August 14, 2008

Restoring the Salmon Creek Estuary

Improving Water Quality. Repairing Habitat. Supporting a Healthier Community.

Brief History

Estuaries are an important part of our coastal landscape. They provide abundant intertidal habitat for salmon and many other types of fish and wildlife. The Salmon Creek Estuary serves as a key transition zone for the fry of the threatened Chinook and chum salmon as they adjust from freshwater to saltwater.

Fifty years ago, the Salmon Creek Estuary flowed unimpeded into Discover Bay and the surrounding Puget Sound, but in the 1950's, the estuary became the site of a productive lumber mill.

As a result of the lumber mill's activities, scrap wood, bark and saw dust filled large areas of the estuary nearby. The end result was blocked tidal flow, depleted salt marsh and poor water quality.

Restoration of the Salmon Creek Estuary will encourage the return of threatened salmon and support a healthy estuary for future generations to enjoy.

The restoration of Salmon Creek Estuary, found at the head of Discovery Bay, is one of the most important restoration projects in the greater Puget Sound area. Home to threatened chum salmon, as well as Chinook and steelhead salmon, much of this estuary has been uninhabitable for fish due to runoff from a lumber mill more than 50 years ago.

Landscape

Once a vibrant part of Discovery Bay, today, the estuary is threatened by wood waste, blocked tidal flow and poor water quality. Sulfur and ammonia leach into the water from more than 22,000 cubic yards of wood fill, making it difficult for salmon and a number of other important species to live in the estuary. Unfortunately, much of the greater Puget Sound area is threatened by similar problems along the coastline.

Fish & Wildlife

The primary intent of the project is to restore estuarine habitat for salmon, but numerous wildlife species will also benefit from the restoration of Salmon Creek Estuary. Shorebirds, waterfowl and shellfish are just a few of the species that will return when the estuary restoration is complete. Bald and Golden eagles will once again feed on salmon along the creeks and intertidal areas, and Roosevelt elk will graze on the grasses nearby.

Community Health

Once restored, the Salmon Creek Estuary will be a much healthier place for people too. The area will soon join other area sites, such as the Dungeness River and Olympic Peninsula, as a popular place for recreation such as bird watching, fishing and kayaking.

Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office Salmon Recovery Funding Board

N.O.S.C. North Olympic Salmon Coalition

FishAmerica Foundation 25 Years 1983-2008

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration NOAA U.S. Department of Commerce

Department of Ecology State of Washington

Puget Sound Nearshore Partnership Restoring Our Ecosystem Health

Top 10 Reasons to Restore Estuaries

- There are 102 estuaries in the U.S. Of these, 28 have been designated by the federal government to be of national importance.
- Our coastal regions today are the home for 110 million people - 127 million by the year 2010.
- Every year, about 70 percent of the entire U.S. population visit estuaries for their beauty, recreation or employment.
- Estuaries have many different types of habitats, including shellfish beds, sea grass meadows, salt and fresh marshes, forested wetlands, beaches, river deltas, and rocky shores.
- Estuaries and coastal waters provide habitat for 75 percent of the commercial fish catch and 80-90 percent of the recreational catch of fish.
- Habitat loss in some of our nation's most important estuaries is approaching 80 to 95 percent.
- Estuaries gather and hold an abundance of life-giving nutrients from the land and from the ocean, forming an ecosystem that contains more life per square inch than the richest Midwest farmland.
- Estuaries are home to the world's busiest sea ports and shipping traffic where threats by oil spills, ship groundings and toxic chemical releases are common.
- Estuaries provide a natural buffer against storms and flooding.
- In eight coastal states alone, estuaries account for 80 percent of the local economy.

Goals of Salmon Creek Restoration

Remove Scrap Wood

More than 22,000 cubic yards of scrap wood will be removed from the estuary, improving habitat and water quality.

Replant Salt Marsh

Salmon Creek will have 11 new acres of salt marsh when the restoration is complete.

Create New Tidal Channels

This project will open new tidal channels, currently blocked by wood debris for more than 50 years.

Provide a Place for Recreation

A healthy estuary is a great place for fishing, kayaking and birdwatching. Many areas, within driving distance of Salmon Creek Estuary, are already popular destinations for tourists.

Involve the Community

The Salmon Creek project provides hands-on opportunities for the community to get involved in the marsh plantings.

For more information:

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