolbox in conjunction with [Cascadia Workshops](#). At home, he and his wife cultivate a ½ acre lot to grow their own food and rebuild the soil.

Advice for Aspiring Eco-Heroes

“Real change can happen when enough people join together, address the tough issues honestly, and focus on positive actions for the future we want to create,” says MacLeod. “Find out if there is a Transition Initiative happening in your community. If there is, join it, and if there isn’t, get one started (see [transitionnetwork.org](#) or [transitionus.org](#) to find out how).”

This was [The Bellingham Eco-Heroes](#), an entry in our [Restoration Campaign](#) from May 24, 2010. It was filed under [Rivers](#)

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