

Uncommon partnership

Farmers work with winter floods to create salmon habitat

By Jana Alexander

Dale Reiner has learned to think like a salmon.

"We're all going to have to eventually," Reiner said.

Dale and his brother Alan are two of several property owners along a 3 1/2 mile stretch of Haskell Slough who have agreed to restore salmon rearing habitat, while at the same time preventing the Skykomish River from reclaiming its 1910 course. That historic course cuts through the Reiner property and would take out Ben Howard Road and a portion of state Route 203.

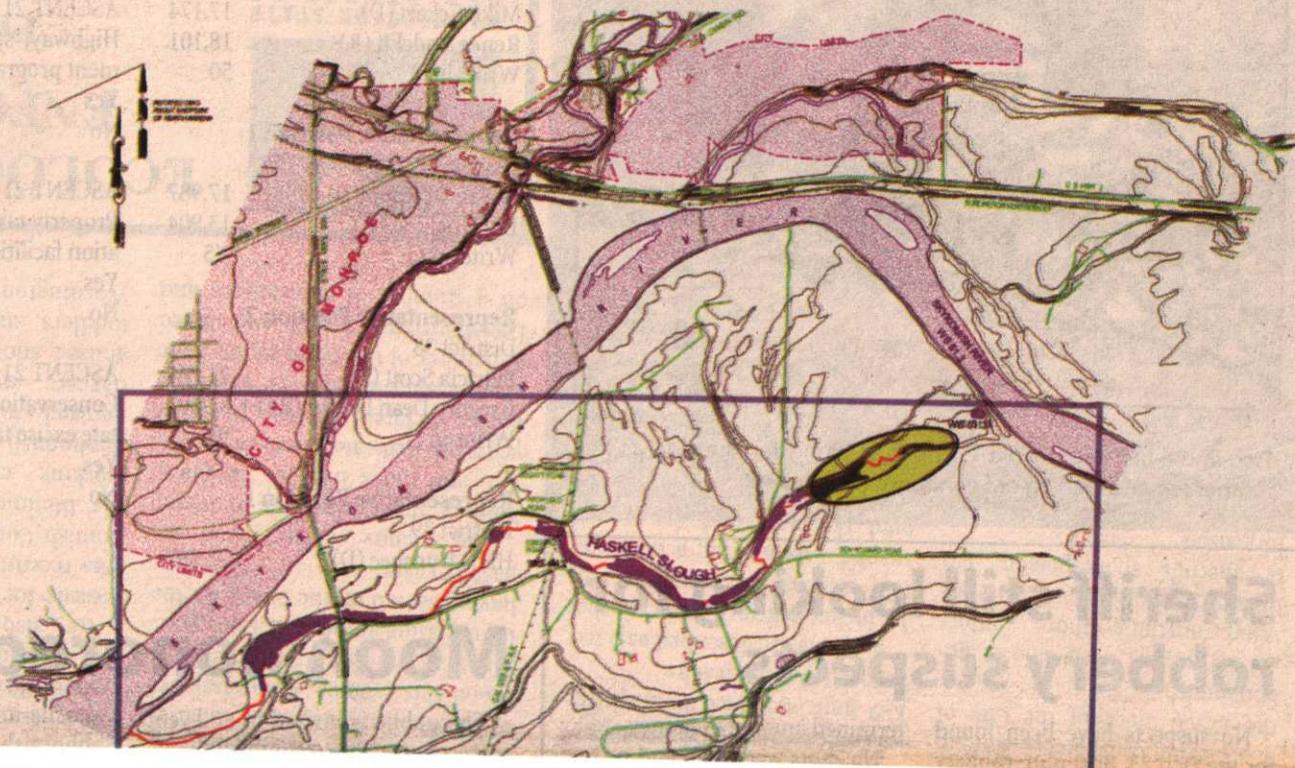
By the time the project is complete, every private property owner along that path will be able to file that historic memory away. And by next year, the increased salmon rearing habitat is expected to up salmon runs by 10,000.

"We're helping the environment to help ourselves," Reiner said.

Rearing habitat is what salmon are lacking right now, Reiner said. So, that's the type of habitat the 3 1/2 mile project is creating.

"What we've done is created a nursery for salmon. It's a preschool and a nursery," Reiner said. "Minnows have to have a place to hide out and grow."

Rearing habitat includes ponds and streams with natural pools created by log jams and root wads (dead trees with the



roots sticking out in the water), cool temperatures created by trees that provide shade, and minnow-food (since bugs are attracted by woody debris). Shade also keeps the temperature too low for bass to live there. Bass are a natural predator of young salmon, Reiner said.

Flooding is natural for a river. So is changing course. The Skykomish has changed course twice in the last 200 years, Reiner said. And it's clear from historic maps and aerial photographs that the river is working towards taking back its 1910 path.

A flood in February of 1996, which washed away 18,865 feet of the Reiner's New Zealand fencing and carried away 80 acres of topsoil led the family to a few discoveries. They hired a geomorphic engineer who confirmed their fears: The original path

of the river has begun to re-form. That means the next major flood could take out the Reiner farm, Ben Howard Road and a portion of state Route 203.

"It could take one flood, it could take two," Reiner said.

Snohomish County had said they would address the changing course of the river. But in May of 1996, they still didn't have a start at it, Reiner was told.

"That's when I got involved with these salmon enhancement people," Reiner said.

The Haskell Slough Restoration is a cooperative effort of private landowners, environmental groups, government agencies, community groups, the Tulalip Tribes and local businesses. And it's an example of what people can do if they pool resources, and commit to negotiation.

Negotiation adds to the learning experience for Reiner. In discussions with the Tulalip Tribes, the Reiners learned a about the relationship between farming and fish habitat. The Reiners had planned to farm around salmon rearing ponds that will be built on his brother Alan's land. But negotiators from the tribes didn't like that idea much, Reiner said.

"I guess farming practices and fish

habitat are not very compatible because of fertilizing and so forth," Reiner said.

So with a little patented Reiner co-operation, negotia-

tors pushed forward with plan number one. Reiner's first goal, after all, is to save the family property. Their second, is to save salmon.

But the river isn't willing to negotiate. So, flooding works into the restoration in a number of ways. Jute netting, and rocks wrapped in tough plastic netting are embedded where flooding previously cut away established banks. In other areas, some erosion is expected.

"During a flood situation, or high waters this year, we'll have some scouring of this bank," Reiner said. "It could cut off a corner; it could go the other way."

The restoration not only prepares people for flooding situations by encouraging the river to keep its present path, it also prepares a floodplace for salmon.

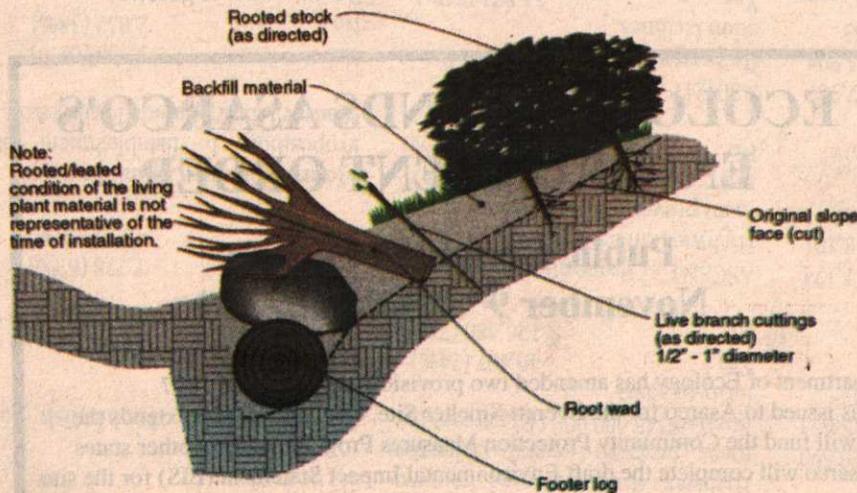
"(Ponds are) where salmon hide during a flood," Reiner said.

Connecting streams provide transportation for salmon after floods, and during spawning season.

When existing ponds along the Haskell Slough Restoration Project were disconnected, salmon would get caught there after floods and die before they were able to spawn.

(Art provided by Haskell Slough Salmon Enhancement Project)

Restoration along the slough will bring back 3.5 miles of river slough for salmon and wildlife.



(Art provided by Haskell Slough Salmon Enhancement Project)

Note:
Rooted/leafed
condition of the living
plant material is not
representative of the
time of installation.