



# NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release**

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## **Bulldozers welcome the tides back to prime salmon habitat in Snohomish River Estuary**

*Newly restored estuary will support recovery of wild Chinook salmon and other wildlife, promote recreation opportunities, and enhance public safety*

Bulldozers today removed about 1,500 linear feet of levee in the Snohomish River Estuary, reopening 350 acres of historic wetlands to threatened salmon and other species as part of the largest restoration project so far in the Snohomish watershed.

The Tulalip Tribes and NOAA Fisheries announced the milestone in restoring key habitat for one of the largest remaining populations of wild Puget Sound Chinook Salmon.

A system of levees cut off and drained the Qwuloolt Estuary from the rest of the Snohomish system in the early 1900s, converting it into farmland like thousands of acres of other wetland and estuary habitat in Puget Sound. Today the land is no longer viable as farmland and the Tulalip Tribes, NOAA Fisheries and other partners have spearheaded its restoration to benefit depressed salmon populations, restore ecological systems, and improve flood control and recreational opportunities.

“Today we witness the culmination of years of coordination, planning, and preparation by a coalition of trustee and implementation partners, and whose hard work and dedication over nearly two decades, will bring salmon in great numbers back to our rivers helping to secure our lifeways for future generations. This is the first large restoration project in the Snohomish estuary, the first of many, and sets the stage for a basin-wide recovery,” said Mel Sheldon Jr., Chairman of the Tulalip Tribes.

The Snohomish River Estuary is regionally important for the recovery of wild Puget Sound Chinook salmon. It is home to one of the largest remaining populations in Puget Sound. These threatened fish return yearly to pristine habitat in the upper watershed on the western slopes of the Cascade mountains, tributaries that could support large spawning populations that are in part limited by habitat in the estuary.

“This breach today represents one of the best opportunities in our region to make a real difference to salmon populations in Puget Sound. We have all the right ingredients in Snohomish River estuary – involved partners, an agreed upon restoration plan, ready projects across the entire basin, and the scientific understanding of how the system works,” said Jennifer Steger, supervisor of the NW & Alaska Region of the NOAA Restoration Center. “We are restoring ecosystem processes of hydrology, energy and nutrients, chemistry, and food web that will benefit robust fish populations and strong ecological communities.”



Scientists from NOAA Fisheries, the Tulalip Tribes, and Snohomish County have been studying the Snohomish River system for over a decade, informing the design of restoration actions that will be most effective. The extensive baseline data will help managers detect changes in fish populations, evaluate effectiveness, and apply new knowledge to other restoration actions in the region.

The restoration project includes partial removal of a levee to reconnect the Qwuloolt Estuary to Ebey Slough, a network of excavated starter channels to facilitate fish access and drainage, and a 4,000 foot setback levee to protect surrounding properties.

Following the breach, scientists will monitor changes in the site including elevation, sediment dynamics, water temperature and salinity, nutrient and food availability, fish population and diversity, and wildlife abundance and diversity.

Current and potential future restoration sites in the Snohomish River include Smith Island and Blue Heron Slough in the near future.

Qwuloolt Estuary restoration is the culmination of years of coordination, planning, and preparation by a broad coalition of project proponents, including the Tulalip Tribes, NOAA, Washington Department of Ecology, Army Corps of Engineers, USFWS, NRCS, Nature Conservancy, and the City of Marysville.

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On the web: Web camera time lapse video  
<http://video-monitoring.com/timelapse/tulalip/>