

Sammy Fletcher: Volunteering to Help Restore and Protect his Local Natural Community

Sammy Fletcher is an and diligent volunteer with the Grays Harbor Stream Team (GHST) and our newest Chehalis Basin Watershed Hero!

Sammy was born and raised in the Aberdeen area, and went to local schools including Robert Gray, and Taholah High School, on the Quinault Indian Reservation. A Quinault Indian Nation member, Sammy also has family ties to the Chehalis Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation, as his aunts and a sister married into the Chehalis tribe.

Bucking hay, and packing cedar was how Sammy grew up. He works in construction, notably with a non-profit that deconstructs buildings and sustainably reclaims wood and processes it into reusable base materials.

From these physically demanding endeavors, Sammy has developed a strong work ethic. With GHST, he tirelessly planted numerous species of trees, shrubs, and emergent plants this past winter, at the Lower Satsop River Restoration site with Stream Team. "Outdoor restoration works sets me free in my soul... and helps me get outside of myself," said Sammy. "I know that I will never see some of the trees fully grown that I planted with Stream Team, but generations of people in the future will."

Sammy has also been involved with beach clean-ups, including one as part of the Yellow Rope Project. According to Twin Harbors Waterkeepers, "some growers in Willapa Bay and Grays Harbor use yellow ropes to raise oysters using the "Longline" method to keep oysters off the bottom.... When the oysters are harvested, fragments of the rope is sometimes released back into the estuaries when shell piles are recycled for future oyster operations."



Credit: Lee First

"I learned at a beach clean-up that this plastic rope breaks down into tiny pieces, that never go away," said Sammy. GHST coordinator, and Yellow Rope Project co-coordinator, Alexa Brown added, "the small plastic bits look like food to marine critters and as the bits get eaten, plastic bio-accumulates in the food chain."

Yellow rope, plastic bottles and other trash collected at a recent beach clean-up

Community volunteers are now monitoring and collecting data on this plastic debris, and collaborating with oyster growers, shellfish associations, and local non-profits, to find a solution to this ecological problem. For more information on The Yellow Rope Project, check out Twinharborswaterkeepers.org.



Credit: Kathy Jacobson

Sammy Fletcher, outdoors — his favorite place to be!

Sammy has also applied "sweat equity" in the removal of invasive species including English Ivy, Scotch broom, English Holly, and others, during other volunteer stewardship events. "The ivy suffocates trees, and the roots seem to go forever," said Sammy. "I also removed invasive English Holly, a plant that just hogs up space! Because I'm native, when I pull out invasive plants, I often give a tobacco offering, and say that I am sorry I'm pulling you out."



Sammy and Alannah Cross removing invasive ivy

Grays Harbor College students also assisted with invasive plant removal activities and have taught their fellow volunteers about the many native edible plants available. "We almost made a vegetable salad at one event!" noted Sammy.

Early on, Sammy was taught by his family “that we are all caretakers of the land, and that we never litter.” “Grandpa always said to be respectful, and to leave the place that you visited better than you found it. I remember a time asking my grandfather how I was created, and my grandfather told me to “go ask a tree -- as trees are our teachers.”

Sammy Fletcher looking up at Sitka Spruce Tree



Credit: Kathy Jacobson

Sammy also learned that “Sasquatch” was to be revered as an elder and guide. “Through Sasquatch, one can be guided to the inner beauty of the forest, and to heal you... to see something new. Going outside, shifts something inside of you,” said Sammy.

On reflecting on his favorite “outdoor spot,” Sammy shared “my favorite outdoor spot is Lake Quinault. It is my place of “firsts.” My family and I started going to Lake Quinault when I was very little. It was so big and fascinating! It was also where I learned to swim, go on my first canoe ride, first outdoor barbeque, and it was where I got lost in the woods for the first time.”

In the future, Sammy hopes to be able to continue his education and get his AA degree at Grays Harbor College

and one day work with his Quinault tribe.” There is a Legacy Native Pathways AA Degree Program at GHC that I hope to enroll in,” said Sammy. “Fawn Sharp, our current Vice President of the Quinault Indian Nation helped to set this program up.” (Fawn Sharp is also the 23rd President of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), the oldest, largest, and most representative American Indian and Alaska Native tribal government organization in the country.)

“I would love to get educated in a really good way, and take biology classes,” shared Sammy.

The program serves students from Quinault, Queets, Chehalis, Shoalwater Bay/Aberdeen, and six other local tribes, and provides specialized assistance to tribal members to be most successful. For more information on the program, check out: www.ghc.edu

In reflecting on why he volunteers with Stream Team, Sammy said, “I volunteer because I learn so much. I just love being outdoors. When I’m outdoors, I feel its residue for days – I’m happy for days. I am single, but not lonely as I have the earth, moon and the sky.”

“As the Stream Team coordinator, it is important to recognize Sammy's efforts because he always shows up early to set up and stays late to help pack up, has a positive perspective, is determined, and has a deep commitment to the well-being of our streams and waterways. I am inspired by his commitment and the number of friends he has convinced to come to the volunteer events,” shared Alexa Brown.

For more information about how you can get involved with GHST, check out Grays Harbor Stream Team on Facebook, or contact Alexa Brown coordinator at graysharbotreamteam@gmail.com.

Story part of the Chehalis Basin Lead Entity’s Watershed Hero series. To learn how you can be involved in projects that support salmon recovery, visit the Chehalis Basin Lead Entity website: www.chehalisleadentity.org. Or contact Watershed Coordinator, Kirsten Harna: (360) 488-3232