

# Coho in the Classroom and Beyond

By Brandy Prefontaine, Hydrological Fisheries Biological Technician, Thorne Bay Ranger District

This spring, middle school students from the Southeast Island School District at the Naukati School Site worked with the Thorne Bay Ranger District, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and Prince of Wales Hatchery Association to investigate and understand their karst watersheds and local Coho salmon populations. Students explored the salmon life cycle, fish habitat, and water quality as they raised adopted Coho salmon fry and engaged in classroom activities, discussions, and field trips. The project information and observations were a perfect complement for their district science fair project, “Be Water and Energy Wise,” which gained them the Island-Wide Science Fair Grand Champion Award.

The adventure started with a field trip by the Naukati Middle and Elementary Schools in February to the Klawock Lake Hatchery. There, students picked out Coho eggs and brought them to their new home in Naukati, a special complex-cooled recirculation aquarium where they would live for four months. The students, who were committed to hatching healthy fry, were required to follow the carefully crafted study plan and permit created by Thorne Bay Ranger District Biological Science Technician Brandy Prefontaine and Naukati Middle School Teacher Kimberly Hoover.

The students monitored light, temperature, and water quality to provide the optimal conditions in the



Naukati School teacher Kimberly Hoover and Thorne Bay Hydrological Fisheries Bio Tech Brandy Prefontaine join their students in front of the classroom aquarium. Photo by Vanessa Richter.



An aquarium that holds salmon eggs generates a lot of excitement at the Naukati School site.

aquarium. They took turns weekly recording and graphing the pH, nitrate, nitrite, ammonium, water temperature, thermal units, as well as checking for mortalities. A series of ooo’s and ahh’s were added to the strong sense of excitement and accomplishment that filled the air when the first eggs hatched out. The students called their parents and other community members in to come celebrate their achievement and talk about the incubation process and impacts from varying management

activities on spawning, migration, and rearing habitat.

Students participated in additional field trips that reinforced the concepts they learned during the semester. They attended the Craig Community Association Earth Day Celebration where they learned about reducing, reusing, and recycling to protect their watersheds. They entered a “Fashion Trashion” show, and reviewed the high school display on bio-fuels project for ideas that could make a difference to the environment. They also participated in a community trash clean up day and learned firsthand how our actions on the landscape can affect watershed health.

The Naukati students joined students from Craig Middle School at the Eagle’s Nest Campground to spend the day learning about aquatic invertebrates and water quality. They also had a fly tying class and fly fishing lesson.

The final field trip was bittersweet. At Klawock Lake, assisted by John Brunes and Dan Goodness from the Klawock Hatchery, the students measured and weighed their fry, and then with happy tears, released them to the lake.

Thanks to teacher Kimberly Hoover, the students, parents, and the community members who devoted extra time and effort to learn about their karst watersheds, water quality, and fish populations. Good things are happening on Prince of Wales Island.