

# Wild Whatcom

EXPLORING / SERVING / CONNECTING



2020 IMPACT REPORT

SEPTEMBER 2019-AUGUST 2020

# OPENING DOORS TO OUTDOOR LEARNING

*A letter from our Executive Director*

At Wild Whatcom, our local parks, beaches, and forests have always been the places where we play games, practice skills, and build community. Yet, in this new COVID-19 era, it seems as though outside spaces may be the best locale for nearly *all activities* as we try to stay healthy, happy, and connected:

- **Evidence indicates that it is safer to gather outdoors.** Experts are speaking out publicly about the safety of gathering outdoors, and preliminary case studies are beginning to confirm that COVID-19 transmission is orders of magnitude lower in outdoor settings than indoors.
- **Education and health officials are recommending more time outside.** Guidance for fall 2020 learning from the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction encourages public instructors to provide more space between students, including keeping students outside more. This guidance follows the advice of local and global health officials who are preferring outdoor gatherings as much as possible.
- **Whatcom County benefits from local outdoor experts and an abundance of natural spaces.** In addition to our many public parks, we have a wealth of knowledge in the community in the outdoor education and related fields.
- **Spending time outdoors also has intrinsic, scientifically proven mental and physical health benefits.** Now, more than ever, getting outside is a vital addition to our daily regimen to keep active and de-stress.

Though this time has been difficult for our organization, I am very hopeful for the opportunities that lie ahead. As much as COVID-19 has halted many aspects of normal life, it has also given us a moment to reflect and begin building a more just, sustainable, and healthy society together. At Wild Whatcom, we hope this means an integration of more time outdoors at home, at school, and around town. We are here to support our community in understanding how to do so safely, and I hope you'll join us in the effort.

With gratitude,



**LICIA SAHAGUN**  
**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**





# EXPLORERS CLUB

*Our year-round, cohort-style adventures*

**355**  
**PARTICIPANTS**

**12,123**  
**NATURE HOURS**

**\$10,777**  
**FINANCIAL AID**

**2,420**  
**SERVICE HOURS**

This past year our Explorers Club underwent big changes. Our flagship program, in operation since 2004, had historically been offered as Boys Explorers Club and Girls Explorers Club. In the last few years we also began offering All Genders Explorers Club to include all youth. In 2019-2020, we worked to merge curricula across programs to ensure all participants were learning the same ecological, naturalist, and social-emotional skills. This past year we also piloted Wayfinders, an Explores-Club-style program for teens in grades 9 and up that allows participants to build relationship, go deep in skills, and spend evenings under the stars. In this coming year we aim to formalize our Explorer Mentor Apprenticeship (EMA) program that provides leadership training for young adults and establish a four-year, skills-based curriculum for our teen Wayfinders program. We hope to see you on the trails and around the campfire next year!

*"I don't know that I can really express how grateful we are for Beth's experiences through Wild Whatcom. To learn what she's learned from all of you exceptional humans is more than I could have hoped for. Not to mention WW's incredible contribution to the community and the heartfelt focus of making sure all kids feel included. As a Queer Straight Alliance advisor, that makes my heart happy."*

— Explorers Club parent



# SCHOOLS PROGRAMS

Donation- and grant-funded programs offered for free to students and teachers in partnership with Bellingham Public Schools

## EDVENTURES

Three to four outings for 2nd and 3rd grade students in Title I schools (schools with large concentrations of low-income students).

**454**

students

**47**

outings

**2,442** nature hours

**100%**

of teachers report an increase in students' social and emotional skills

**100%**

of teachers report an increased understanding of skills related to science standards

In our EdVentures program we are increasing our supply of free loaner gear available for students to ensure all participants are safe, warm, and happy outside! This year we also streamlined our scheduling process and began conversations with the City of Bellingham Parks Department to start incorporating service projects into the program for the 2020-21 academic year.



*"Wild Whatcom combines a love and respect of nature with hands-on learning and links the science standards we are learning in the classroom to the activities the students participate in on our field trips."*

- Alderwood 3rd grade teacher



## STUDENT ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION & DISCOVERY (SEED)

Weekly or bi-weekly, sensory-rich outings for students of all ages in Life Skills and BRIDGES classrooms (students with moderate to severe developmental and behavioral disabilities).

We love our SEED program and so do our teachers! We consistently see overwhelmingly positive feedback. This last year 100% of surveyed teachers reported they felt more comfortable taking their classes outside, saw an improvement in students' social and emotional learning, and want Wild Whatcom to return next year. In the 2020-21 academic year, we hope to serve all classrooms on our waitlist.

**87**

students

**64**

outings

**1,010** nature hours

*"Often times, students with disabilities come from homes that are overwhelmed and impacted. Getting outdoors is often not a priority, or manageable for a parent or parents. This program has provided opportunities for my students to engage with the world around them and learn about their community. I notice that after Wild Whatcom adventures, my students come back to class more regulated in tune with themselves and their surroundings, increasing their ability to positively engage throughout the rest of their school day."*

- Columbia Life Skills Teacher

# SCHOOLS PROGRAMS

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## NEIGHBORHOOD NATURE

Weekly after-school outings that encourage kids to connect with their surrounding ecosystem through exploration, play, art and nature activities in most Bellingham Public Schools.

**168** students  
**134** outings  
**2,964** nature hours

Our Neighborhood Nature program offers opportunities for students to connect with peers outdoors in nearby nature. We aim to keep prices low and subsidize the cost of programming in our Title 1 schools through donations and grants. Next year, we plan to increase awareness of the program, connect with local sponsors, and offer more financial assistance to all families in need.



## TEACHER TRAINING

We currently offer two programs: Forest Friends provides outings co-led by teachers at Lowell Elementary School and ClimeTime, collaborative professional development workshops for public school teachers.

*“This was one of the best workshops I've been to. I really appreciated the high level of involvement we had, all of the shared resources and ideas, and the emphasis on sustainability in our own practices.” - Teacher participating in ClimeTime workshop*

Even though our year was cut short due to COVID-19, we served all teachers and roughly 300 students at Lowell Elementary through our teacher-training program, Forest Friends. Teachers co-lead outdoor exploration outings alongside our Field Mentors to understand and practice teaching in the outdoor classroom.

Our ClimeTime project, a WA-state-funded initiative in partnership with ReSources, Common Threads, and NSEA, mentored 42 elementary teachers across 6 districts. Workshops provided teachers with tools to instruct on and talk about climate change while utilizing nearby outdoor settings.

**56** teachers  
**21** co-led outings  
& trainings



# SUMMER PROGRAMS

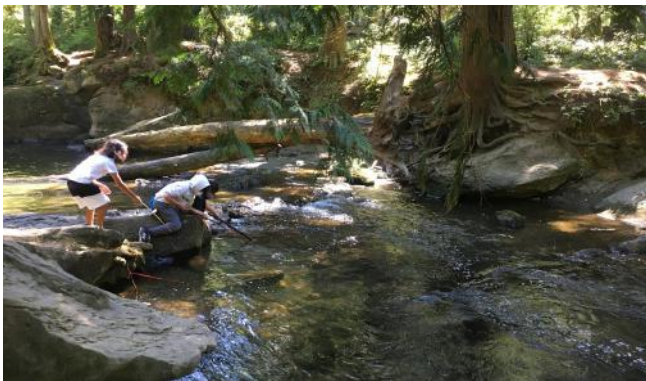
## SUMMER IN THE COVID ERA

**139** campers **\$1,176** in financial aid

**Free** summer school for students of migrant families at Kulshan Middle School



Campers in our Wilderness Skills camp practice knots and carving.



Summer school students fish for crawfish in Whatcom Falls Park



Our team practicing a new role-playing game, Ryutama, offered online for grades 3-12.

This summer looked very different at Wild Whatcom. For a variety of reasons including safety concerns and new permit restrictions, we did not run our backpacking trips. Our summer also got a late start as our team gathered information and guidance from health officials. After comprehensive preparations including the development of COVID-19 Risk Management Plans and staff trainings, we began offering adapted in-person camps and new virtual programs on July 20th. In-person camps saw smaller groups sizes, masks, social distancing, and drop-off screening procedures, among other COVID-19-related safety measures. We also piloted virtual programs in which campers practiced birding, navigation, and plant identification and took on new characters in Ryutama, a role-playing game with a focus on nature, collaboration, and creativity. We also partnered with Vamos Outdoors Project and Bellingham Public Schools to offer free outdoor programming for students of migrant families. Thank you to the donors and sponsors that help us reach this community!

As we move forward together, we are committed to learning, growing, and adapting to what our community needs. This summer, all of our camps (and waitlists) filled for most camp offerings. We are honored that families continued to trust our team to keep their kiddos safe, healthy, and having fun! We are also thankful for the patience, grace, and understanding of our community as we navigated new programs online and new procedures at in-person camps. We are having so much fun seeing our Wild Whatcom community again whether it be in person or online!

*"These summer camps are so fantastic. I can't thank you enough for putting them on. Leo is really having a great time, and I'm thrilled to have him interacting with other kids again, and out in nature!"*

-- Summer camp parent



*"Through the Wild Things program you have made it simple, fun, and rewarding to bring our kiddos together for hands-on, sensory exploration in local parks. Kiddos learn while they have fun making discoveries in nature. It's truly a celebration of the wonder and awe of the natural world around us. What could be better for little people and families, and the future health of our planet?"*  
 -- Wild Things Parent

## COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

*Ladies Night Out (full moon walks for female-identifying folks), Wild Things (weekly walks for toddlers and their guardians), and Nature Outings (seasonal family gatherings)*

### This year our Wild Things program turned 10!

One of Wild Whatcom's co-founders and expert naturalist, Holly Roger, has been exploring weekly with our community's toddlers and their guardians every week since May 2010! Peering into tide pools, searching for bugs, and traversing our local landscape, our Wild Things crew gathers rain or shine (or wind or snow)!

*Holly Roger, Wild Whatcom Community Programs Coordinator shares her reflections:*

"We recognized parents' need to find community, socialize with friends, have fun, and be immersed in nature. And how children loved interacting with their peers and the sensory experiences inherent in exploring nature. In the years since our first day, Wild Things have made a million small and huge discoveries every week, while exploring the mystery and beauty of nature together. The adults have learned a thing or two about nature, shared parenting strategies, and formed new

friendships along the trail as well! We've practiced social skills, used our climbing and balancing muscles up hills and on logs, smelled flowers that smell like skunks, tasted lots of edible berries, touched a lot of slimy things, discovered many mysterious sea creatures, and enjoyed spending time outdoors together. We've shared our sense of wonder about this world we live in and so many snacks.

My heartfelt gratitude to all Wild Things families. It's been my honor to be your guide to the natural world."



# PARTNERS & PROJECTS

Wild Whatcom would not be the organization it is today without the incredible partners we have in our community.

Partnerships with Villa Santa Fe and Sterling Meadows housing complexes and the Opportunity Council allow us to provide free programming for underserved youth in our community.

Our partnerships with the City of Bellingham Parks and Recreation Department, Washington Trails Association, and the Volunteer Center allow Wild Whatcom program participants to give back to their community in lasting and meaningful ways.

And our long standing partnership with Bellingham Public Schools facilitates free outdoor learning for some of the district's highest needs students in Title 1 schools and in Lifeskills and BRIDGES classrooms of students with developmental or behavioral disabilities.



This coming year we are excited to expand and deepen our partnerships. A grant through the **Whatcom Community Foundation** will allow us to provide free, outdoor outings for families in **Lydia Place's** transitional housing complexes for formerly houseless families. These outings will help reestablish positive relationships with the outdoors and also support Lydia Places's efforts to build community and connection for its residents.

We are also excited to deepen our relationships with the **City of Bellingham Parks and Recreation Department** and the **Whatcom Land Trust** to offer additional stewardship opportunities for our Wild Whatcom youth and families.

Although COVID-19 has required us to rethink and reimagine, we are confident that our strong relationships in the community will allow us to move forward together, supporting our community with safe and healthy opportunities to stay connected, stay engaged, and have fun!



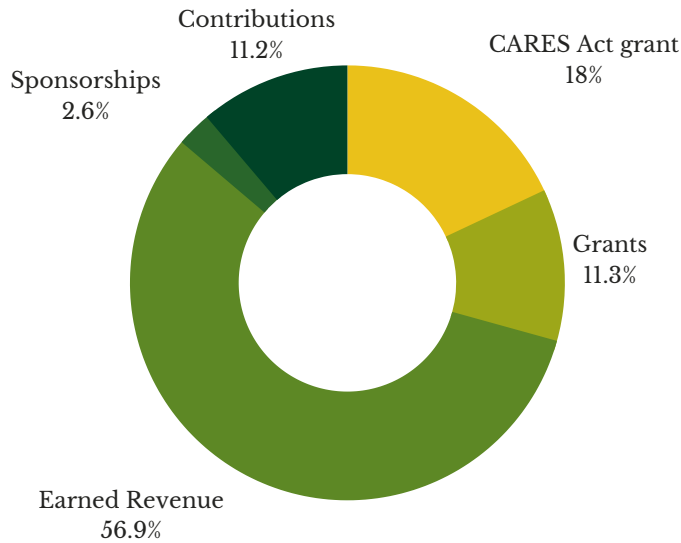
# FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

## REVENUE (\$489,000)

This year, more than ever, our donors, funders, and supporters provided the vital support necessary for Wild Whatcom to sustain operations, maintain staff, and pivot to new programming that continues to build community, support youth and families, and create lasting connections with nature.

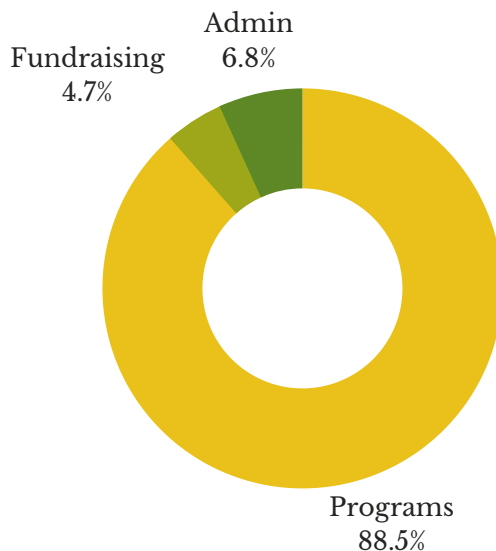
In April of 2019, we welcomed a new Executive Director to our team. Thus, we had planned to see a slight financial loss in 2019-2020 as she got up to speed, built personal relationships with donors, and oriented to our programs and organization.

It has been a tumultuous year to say the least. Yet, thanks to the steady and adaptable support of our staff and board, the Wild Whatcom team is ending the year in a better financial position than expected.



## EXPENSES (\$505,000)

As always, the vast majority of our expenses go directly into supporting our programs. Thanks to years of prudent financial planning and fundraising, a fund of reserves allowed us to keep staff employed, develop our programs, adapt to new programming, and invest in continued partnerships in the community to navigate successfully through these uncertain times.



*Wild Whatcom Board of Directors and Executive Director strategic planning at a February Board Retreat. These annual sessions guide future organizational development, partnership growth, and donor development.*



*Wild Whatcom staff reflecting, collaborating, and dreaming together at a January Staff Retreat. These moments of pause allow us to be both critical and creative as we plan our programming for the years to come.*



*Wild Whatcom staff and families at our Fall Family Gathering. These annual gatherings bring our Explorers Club families together to build community and learn about the upcoming program year.*

# THANK YOU

*We could not do what we do without you!*

## FOUNDATION FUNDERS & SPONSORS

Whatcom Community Foundation  
The Cairn Project  
Mary H. Storer Foundation  
Alcoa Foundation  
D.V. & Ida J McEachern Charitable  
Trust  
Puget Sound Energy Foundation  
Bellingham Public Schools  
Foundation  
Office of Superintendent of Public  
Instruction  
Seattle Foundation  
Seeking Health, LLC  
Jon Greenwood Family and Friends  
Superfeet  
Lowell Elementary School

## COLLABORATORS AND BUSINESS AND NON- PROFIT PARTNERS

Agate Pond Preserve  
Baker Mountain Guides  
Barron Smith Daugert PLLC  
Bellingham Parks and  
Recreation  
Bellingham Public Schools  
Common Threads  
Garmo Family  
Marine Life Center  
Nooksack Salmon Enhancement  
Association  
North Cascades Audubon  
Society  
Northwest Mushroomers  
Association  
Northwest Youth Services

Opportunity Council  
Port of Bellingham  
RE Sources  
Satushek Family  
Sinnet Family  
Sterling Meadows Apartments  
The Volunteer Center  
Washington Trails Association  
Whatcom County Parks  
Whatcom Land Trust  
And so many more!



## And our countless parents, donors, and other partners in the community!

You are the heart of all we do! The silliness and curiosity of your kiddos, the unwavering support of our long-time funders, and the passionate generosity of our donors are the reason Wild Whatcom can celebrate more than 15 years of service in our community. Our success this year and in the years to come is due to support from individuals like you! We are still collectively learning what the future holds, but we are confident that our partners, funders, donors, and community will allow us to emerge from this moment even stronger, together. We can never say thank you enough!



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