

Squaxin Island Tribe Steps up Efforts to Restore Fish and Wildlife Habitat in Shelton Harbor

SHELTON -- The Squaxin Island Tribe will develop a plan to restore fish and wildlife habitat in the Shelton Harbor portion of Oakland Bay, the southwestern most terminus of Puget Sound. Over the next year, the tribe will work with harbor landowners to formulate a list of mutually agreeable actions to improve estuary conditions there.

"Simpson Timber Company has been active in the early planning efforts and their partnership is critical," said John Konovsky, environmental program manager for the Squaxin Island Tribe.

"If we want to protect Oakland Bay, we need to restore and protect fish and wildlife habitat too," said Dave McEntee, Simpson vice president.

The relationship between the tribe and Simpson is hoped to expand to include other landowners around the harbor. "While Simpson owns a majority of the shoreline and tidelands, this partnership is incomplete without taking as much of the harbor into consideration as possible," McEntee said.

The habitat improvements will boost coho production in Goldsborough Creek - the main tributary to Shelton Harbor - and will help protect shellfish harvest in Oakland Bay.

One possibility is to create more gradual slopes along portions of the shoreline to allow salt marsh plants to grow. "Creating salt marsh will restore a habitat type currently missing in the harbor that provides refuge as juvenile coho transition from fresh to salt water," Konovsky said. "It might look similar to the head of the bay at Capitol Land Trust's recently conserved Twin Rivers Ranch." (<http://go.nwifc.org/twinriver>)

The tribe, Simpson and other partners worked together to remove a dam on Goldsborough Creek in 2001, significantly increasing natural coho production. "Goldsborough is the only system in all of Puget Sound that has produced more, not less, coho in the last few years," Konovsky said. "All other creeks and rivers have experienced a severe decline, especially in South Sound."

"Lumber operations in Shelton have evolved over the years, and that has changed the way the harbor is used," McEntee said. "That change has opened up a number of opportunities to improve conditions for fish and wildlife. Finding creative ways to capitalize on these habitat opportunities will allow the environment to thrive while Simpson continues as a very successful business operation."

The tribe's stepped up habitat efforts coincide with a just issued Department of Ecology report about sediment contamination in Oakland Bay. "While the pollution doesn't present a human health risk, some clean-up may be required and that's the time to improve habitat as well," Konovsky said.

"By combining any funds destined for clean-up with money EPA and others are providing for restoration, we may be able to advance improvements to fish and wildlife habitat in Shelton Harbor far beyond expectations," said Andy Whitener, natural resources director for the Squaxin Island Tribe.

"Shelton Harbor will always be a working harbor, but with this kind of cooperation we can move toward a healthy Puget Sound by 2020," Whitener said. "Without this kind of innovation, we don't stand a chance."

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For more info, contact: John Konovsky, environmental program manager, Squaxin Island Tribe, (360) 432-3804. Dave McEntee, vice president, Simpson Timber Company, (253) 779-6405.