

## Skagit offers eagle viewing- a great family activity

From the Olympian, modified & submitted by Patty Suskin

Every year the upper Skagit River becomes a confluence of bald eagles, rotting salmon carcasses and people.

The bald eagles – some having flown 400 miles – come to feed on salmon carcasses easily found on the banks of the Skagit River.

The people make a similar journey for the chance to see the eagles up close. Some come armed with massive telephoto camera lenses, others with a simple point-and-shoot camera. They all come with a sense of awe.

Every winter, from late November to February, the eagles gather along the river, mainly from Rockport to Marblemount. In the morning, they can be seen on the rocky riverbank, tearing at dead salmon. By day they sit in branches high in the riverside trees, digesting their breakfast or looking for the next meal.

Here are some of our recommendations for an eagle watching trip.

### Howard Miller Steelhead Park

Rockport

This is the place to start your eagle viewing. There is plenty of good viewing spots, including the Highway 530 bridge over the Skagit River, and the park is home to the Bald Eagle Interpretive Center.

The park and center remain the heart of eagle watching activities. Stop at the center to get the latest info on where the eagles are, how many there have been and to take part in an activity such as one of the weekend lectures. There is a small kids corner where young children can do some drawings or read if they need a little time to warm up.

The center is scheduled to be open 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Fridays through Sundays from Dec. 11 through Feb. 15. There will be speakers most weekends, discussing topics such as eagles, fisheries, the Skagit River watershed and wildlife photography. Staff from the Sardis Raptor Center will bring live birds to the center Jan. 2 and Jan. 30.

The park is located off Highway 20.

### Highway 20 rest area

Milepost 100

This large pullout just east of Rockport on the south side of Highway 20 might be the closest you will get to an eagle without taking a float trip down the Skagit. The large trees along the riverbank and across the roadway are perfect eagle perches.

On busy weekends, there will be lots of cars and people, so drivers should be cautious. There are portable restrooms and volunteers stationed here during the peak watching season.

### Marblemount Fish Hatchery

Marblemount

The boat ramp at the bridge crossing the Skagit River is the starting point for many eagle-viewing raft and boat trips.

But the fish hatchery just a bit farther down the Cascade River Road is another good viewing spot.

### PLANNING YOUR EAGLE ADVENTURE

#### Viewing for everyone

Eagle watching is an activity everyone can take part in. The interpretive center is handicap accessible, and each of the three main viewing areas are flat and easily traversed by wheelchairs and strollers.

#### River options

A number of companies offer eagle watching river trips. Among them are Ackerlund's Guide Service (1-888-6-SKAGIT, [www.ackerlunds.com](http://www.ackerlunds.com)), Alpine Adventures (1-800-723-8386, [www.alpineadventures.com](http://www.alpineadventures.com)), Blue Sky Outfitters (1-800-228-RAFT, [www.blueskyoutfitters.com](http://www.blueskyoutfitters.com)) and Pacific NW Float Trips (1-866-967-8555, [www.pacificnwfloattrips.com](http://www.pacificnwfloattrips.com)).

#### Directions

Get on I-5 going North. Take Exit # 230 to WA -20. It is about 3 hours from Shelton.

#### Lodging

Making this an overnight trip makes sense. There are a number of chain options in Burlington, including Marriott Fairfax Inn. In Concrete, there is Ovenell's Heritage Inn – a unique mix of bed-and-breakfast, small cabins and working cattle ranch (360-853-8494; [www.ovenells-inn.com](http://www.ovenells-inn.com)). Farther up river is Clark's Skagit River Resort (360-873-2250; [www.northcascades.com](http://www.northcascades.com)) in Rockport and Buffalo Run Inn in Marblemount (1-877-828-6652).

