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Snohomish County Celebrates Completion of Smith Island Project, Restoration of Critical Salmon Habitat

More than two-decade long project involved multiple agencies and impacts entire region

EVERETT, Wash., September 27, 2018 – The health of endangered Southern Resident Orca Whales is directly linked to local threatened salmon species. Snohomish County is doing its part to help with the completion of the Smith Island Estuary Restoration project, which provides critical habitat for threatened Chinook and other salmon species in the Snohomish River basin. A special ceremony will be held at 10:30 a.m. on Tuesday, Oct. 2 at Smith Island to honor those who were instrumental in making the restoration a reality.

“The Smith Island project is important to help realize our responsibilities for Orca and salmon recovery. Returning 378 acres to marshland has important regional significance,” Snohomish County Executive Dave Somers said. “We want to thank the county council, our funders, lawmakers and staff who made this project happen.”

Snohomish County Council Chair, Stephanie Wright added, “The Smith Island Project exemplifies Snohomish County’s commitment to restoring vital salmon habitat. By re-establishing the tidal estuary, we are taking a big step toward reaching our restoration goals. It took a long time, but I’m proud of the efforts by all involved.”

This project involved multi-agency cooperation and funding, including Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO), Puget Sound Partnership (PSP), Washington State Department of Ecology, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), United States Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Restoration Center, City of Everett, BNSF railway, and Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT).

The project was funded with more than \$20.7 million in state and federal grants. Snohomish County Surface Water Management contributed \$5.9 million dollars and the City of Everett contributed more than \$421,000. An additional \$2.5 million dollars in compensatory mitigation was provided by WSDOT and BNSF Railroad.

“This historic project marks the first time in 85 years that tidal marshlands are being re-established,” Snohomish County Public Works Director Steve Thomsen said. “Increasing the number of wild salmon in the region also helps the local economy and outdoor life in Snohomish County.”

The combination of the Smith Island project with others in the estuary, including the Tulalip Tribe's Qwuloolt Estuary project, the City of Everett and Port of Everett projects at Union Slough, and the WDFW and Ducks Unlimited project on Spencer Island, restores approximately 1,200 acres of tidal marsh estuary.

The restoration included construction of a new setback dike to hold back flood and tidal waters and protect adjacent properties including farmland, local businesses, and Interstate 5. The new setback dike was completed in August 2018 and large sections of the previous dike were removed, allowing the ebb and flow of tidal waters to marshlands that will provide habitat and protection for young salmon.

"Rearing habitat in the estuary is a bottleneck for our Snohomish salmon species. Restoring tidal marshlands and tidal channels provides juvenile salmon protected habitat rich with food before they head out to Puget Sound and the Pacific Ocean. An increase in the salmon's size and overall health improves their survivability in the ocean, ultimately resulting in more adult salmon returning to spawn in our rivers," said Mike Rustay, Snohomish County Senior Habitat Specialist.

In 1999, Puget Sound Chinook were designated as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. This project meets 30 percent of the 10-year estuary recovery target from the 2005 salmon recovery plan for the Snohomish Basin.

Quotes from supporters:

- "Restoring the health of Puget Sound relies heavily on restoring the Snohomish River Delta, and the Smith Island project brings us a large step closer towards that goal," commented WDFW Estuary and Salmon Restoration Program Manager Jay Krienitz.
- "With projects like this, we envision a day when there will be plenty of salmon not only for endangered orcas but also for the Tribal, commercial, and recreational fishers suffering from declining salmon numbers. We thank the County and its amazing staff for their leadership in salmon recovery" commented Jennifer Steger, NOAA's Restoration Center Pacific Region Supervisor.
- "Projects like this one are critical to a better future for salmon, Puget Sound and our communities," said Kaleen Cottingham, RCO Director. "When we come together to restore salmon, we're really investing in the long-term health of our waters, forests, shorelines and the communities that depend on them."
- "Projects like this result in multiple benefits—for orcas, salmon, and habitat for all of us," said Sheida Sahandy, Puget Sound Partnership Executive Director. "We are now at a point where we can see all the benefits from early Puget Sound Acquisition and Restoration (PSAR) fund investments and can tangibly understand why we have to continue investing in these incredibly important restoration projects with positive records of results."
- "The City of Everett is proud to partner on this great environmental project. This is an investment in the future of our region's salmon runs and also in the future of Everett's sewer utility," said Jim Miller, Engineering Superintendent.

About Snohomish County Surface Water Management

The Snohomish County Surface Water Management is a division of the Public Works Department, and works in partnership with the community to protect and enhance water quality and aquatic habitat, to minimize damage from flooding and erosion, and to preserve resources for future generations. For more information about

Snohomish County Surface Water Management, visit www.snohomishcountywa.gov/208/Surface-Water-Management.

About Snohomish County Public Works

The Snohomish County Public Works Department constructs and maintains county roads; controls and manages surface water quantity, quality, and fish habitats; and oversees the recycling and disposal of solid waste. The department's main office is located at 3000 Rockefeller Ave., Everett, WA 98201. For more information about Snohomish County Public Works, visit www.snohomishcountywa.gov/PublicWorks.

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