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Snohomish County's Largest Ever Estuary Project Earns ACEC Award for Engineering Consultant Company

American Council of Engineering Companies Honors Otak with Bronze Engineering Excellence Award for Work on Smith Island

EVERETT, Wash., March 26, 2019 – With the help of many partners, Snohomish County completed the Smith Island Restoration project in 2018. One of those partners, consulting engineering firm Otak, was recently honored for its work on the project by the American Council of Engineering Companies (ACEC) of Washington with the Best in State Bronze Award.

“Otak’s work on Smith Island was indispensable,” Snohomish County Public Works Director Steve Thomsen said. “This project was challenging and Otak partnered effectively with the county to explore and solve a number of technical issues.”

The Smith Island project, funded at nearly \$30 million by Snohomish County Surface Water Management (SWM) and a variety of federal and state grants, re-establishes tidal influences from Union Slough to 378 acres of critical salmon-rearing habitat. Snohomish basin estuary projects combine to be the largest in the Puget Sound area, totaling roughly 1,250 acres of restored estuarine habitat for salmon.

Key to the project’s success was managing a complex construction schedule within the constraints of tidal flows, weather delays, winter construction suspensions and limited in-water work dates. Built to the highest engineering standards for levees and designed for reduced maintenance needs in the future, the completed project offers improved flood protection for Interstate 5, surrounding infrastructure and private businesses on Smith Island.

"Managing the stormwater runoff from the interior area of the setback levee was a big concern of neighboring property owners. Otak's analysis and design was instrumental in addressing these concerns and helping to gain local support for the project," Snohomish County Surface Water Management Utility Director Gregg Farris said. "They were good to work with and helped Snohomish County deliver its largest habitat project ever."

The firm provided responsive leadership and coordination to help address complex technical issues on the project site. Otak helped to develop and execute a number of innovative design features to ensure dike stability and function. For example, the project features a pump system to maintain post-construction drainage for surrounding properties. Construction of the new setback dike allowed for the removal of sections of the old levee, reducing future maintenance needs from channel migration hazards.

After construction of the new setback dike was completed in August 2018, large sections of the existing dike were removed and the ebb and flow of tidal waters returned to the historic marshlands for the first time in 85 years. The Smith Island project is regionally significant, creating essential habitat for priority salmon species in the Snohomish River basin, including threatened Chinook salmon, which are tightly linked to the health of endangered Southern Resident Killer Whales. To learn more, Visit: www.snohomishcountywa.gov/1150/smith-island-restoration-project.

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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