

Hood Canal Environmental Council

Summer 2023

Protecting Hood Canal since 1969

Duckabush Estuary Restoration

(Barbara Moore-Lewis)

State and the federal governments are planning to replace the Duckabush Bridges and to restore the river estuary at the same time. The plan calls for about 1,600 feet of Highway 101 to be elevated above the estuary on support piers. Historic channels of the river would be restored.

Jefferson County has approved a master planned resort with almost 900 units and recreational facilities on the same estuary (Pleasant Harbor Marina and Recreational Community MPR). Extensive review of the resort did not include the planned salmon recovery project or the impacts of an urban density project on it.

The changes to the highway, bridges, and river are expected to cost more than \$100 million. Planning started in the mid 1990's, involving the state Fish and Wildlife and Transportation departments, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Hood Canal Salmon Enhancement Group.

The federal government is supposed to pay for 65% of the project and the state the rest. Federal spending measures have included funding for it. The state approved \$14 million this year in the capital budget. Last year the state approved \$25 million in the operating budget. The Puget Sound Partnership, a state agency, has awarded the project about \$19 million in grants, as part of the state's funding share.

The Duckabush is not dammed and is relatively undeveloped. It is a Wild and Scenic River flowing from the Olympic National Park.

Below: Hwy 101 over Duckabush flood zone



Obstruction of the river includes a 168-foot bridge built in 1934, a man-made plateau of earth with steep embankments on both sides, and a smaller bridge over the river's north channel. Because the way the river would naturally flow through the estuary is blocked, summer chum salmon and other wildlife are impacted. Historic river channels are completely blocked by the causeway fill material. The planned changes would result in those channels flowing once again.

The new section of highway will feature safety upgrades and will meet modern standards for earthquake protection and road width. (Anyone who has crossed the bridges knows what it's like to meet a logging truck there.) There is currently no easy detour for traffic if the bridge fails. The detour is a hard to access and poorly maintained Forest Service road.

The elevated highway will provide safer passage for the Duckabush elk herd, who now cross Highway 101 to graze on salty plants on Hood Canal. Bird habitat for shorebirds, herons, mergansers, and teals should improve.

Like other rivers blocked by bridges, such as the old bridge over the Skokomish River, the Duckabush has flooded, impacting homes along the river. The new bridge structure should make flooding upstream less likely.

Local tribes and the Point No Point Treaty Council have raised concerns about the effects of the construction on nearby shellfish beds. Advocates for the project say the health of shellfish in the area could improve. There will be new parking areas and people may be able to walk under the highway to the shellfish beds.

Below: Inspectors along Hood Canal at Seabeck



Harding Creek Aquaculture Permit Update

(Bernadette Olson)

Although the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers issued a Letter of Permission (LOP) to Washington State Seafood (WSS) on 3/23/2022, Kitsap County Shoreline Master Program requires a separate Shoreline Conditional Use Permit (CUP), which has not been applied for as of 6/5/2023. Once the application for a CUP is accepted, there will be legal noticing and opportunity for review and comment, as well as a hearing before the Hearing Examiner for this project. There will also be an opportunity to comment on the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) checklist and determination.

WSS wants to cultivate 6 acres of oyster using flip bags, 2.2 acres of naturally seeded Manila clams, and 6.8 acres of geoduck. If allowed to proceed, WSS would plant 5 to 9 PVC tubes per square meter which would be 138,000 - 248,000 tubes total.

This shellfish area is located at the estuary of Harding Creek in the Nellita area, north of Tekiu Point. Harding Creek is a documented sand lance spawning area and has Chinook, Coho and Chum salmon and Winter Steelhead. It borders a preserve with abundant eelgrass that is only accessible at low tide, donated in 2006 to Great Peninsula Conservancy (GPC) by the Matchett family specifically with the goal of protecting it in its natural state and preventing neighboring aquaculture.

Anyone who wants an update about this proposed project may contact Bernadette at 360-710-4165.



Phil and Karen Best Receive Environmental Awards

Phil and Karen Best received an Earth Day Award on March 24th at a ceremony held in Kitsap County. The Bests were recognized for their longstanding work to protect the environmental integrity of the Hood Canal watershed. After more than 50 years, they are still dedicated to working to protect against proposed developments which would negatively impact the health and beauty of Hood Canal. Their long list of accomplishments is impressive. Although not all environmental battles have been successful, the leadership from Phil and Karen has been a key factor in many successful outcomes.



Phil and Karen Best with Kitsap County Commissioners Rob Gelder, Charlotte Garrido, and Katie Walters

On June 1st Phil was presented with the Gary Allen Cunningham Conservation Award at Great Peninsula Conservancy's Annual Celebration. Phil was given this award for "significant contributions to the Conservancy's mission and vision."

Congratulations to Phil and Karen! They have made a real difference in the future and environmental health of Hood Canal.

Left: Harding Creek estuary from GPC preserve, showing eelgrass in proposed geoduck farming area

Below: Harbor seals on Dosewallips estuary



HCEC Supports Johnson Creek Estuary Restoration

(Michael Beaulieu)

Hood Canal Environmental Council (HCEC) is pleased to support a Great Peninsula Conservancy (GPC) request, in partnership with the Washington State Department of Ecology (WDOE) and the Hood Canal Coordinating Council (HCCC), for funding through the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program and Washington State Salmon Recovery Funds to acquire 13.1 acres and 530 feet of Hood Canal shoreline in Kitsap County.

Located in Seabeck, off Anderson Hill Road at the mouth of Johnson Creek, this project would remove buildings, shoreline armoring and other modifications, and permanently protect the site containing 11.1 acres of wetlands and tidelands. The property contains eelgrass beds, which are critical habitat for many species of juvenile salmon, including threatened Hood Canal summer chum salmon and Puget Sound Chinook salmon, and is frequented by numerous state and federally listed animal species that rely on the property's nearshore habitat, such as marbled murrelet, sunflower sea stars (proposed), and bocaccio rockfish.

HCEC has pledged a modest financial donation and a minimum 500 hours of volunteer work to assist GPC as they take on cleanup and restoration of the beach and trails around the property. After the land is acquired, GPC would remove all structures, including an old house, outbuildings, etc. Subsequent restoration phases would remove shoreline armoring and fully restore the historic salt marsh estuary. GPC will also work to bring school groups and youth to the property for guided tours, and potentially make the property a kayak landing spot on the Kitsap Peninsula National Water Trail.

For more information contact Erik Steffens, GPC Conservation Director, 423 Pacific Ave. Suite 300, Bremerton, WA 98337; (360) 373-3500, www.greatpeninsula.org.

Twanoh State Park Restoration

(Donna M. Simmons)

HCEC has notified the Washington State Parks and Recreation (WSPR) Commission of its strong support for the Commission's application to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) for a permit to conduct restoration projects at Twanoh State Park. If approved, this permit will allow the WSPR to restore the saltwater lagoon, remove 400 feet of concrete bulkhead, restore streams and shorelines, and replace a 160-foot bridge with a larger one over the stream.

In addition to supporting the WSPR Commission's proposed projects at the state park, HCEC encouraged the WSPR Commission to take the opportunity to install signs explaining how the restoration of beaches and streams allows natural processes to continue.

For further information, contact the USACE Project Manager, Samantha Stanford, by e-mail at Samantha.M.Stanford@usace.army.mil and reference project number NWS-2022-31-PN.

The Search for Green Crabs

(Donna M. Simmons)

Emergency measures are being taken by the Washington State University Extension and Washington Sea Grant in the effort to locate European green crab molts. The purpose of the Molt Search program is to train volunteers to identify green crabs and to report their presence and locations to project managers. The first training session took place in Poulsbo in May and a second session was held in June in Port Townsend.

European green crabs are one of Washington State's most invasive species. Their presence in Hood Canal and other water bodies is causing concern for wildlife biologists and other marine resource experts. These crabs eat or compete with a wide range of native species, including juvenile Dungeness crabs and littleneck clams. They also damage seagrass habitats which are important to salmon. They are hard to find as they hide under logs, rocks and vegetation and are often found in the mudflats or in protected estuaries and marshes. Finding molts (the exoskeletons shed by the crabs) is easier as they wash onshore with the tides before the crabs are caught with traps.

Early detection is the key to controlling the rapidly spreading populations of the European green crab. For this reason, Washington State declared emergency measures in 2022. Complete eradication is not likely to happen. However, the Molt Search program will go a long way toward protecting our shorelines from the harmful impacts of this invasive species.

For more information, contact Bob Simmons, Associate Professor – Water Resources, WSU Extension by telephone at (360) 789-8694 or by email to simmons@wsu.edu. The list of upcoming training sessions is on this website: <https://wsg.washington.edu/introducing-molt-search/>

HCEC BOARD OF DIRECTORS: Phil Best (President), Bernadette Olson (Vice President), Michael Beaulieu (Secretary), Don Seavy (Treasurer), Donna Simmons (Past President after many years as a **great** President), Barbara Moore-Lewis, Janet Wold, Terry Reeve, Karen Best, Bruce Morse, Paul McCollum. [Bob Wiltermoor, wetland expert and valuable board member, has regretfully resigned].

To join our monthly online meeting, email a request to Phil Best at pbest@wavecable.com.

Remembering Judy Matchett

HCEC sadly notes the passing of Judy Matchett on April 4th at the age of 97. Judy served on the HCEC board along with her late husband Bill Matchett for many years protecting Hood Canal.

Jeromy Sullivan, S'Klallam Tribal Chairman

Port Gamble S'Klallam Chair Jeromy Sullivan, past chair of the Hood Canal Coordinating Council, recently passed at age 50. He was instrumental in restoring Port Gamble Bay and a friend to HCEC.

Proposed Listing of Sunflower Sea Stars

(Donna M. Simmons)

Sunflower sea stars may soon be listed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act due to a sharp decline in populations throughout Puget Sound, including Hood Canal. Once abundant and widespread along the Pacific Coast of North America, sunflower sea stars are now in danger of becoming extinct. The primary threat to the species is a lethal pathogen which caused an outbreak of Sea Star Wasting Syndrome from 2013 to 2017, killed 90 percent of sunflower sea stars and may be the largest marine wildlife disease outbreak on record.

Sea Star Wasting Syndrome appears to be exacerbated by rapid changes in water temperature, warming oceans, and other stressors. Outbreaks are likely to occur more often and spread more quickly due to climate change and may be pushing this species to a higher risk of extinction.

Sunflower sea stars help control sea urchin populations in kelp forests and other vegetated nearshore habitats and maintain ecological balance. Listing as threatened is clearly needed to avoid extinction.

For more information see:

<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/feature-story/noaa-fisheries-proposes-listing-sunflower-sea-star-threatened-under-endangered-species>

and by calling The West Coast Region of NOAA Fisheries Lacey office at (360) 871-8300.

Hood Canal Shellfish Harvesting at Risk of Closures

(Donna M. Simmons)

According to Washington State Department of Health (DOH), annual water quality evaluations of the State's commercial shellfish growing areas confirmed in April that several shellfish harvesting areas in Hood Canal do not meet public health water quality standards. The downgrades are due to high levels of coliform bacteria. Sources of fecal pollution may be linked to water runoff from agricultural activities, pet waste, boater discharge and failing on-site sewage disposal systems.

The three areas at risk for shellfish harvesting restrictions include portions of Annas Bay, Tahuya and Lilliwaup. Both commercial and recreational shellfish harvesting will be affected by these restrictions, which are expected to be in place by August. The DOH is working with Mason County Public Health to continue water sampling and will make decisions on whether the Hood Canal downgraded areas will be classified as closed, or as conditionally closed allowing shellfish harvesting only during certain times of the year. Action plans will be prepared for closed areas.

More information is available on the State DOH website or by contacting the Mason County Public Health at (360) 427-9670 ext. 400.

WDFW Proposes Acquisition of Lynch Cove Tidelands

(Donna M. Simmons)

The Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) has proposed the purchase of nearly 64 acres of tidal land in the Union River Unit of the South Puget Sound Wildlife Area. The Lynch Cove project includes the acquisition and protection of four separate tracts of tidelands referred to as "worksites." This proposal, which has the full support of the Hood Canal Environmental Council, is one of 15 land acquisition proposals by the WDFW throughout Washington State as part of its Lands 20/20: A vision for the Future program. Conserving these properties will protect estuarine habitats for natural marine resources including summer chum, Puget Sound steelhead and many waterfowl and to preserve recreational opportunities such as bird watching, kayaking and wildlife viewing. In addition, the proposed work sites are a natural extension of the Theler Wetlands educational facilities and activities.

Acquisition of these properties by WDFW depends on obtaining adequate funding and agreements with willing sellers based on a fair market appraised value of the properties.

More information about the proposed WDFW Lynch Cove acquisition project is available at https://wdfw.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2022-10/lynch_cove_estuarine_tidelands.pdf

Dabob Bay Trust Land Transfer

(Bernadette Olson)

The Dabob Bay Trust Land Transfer (TLT), which received strong support from community and conservation organizations in a public hearing held on February 28, 2023, in Quilcene, conserves 826 acres of state forest within the boundary of the Dabob Bay Natural Resources Conservation Area (NRCA) and is fully funded as of May 2, 2023. The TLT involves an exchange of trust designations between the State Forest Land Trust and the Common School Trust, which are both managed by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

The Dabob Bay NRCA is a protected area that supports recreation, wildlife habitat, and open space uses. The TLT will help preserve the natural and scenic values of the Dabob Bay area, which is home to diverse plant and animal species, including salmon, shellfish, eagles, and herons.

In addition, State House Bill 1460, signed into law by Governor Jay Inslee on May 9, 2023, modernizes the Trust Land Transfer program in Washington State. The program allows the Department of Natural Resources to transfer state trust lands that have high conservation or recreation value to other public agencies or non-profit organizations. The bill increases the program's transparency, flexibility, and efficiency in transferring such lands out of trust status and provides up to \$30 million a year for acquiring productive replacement land. You can read more online at [Trust Land Transfer | WA - DNR](#).

Commercial Shellfish Farming in Hood Canal

(Jan Wold)

About one third of all of Washington's marine shorelines are under permit for commercial shellfish farming. Around 2017 the Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) prepared a Draft Cumulative Impacts Analysis for all the commercial shellfish farms that were expected to be approved prior to October 2019, revealing that of the active commercial shellfish farm acreage in Hood Canal:

- *Forty-one percent was potentially co-located with eelgrass.

- *About ten percent will be covered with large cover nets to keep out predators such as birds.

- *Fifty-four percent was co-located with forage fish spawning areas.

- *Together they were likely to adversely affect designated critical habitat for several species listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), including Puget Sound Chinook salmon, Hood Canal summer-run chum salmon and Puget Sound steelhead.

This is a significant amount of impact and the permitted shellfish farm acreage has increased significantly since these initial calculations were made.

In October of 2019, the U.S. District Court invalidated the Corps' blanket 2017 permit for commercial shellfish operations in Washington state. The court found that the Corps failed to properly analyze the cumulative effects of shellfish operations and failed to comply with the Clean Water Act (CWA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The Court then required new Corps permits for all commercial shellfish farms in the state of Washington.

Most farms have received new permits.

New litigation has been filed in U. S. District Court by the Coalition to Protect Puget Sound Habitat (Coalition) and Center for Food Safety (Center) against the Corps. The Coalition and Center expressed concern that the unique and invaluable coastal ecosystems in Washington state are being threatened by the excessive expansion of industrial commercial shellfish farming. This litigation asserts that the Corps failed to comply with NEPA (again), the CWA (again) and the ESA in authorizing new permits.

Examples of commercial shellfish farming in Hood Canal can be found in Squamish Harbor, southwest of the Hood Canal Floating Bridge. One of the Squamish Harbor active commercial farms covers 44 acres of tideland and grows Pacific oysters, Kumamoto oysters, Manila clams and geoduck clams.

Another farm grows geoducks, all sold to China, on 3.58 acres of tidelands. This farm is permitted to farm directly in patchy native eelgrass, a very important part of the food web. This farm was replanted with geoducks this past month with around 130,000 white PVC pipes (4" diameter by 10" long). Each pipe is pushed into the substrate one foot apart (see photo).

Jefferson County is processing a county permit for a proposed new 5.15-acre geoduck farm that would add another 220,000 PVC tubes into the Squamish Harbor tidelands. This farm shares a border with Jefferson County's Hicks Park. The PVC tubes would begin about 30 feet from the public boat launch ramp, creating navigation, safety, and visual impacts. Tubes become dislodged and wash around. The tubes and nets release micro-plastics into the water that are then ingested by marine organisms and birds. When the geoducks are six or seven years old, they are harvested with hydraulic high-pressure hoses that are used to liquify the tidelands down to three feet deep, continuing the impacts in six to seven-year cycles.

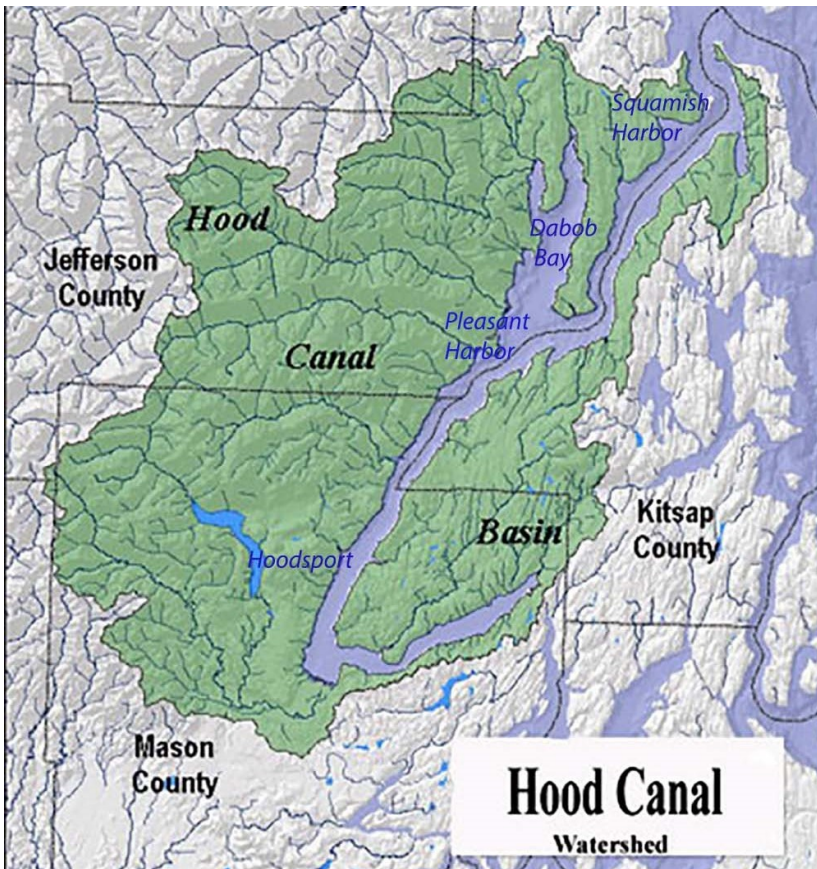
Below: Installing PVC plastic geoduck tubes on tidelands at Squamish Harbor in Hood Canal



Hood Canal Environmental Council

PO Box 87

Seabeck, WA 98380



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