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\$3.5M Grant Awarded to Snohomish County for Meadowdale Beach County Park

Funding from Federal grant will go toward building a rail bridge for safe public access to a beloved beach, improve salmon habitat, and restore a critical estuary

EVERETT, Wash., June 12, 2019 – The Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvement (CRISI) program at the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) today announced an award to Snohomish County of a \$3.5M grant for construction of a new railroad bridge at Meadowdale Beach County Park (6026 156th SW, Edmonds, WA 98026). The new bridge will address multiple issues associated with the narrow culvert under the embankment that have impacted the park for nearly two decades. The bridge will improve beach access while also enabling restoration of a historic estuary in the same location. The estuary will provide critical rearing habitat for threatened Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed juvenile Chinook and other salmonids.

“We are grateful the US Department of Transportation and our Congressional delegation will invest in this important environmental project,” said Dave Somers, Snohomish County Executive. “A project that improves safety for us and our neighbors, while making a significant impact on environmental protection, should be a model across the region and country. We are excited to make these improvements to one of Snohomish County’s most beautiful parks.”

Meadowdale Beach Park improvements are a featured part of Snohomish County Executive Dave Somer’s Puget Sound Initiative, addressing water quality, habitat protection and species vitality. The project will restore seven nearshore ecosystem processes identified in the Puget Sound Nearshore Ecosystem Restoration Project along a segment of Puget Sound shoreline considered to be “most degraded” due to shoreline armoring. The project will also achieve 50% of the habitat goal identified in the Watershed Resource Inventory Area (WRIA) 8 Salmon Recovery Council’s Recovery Strategies.

“This is truly a wonderful project, one that increases public safety and beach access, while improving the estuary conditions,” said County Councilmember Stephanie Wright. “We are grateful for the support of our federal legislators, for their interest in this unique and valuable community asset, and for making time in their busy schedules to see this beautiful park in person.”

This grant addresses the public safety issue by allocating funding towards the removal of 128 linear feet of shoreline armor and the undersized culvert. The culvert will be replaced with a five-span railroad bridge and a dedicated 9-foot wide, ADA compliant pedestrian path separated from the creek. Additionally, approximately 17,000 cubic yards of fill will be removed to restore a pre-railroad estuary that will provide high-functioning, sustainable rearing habitat for non-natal juvenile Chinook, coho, chum, cutthroat trout, and other fish. This will also benefit additional species in the larger Puget Sound food web, including Southern Resident killer whales.

The project provides a long-term solution to long-standing challenges surrounding historic development practices along the shoreline, Puget Sound recovery, and public recreation. The outcome includes maintaining and improving a much-loved public saltwater beach access point along with a restored coastal ecosystem co-existing with critical transportation infrastructure. There are also economic benefits that will come from the project.

The project is anticipated to begin construction in 2020 pending all final project permit approvals, BNSF agreement, and funding.

Background:

Meadowdale Beach Park is frequented by approximately 70,000 annual visitors and includes a popular 1.25-mile forested gulch hike (featured in 2015 Sunset Magazine) that ends at the shoreline of Puget Sound. Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad (BNSF) owns the right-of-way containing the heavily armored railroad embankment, built in the late 1800's, that separates the county-owned tidelands from the upper park area. Lund's Gulch Creek, a salmon-bearing stream carrying nourishing sands and gravels, runs the length of the gulch, but is constricted at the stream mouth by a 6-foot wide opening under the rail embankment.

In 1988, Snohomish County entered into an agreement with BNSF for shared pedestrian access through the 6-foot wide culvert. The culvert, with a low-head clearance, is the only legal means for park patrons to access the beach. Aluminum grates within the culvert opening provide a suitable walking surface during low flows with fish passage below. Increased creek flows and increased sediments from naturally occurring gulch-erosion processes have required the pedestrian grating to be removed and beach access closed for extended periods of time over the thirty years due to high water levels and to accommodate fish passage. The County maintains fencing and signage efforts to deter illegal trespassing of the railroad tracks though it remains a serious public safety risk for those who choose to cross.

This section of rail, has a high daily volume of freight, passenger, and commuter railroad traffic, which will likely increase over time. Daily train traffic estimated in 2018 includes approximately 40 freight trains and 21 passenger and commuter trains.

Snohomish County Parks, Recreation & Tourism, with the financial and staff support of Public Works Surface Water Management and Snohomish County Marine Resources Committee, commenced a feasibility study for the project in 2014. The County has worked collaboratively with BNSF throughout feasibility and design stages. The project is currently at 90 percent design review and has submitted applications for permits with several agencies. The United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) permit was recently issued.

This project has received significant support from our Congressional Delegation, including both Rep. Rick Larsen and US Senator Maria Cantwell. The local park community, Tulalip Tribes, Meadowdale High School, Edmonds Community College, the Cities of Edmonds and Lynnwood, Water Resource Inventory Area 8, and Sound Transit also support the project.

The County has invested approximately \$2.4M for feasibility and design, including a \$250,000 grant from the Salmon Recovery and Funding Board (SRFB) for preliminary design. The estimated construction cost for the project is \$16M. In 2018, the County applied for nearly \$8.3M dollars of state and federal restoration, salmon, recreation and transportation grants. This \$3.5 M federal grant will be combined with \$800,000 from SRFB, \$500,000 from Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account, and \$250,000 from Estuary Salmon Restoration Program.

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