

Valley receives national habitat status

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Features Writer

Next time you are out of doors, stop for just a moment, wherever you are, and look around. Nothing new or unusual, you might say. But that's the point. Our vibrant, verdant and wildlife-abundant valley is a natural habitat.

The only difference now is that the National Wildlife Federation has made it official.

The Skagit Valley was certified in August as a Community Wildlife Habitat — just the 45th in the entire United States.

The valley became one of only 10 other communities in the state to receive a similar designation during a public celebration, held between afternoon rain showers Aug. 26 at the Kulshan Community Bird and Butterfly Garden, 2520 Kulshan Ave., in northeast Mount Vernon.

The designated habitat area comprises about 250 square miles and includes the Mount Vernon ZIP codes, Conway, Edison/Bow, Clear Lake and La Conner.

A group of community volunteers called the Skagit Valley Backyard Wildlife Habitat Team led the certification project in partnership with the Skagit Conservation District and the National Wildlife Federation.

"We're a small team, probably one of the smallest in the country," volunteer chairwoman Donna Schram said. "It took hundreds and hundreds of hours to make this happen."

Nearly 200 residential yards within the Skagit Valley were certified as natural habitats. In addition, five businesses, eight school grounds, two church grounds, and 10 parks were certified through the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife habitat program.

Each certified site must incorporate four



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Emiliano, 9, Brensa, 11, and Ruby Victoria-Reyes, 4, show some of the flowers they helped plant during a dedication ceremony on Aug. 26 at the Kulshan Community Bird and Butterfly Garden, 2520 Kulshan Ave., Mount Vernon.

requirements, Schram said — food, water, shelter, and a place for animals to raise their young.

She said the newly restored garden in the Kulshan community where the celebration was held reflected her team's vision for enhancing habitat for wildlife and spaces for children.

"It's just a gem," she said. "A lot of the neighborhood kids helped with the restoration. It's not just pretty, it's pretty with a function. We have butterflies, birds, deer, snakes — they are all welcome."

National Wildlife Federation spokesperson Roxanne Paul, in a news release, commended the Skagit Valley residents and the habitat team for creating "a community where people and wildlife can flourish."

"At a time when communities are faced with the problems of losing habitat to development, Skagit Valley stands out as a model for other communities to emulate," Paul said.

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