



Announcing: 2015 ASK ME! Training Program

Kwiaht's Marine Health Observatories, salmon seining teams, and other volunteer "citizen science" programs were largely established in collaboration with the WSU Beach Watchers program in San Juan County, which graduated its last class five years ago. Our volunteer pool has expanded considerably since then and there has also been considerable turnover. New volunteers have mainly trained "on the job," with the focus on learning the data-gathering protocols and methods that the first tier of volunteers helped develop, and maintaining our irreplaceable long-term monitoring activities. This was possible because new volunteers were initially "shown the ropes" by members of our original cohort—but many members of that extensively trained original cohort have moved away or retired.

At the same time Kwiaht's field teams are experiencing new challenges due to the growing popularity of the San Juan Islands (including the new National Monument) with tourists, and growing educational use of our public shorelines by local schools, summer camps and visiting schools and universities. Beginning in 2012, we redefined our mission at our field sites to combine stewardship and outreach with monitoring and research. And we made commitments to the National Monument, National Park, and the Port of Friday Harbor to do more to engage, educate, and guide visitors, both enhancing their experience and reducing their impact on fragile habitats.

With volunteer turnover and an expanded mission of education and stewardship, it's time for a new round of training for current and prospective volunteers! Our goal will be to prepare our volunteers to teach the public about our monitoring sites, from plankton and marine macro-invertebrates to wildflowers, fish and seabirds. This requires a broader knowledge of species diversity and food webs than necessary for most monitoring tasks.

We hope our current volunteers will find this to be a valuable "graduate course" that goes beyond what they have learned thus far on-the-job; and that the opportunity to study amazing places such as Indian Island and Iceberg Point with Kwiaht scientists will attract fresh interest and a new generation of volunteers to energize our programs.

Participants get to explore native wildflowers with botanist Madrona Murphy, see the micro-worlds of plankton and insects under the microscope with Russel Barsh; watch seabirds and shorebirds with wildlife biologist Joe Behnke; seine eelgrass meadows for colorful fish, and explore beaches for sea slugs and sea stars with experienced scientists and volunteers. And of course there will be formal classes and slideshows.

ASK ME training is open to islanders ages 16 and over, at a modest fee for books and lab supplies, and a commitment to future volunteer service at any one of Kwiaht's ten shoreline and small-island monitoring sites in San Juan County. Graduates will receive a personalized ASK ME cap to wear in the field, inviting visitors to engage and learn.

Here are the details

Please sign up by: January 12, 2015*

Time frame

January through June 2015

One afternoon per month in class or lab, plus three spring field trips

Time commitment

Classroom and lab time: 20 hours total (approx. 3.5 hours per class date)

Field trips: 10 hours exclusive of travel total (approx. 2.5 hours in field each trip)

Venues

Indoor classes and labs will be in Lopez Village, Eastsound and/or Friday Harbor. Depending on the number and geographic distribution of the participants, some of the classes and labs will be repeated on two or three islands.

Costs

One-time fee for printed materials and lab supplies: \$50

Commitment to a minimum of 60 hours of volunteer service in 2015-2016

Schedule

Dates of activities will be finalized in consultation with participants. There will be a limited number of repeat or make-up class sessions to make it possible for all participants to enjoy the entire program!

January: Island biogeography and paleo-ecology

February: Micro-worlds + Microscopy Lab

March: Birds of sea and shore + Field trip

April: Native meadows, wildflowers, and weeds + Field trip

May: Marine macro-invertebrates + Field trip

June: Fish communities and food webs + Field trip

Field sites where you can volunteer

Cattle Point (botany, insects), Cowlitz Bay (salmon, plankton), Fisherman Bay (plankton, birds), Iceberg Point (botany, insects, birds), Indian Island (botany, fish, invertebrates), Port of Friday Harbor (marine invertebrates), Watmough Bight (salmon, plankton), also Freeman, Skull, Twin Rocks and other small National Monument islands (botany, wildlife)

*Here's how you can sign up for ASK ME training: Send your name, email address and postal address to kwiaht@gmail.com or Kwiaht, PO Box 415, Lopez Island WA 98261. We will send you a brief reply asking for information on dates you will be available for classes and field trips. Send us your dates, and your check for \$50, and we will confirm your place in the 2015 ASK ME training!