

Duckabush Estuary Restoration Project Update to Olympic Canal Tracts

Spring 2019

Olympic Canal Tracts Board and Members,

We hope you find this update useful, knowing that many of you have heard about a potential project at the mouth of the Duckabush River that involves Highway 101. **The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and the Hood Canal Salmon Enhancement Group (HCSEG) along with several partners are proposing a project to reconnect the mouth of the river to its floodplain and to the Hood Canal.** This would be accomplished primarily by elevating and relocating the highway and removing existing fill and roadway infrastructure.

We expect this handout will generate many questions and hope you'll make time in your schedule for a public meeting about this project Saturday, July 13th at Brinnon School at 9:30 a.m. Details are still being finalized and additional meeting information will be provided soon.

WHY DO A PROJECT HERE AND WHY NOW?

An estuary is a place where freshwater meets saltwater and creates a unique environment that supports many land and water species. There are 16 large river estuaries located broadly within Puget Sound with five in Hood Canal. Since the late 1800s, the amount of estuary habitat in Puget Sound has decreased by 56%. The opportunity to restore habitat in some estuaries is nearly non-existent due to massive development and infrastructure (think, Duwamish in Seattle or the Puyallup in Tacoma.) **The Duckbush is an estuary where restoration is not only possible, but can be compatible with current uses.** With some modifications, this beautiful place can continue to provide transportation connectivity and improve its ability to support fish and wildlife species.

Recently, the Federal government created an opportunity for federal funding to be used for a project at the Duckabush estuary, but this funding opportunity will not exist forever. With world-wide interest in the future of iconic species such as salmon and Orca whales (which benefit from healthy estuaries), making timely use of this funding source will allow the Duckabush estuary to be part of the solution to a healthy Puget Sound. Funding available now will be used to collect information about the project area that can be used to inform project design.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS ESTUARY RESTORATION?

Restoring estuary habitat in Puget Sound is a top priority for recovering species like salmon and Orca whales. This project has the potential to address other areas important to this community. Project benefits include:

- Improved estuarine habitat is linked to improved survival for salmon, including several listed as endangered by the Endangered Species Act, including Hood Canal Summer chum and Puget Sound Chinook.
- Passage of elk and other wildlife beneath an elevated highway reduces risk of collisions with vehicles.
- Changes to how and where the water moves in the estuary could provide flood relief during peak flows and more open floodplain could yield water quality improvements through natural filtration.
- A modern highway design improves safety with wider lanes, better intersections, and reliable emergency access.

WHAT HAS BEEN DONE ALREADY?

- A conceptual design was developed to sketch out the project idea. Conceptual designs have minimal detail and provide a starting point for public conversations and determining data needs.
- The Hood Canal Salmon Enhancement Group (HCSEG) has been meeting with the community to understand local interests and values including a survey and a public meeting in 2017. They have also provided volunteer opportunities to collect data in the estuary.
- In spring 2018, HCSEG acquired the former Brinnon Fire Station and its associated land. (Purple parcel on map below.)
- In summer 2018, WDFW received permission from the Olympic Canal Tracts Board to conduct a wetland survey on lands within the potential project footprint. The final report and maps are available upon request.

WHAT'S UPCOMING?

Survey work will be one of the first items to be completed. **Surveys will allow us to better understand where a new road will be most feasible, cost-effective, and meet the intent of the project.** With this information we can provide more specific answers to questions that are likely to come up about this project. It is possible that nearby property owners will receive requests from project partners for access to parts of their land to do survey work. These project partners could include WDFW, HCSEG, Washington State Department of Transportation, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, or any entity contracted by one of these partners. If you have any questions about the validity of someone's request, don't hesitate to reach out to us.

WDFW IS YOUR NEIGHBOR

Much of the land at the mouth of the estuary is owned by WDFW as part of the Duckabush Unit of the North Olympic Wildlife Area. The Unit consists of 232 acres of upland, intertidal and subtidal land (shown in beige). Most of the land was acquired between 1993 and 1997 and can be used for a variety of recreational purposes, including shellfish harvesting and birdwatching. **The wildlife area manager (Darric Lowery), the water access site manager (Brian Mitchell) and WDFW enforcement officers work to keep the Wildlife Area clean and safe.** Your help is appreciated by notifying them when there is a maintenance or safety issue at the site. Darric can be reached at Darric.Lowery@dfw.wa.gov or (360) 701-5145.



COMMUNICATION

We expect this letter to be the start of regular updates provided to the Board about this project approximately 3-4 times per year or as important topics arise. **If you have questions, comments, or ideas about the project you can send them to one or all of the project members listed below or provide them at the July 13th public meeting.** Thank you for being part of such an enthusiastic and engaged community. We look forward to seeing you in July.

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Conceptual Duckabush Estuary Project Design

