

# Hood Canal Environmental Council

Spring 2026

Protecting Hood Canal since 1969

## State And Federal Forest Management (Donna Simmons)

### NATIONAL FOREST (MIS)MANAGEMENT

Under the guise of fighting wildfires and boosting rural economies, in 2025 the Department of Agriculture/Forest Service (USFS) proposed amending the **Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP)** to shift the fundamental purpose of the NWFP from recovering old growth to maintaining what little old growth remains while significantly increasing logging and road construction. The amendment would open over 800,000 acres of mature and older forests to destructive timber harvesting, increase carbon emissions that exacerbate climate change, fail to offer any measures to protect crucial habitat of endangered species, and increase logging of mature forests that are already fire resistant and resilient.

Adopted in 1994 and covering 24.5 million acres of forestland, the NWFP was created in response to decades of unsustainable logging practices that decimated old-growth forests and destroyed critical habitat for endangered species - still plainly visible on the timbered slopes of the westside of Hood Canal. A Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) outlining the amendment was prepared by the USFS in 2024. HCEC joined with a coalition of environmental groups opposing the amendment in a letter submitted to the USFS last year. For more information, see the HCEC Fall 2025 newsletter (pg. 3).

In the fall of 2025, HCEC joined 160 environmental, recreation and wildlife organizations, legislators and local businesses, to oppose the attempt by the Trump Administration to dramatically expand timber harvesting on National Forests by repealing the **Roadless Area Conservation Rule**. Established in 2001, this rule prohibits commercial logging and road building on tens of millions of acres of public forestlands, including the Jupiter Ridge, Lena Lake, and South Fork Skokomish roadless areas located on the west side of Hood Canal.

Last March, HCEC wrote the USFS strongly opposing proposed changes to the **Project-Level Predecisional Administrative Review Process** regulations. The agency's stated goal of "efficiency and timeliness" ignores the fact that the new rule would essentially cut public participation in the rule-making process to an unprecedented extent. Public comment periods would be reduced from 30 days to 10 days for Environmental Assessments (EAs) and from 45 days to 20 days for Environmental Impact Statements (EISs); the USFS could issue the EAs and the draft decision simultaneously, meaning that it may have already drafted its decision even before it receives comments from the public; oversight of the agency official signing the decision

would be eliminated, essentially removing existing independent review and possibly violating the Administrative Procedure Act's requirement that agencies provide the public with adequate opportunities to influence decisions. If adopted, the rule would speed up the logging and roading permitting process, reduce oversight on projects, make it harder to detect errors in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analyses, speed up infrastructure and recreation projects, and lead to cumulative negative impacts on water quality and other natural resources.

The Forest Service deserves credit for recently reinstating and permanently authorizing the **Legacy Roads and Trails Remediation Program** in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. This program has benefited visitors to national forests and has improved waterways across the U.S. for over a decade. However, since the backlog of road and trail maintenance has grown dramatically due to years of neglect from increasing storm events, the small amount of seed funding provided is very insufficient. For this reason, the HCEC joined with 167 organizations, elected officials and local businesses to request that the FY 2027 Interior-Environment Appropriations Bill include an increase in funding for the program.

### STATE FOREST MANAGEMENT

In contrast to federal forest management, HCEC is encouraged by recent management decisions made by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). In February, after its review of public comments under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA), DNR withdrew its earlier decision to offer a timber sale, opposed by HCEC members and the Skokomish Tribe because the 95-acre **Bayou Stomp Unit 2 timber sale** lies in the middle of a 360 acre "Legacy Forest" located in the headwaters of Lilliwaup Creek. DNR will submit a new checklist and call for another comment period. This case clearly emphasizes the importance of public participation in decision-making processes.

In January HCEC joined environmentalists, elected officials, businesses, and conservation, recreation and wildlife organizations to ask the state legislature for additional funding for the DNR's **Trust Land Transfer (TLT)** program. TLT is a conservation tool used to transfer economically under-performing state trust land to be managed instead for fish and wildlife habitat, recreation, education, and other public benefits. Additional funding was recently approved by the state. In the last round of funding, Cape George (241 acres), which contains 33 acres of old growth forest in Jefferson County, received funding along with the Yakama Nation's tract C project (2000 acres). Also in Jefferson County, Anderson Lake and Beaver Lake are on the DNR's priority list but have not yet been funded. HCEC is currently asking the DNR to prioritize funding for two long-sought Trust Land Transfers for Dabob Bay near Quilcene.

HCEC will continue to stand strong in calling for multiple use management of both state and national forests, oppose any proposed actions that threaten our public lands, and support those that protect them.

## Pathogen Cause of Seastar Wasting Disease (Dave Butterfield)

The Sunflower Sea Star (*Pycnopodia helianthoides*) is a keystone species in the NE Pacific coastal zone (i.e. the Pacific Northwest), playing an important role as a predator of kelp-eating sea urchins, and thereby maintaining healthy kelp forests that provide essential habitat for many coastal marine species. In 2013, a marine epidemic, called Sea Star Wasting Disease (SSWD), hit Pacific coastal waters extremely hard and wiped out 90% of the sea star population. The gruesome disease caused sea star bodies to fall apart and dissolve, and the cause was unknown. Was it a virus? A bacterium? Some kind of toxin? In 2025, a dedicated team of [researchers working at Friday Harbor Labs discovered that the culprit was a bacterium: \*Vibrio pectenicida\*](#). The research article published in *Nature Ecology and Evolution* explains that *V. pectenicida* produces a toxin that kills the infected animal, and that the bacterium itself is not easily detected on the infected organism. *V. pectenicida* can also be toxic to some scallop and oyster larvae.

Clearly it is important to understand what causes a disease if there is to be any hope of preventing or curing it. This latest result gives some hope that scientists can learn what environmental conditions favor the growth of *V. pectenicida*, as well as looking for resistance in sub-populations of sea stars and other affected species. The presence of *V. pectenicida* in marine waters can be monitored relatively easily. It also means that healthy sea stars can be raised in aquaria in research labs, such as Friday Harbor Labs, and marine scientists can help the keystone Sunflower Sea Star put up a fight against this disease that potentially threatens extinction.

Meanwhile, what can the average person do to help? Two things. 1: Write your representatives in congress to support marine ecology research. 2: Eat more purple sea urchins! Seriously. They're delicious. (Ask any sea otter). And, if you're a diver, with a little education and a [Washington shellfish/seaweed license](#), you can harvest them yourself. <https://www.splendidtable.org/story/2018/07/26/why-we-should-be-eating-more-purple-sea-urchins>

Link to UW news article: <https://www.washington.edu/news/2025/08/04/researchers-have-found-the-culprit-behind-sea-star-wasting-disease/>

Link to WDFW shellfish/seaweed licensing information: <https://parks.wa.gov/find-activity/activity-search/fishing->



## HCEC Offering Crab Molt Search Trainings This Season (Bernadette Olson)

The European green crab continues to pose a serious threat to Washington's shorelines, shellfish beds, and near-shore habitats. Early detection is one of the most effective tools we have and community volunteers play a central role.

This April, I attended Washington Sea Grant's **Molt Search Train-the-Trainer** session in Kingston. The training provided a deep dive into the invasion status of European green crab, hands-on practice identifying native and invasive crab molts, and step-by-step instruction in the standardized Molt Search protocol. With this training completed, **HCEC will now be able to offer our own hands-on Molt Search sessions for members.**

### Why Molt Search Matters

- \* Molts (shed shells) often reveal the presence of green crabs before live animals are seen.
- \* Even "zero-find" surveys are valuable — they help scientists map where the invader *isn't* yet located.
- \* Searches take only about 20 minutes and can be done on any accessible shoreline.

Data is submitted through the MyCoast app, contributing directly to statewide monitoring.

### What HCEC Members Can Expect

Beginning this spring and continuing through summer, I will be hosting this small-group Molt Search training for HCEC members. These sessions will include:

- \* A brief overview of the green crab threat in Hood Canal
- \* Identification practice using real molts
- \* A guided Molt Search on a local beach
- \* Help setting up MyCoast for reporting

No prior experience is needed — this can be done any time, any place and at your convenience.

### Interested in Joining a Training?

To participate in one of the upcoming HCEC hosted sessions, contact Bernadette at [bernadetteolson@hotmail.com](mailto:bernadetteolson@hotmail.com) so she can schedule dates based on member interest. This is an easy, hands-on way to contribute to protecting Hood Canal's ecosystems.

For more background on the statewide program, visit Washington Sea Grant's Molt Search page: [Molt Search – Washington Sea Grant](#)



## Pleasant Harbor Master Planned Resort Update (Barbara Moore-Lewis and Phil Best)

*The proposed Pleasant Harbor Master Planned Resort (PHMPR) is located on 238 acres in a rural area of Jefferson County on the west side of Hood Canal between the Duckabush estuary and Pleasant Harbor just south of Brinnon.*



In a limited exception to the general rule that high density residential development is not allowed in a rural area, the state Shoreline Management Act provides (RCW 36.70A.360) that a Master Planned Resort is a self-contained and fully integrated planned unit development with primary focus on destination resort facilities, within which residential uses are permitted only if the residential uses are integrated into and support the on-site recreational nature of the resort.

The PHMPR concept was approved in 2008 and is subject to a 2018/2019 Development Agreement which allows three potential Phases of development. Pursuant to a Kitsap County Superior Court case brought by The Brinnon Group, the Development Agreement was amended so that Phase one includes amenities required for the MPR, including a 9-hole golf course, spa, sports courts, pool, water slides, community center, recreation center, conference center, staff quarters, maintenance building, and commercial space. These features make the proposal a “destination resort” and not just a high-density residential development improperly located in a rural area. This court decision requires the county and developer to follow rules for master planned resorts, including that infrastructure and resort amenities must be constructed before selling homes.

There was a hearing October 14, 2025 on whether the county should approve the preliminary plat for Phase 1 of the PHMPR. The preliminary plat would create 150 residential lots for dwelling units for both temporary and permanent occupancy and 29 tracts for residential and commercial buildings, golf course fairways, private roads and utilities, open space, storm drainage, and park-and-ride.

The Hearing Examiner decided that the county can approve the preliminary plat with several conditions, including **Finding 106 which provides that Phase 1 cannot receive final plat approval until all conditions are satisfied for such phase, expressly including completion of the recreational amenities that shall be available to the general public.**

Both the developer and the county appealed the decision seeking to eliminate or modify Finding 106. The hearing decision and the appeals are at <https://www.brinnongroup.org/>.

In response to the appeals, The Brinnon Group argued that Finding 106 correctly requires that the recreational amenities (destination resort facilities) must be completed before final plat approval.

On May 18, 2026, the Hearing Examiner denied the appeal and confirmed that the destination resort facilities required by the Development Agreement must be completed in Phase 1, stating: **“The Brinnon Group correctly identifies the practical concern that would arise if the Applicant’s interpretation were accepted too broadly: final plat approval could allow lots to be sold and residential units built while the destination resort facilities remain indefinitely deferred.** That concern is not speculative in the context of an MPR approval that depends upon resort facilities and a binding phasing plan.” The parties have 30 days to appeal to superior court.

Bottom line: Any master planned resort must be done right, with environmental protection and approved amenities, or not done at all. The Brinnon Group is a 501c3 organization. Click here to [help with their legal fees.](#)

## Proposed Commercial Shellfish Farms at Squamish Harbor West of the Hood Canal Floating Bridge (Jan Wold)

**Smersh/BDN (Smersh)** is proposing a 5.15-acre commercial geoduck farm along Shine Road one mile west of the Floating Bridge, on the tidelands wedged between Jefferson County's Hicks Park and State Beach 59. Smersh requested that Jefferson County (County) pull their original State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) Mitigated Decision of Non Significance after local neighbors appealed it. The County later received an updated SEPA checklist from Smersh. The County asked for additional clarification on numerous items from Smersh on January 13, 2026. A new SEPA decision will be made by the County once all of their questions have been answered by Smersh. There will be an opportunity to appeal any new SEPA decision and have a hearing before the Hearing Examiner.

The **Carson Rock Island Oyster Farm** is proposed on one-half acre of tidelands near Termination Point, directly west of the Hood Canal Floating Bridge. There are many issues on the Carson property, including debris and unpermitted structures located in the shoreline buffer of Hood Canal.

The Hearing Examiner held a public hearing in August 2025, and on January 30, 2026 filed an order reopening the record, requesting that four questions be answered by Carson involving: correction of prior code violations; whether "Denial of Permits" should apply; the provisions of any Voluntary Agreement; and whether financial assurance or surety should be required. Both the public and the County were given an opportunity to weigh in on these issues and answers from Carson. Recently, **the Hearing Examiner rejected the County's and Carson's positions and denied Carson's application for an oyster operation.** The Examiner's primary reasons are that the uplands should have been considered as part of the proposal (not just the tidelands) and that Carson's record in addressing violations on the uplands is dismal. The County and Carson have 10 days to request re-consideration. The Hearing Examiner's order does not preclude another attempt by Carson that adequately addresses the uplands, but that would be a new application with a new review process--if it ever happens.



*This photo was provided by the Carson proposed Rock Island Shellfish oyster farm in a 3/27/26 reply to the Hearing Examiner's Order Reopening the Record. A half acre of the tidelands would be covered with this industrial oyster farm equipment.*

## Miles Sand and Gravel Shine Rock Pit 200-acre Proposed Expansion (Jan Wold)

An appeal of a Jefferson County purported decision to approve the Miles Sand and Gravel's 200-acre expansion of the Shine Rock Pit was filed with the Jefferson County Superior Court on April 22, 2026 (appropriately Earth Day). This 200-acre expansion of the Shine Rock Pit is located about four miles west of the Hood Canal Floating Bridge, south of Highway 104 and west of South Point Road. The expansion includes a large elevated rock conveyor system that is 25 feet tall, ten or more feet wide and around 1,500 feet long.



The expansion area includes 18 wetlands and 4 creeks. Two of the creeks, Thorndyke Creek and one of its tributaries, are designated by the state as F Streams, with fish. These creeks have Federally listed threatened bull trout, threatened steelhead, and threatened Hood Canal summer-run chum salmon. About two miles downstream, Federally listed Chinook salmon occur in the Thorndyke Creek Estuary at Hood Canal where there is also a large commercial shellfish farm. The Western toad, proposed for state listing, has also been observed nearby. The elevated conveyor system crosses both fish creeks and their buffers which also serve as wildlife corridors.

The county only considered the alternative with the conveyor system which is preferred by Miles Sand and Gravel who state that it is the cheapest alternative. Jefferson County made a Decision of Non Significance which provided for no mitigation. Input from both the public and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) documented many procedural errors and deficiencies in the SEPA Checklist, other parts of the application and the decision, indicating the need for a Decision of Significance and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The WDFW Biologist was very concerned about the deep rock pits having the potential to de-water the creeks and wetlands. A culvert where Thorndyke Road crosses Thorndyke Creek between Hood Canal and the rock pit expansion was replaced in June of 2023 at a cost of 2.15 million dollars, giving an indication of the value of the fisheries in these creeks. If the county requires an EIS there will more complete data gathered, more input from the public and analysis of more than one alternative. This link to the appeal offers more detail: [LUPA FILED Conformed 26-2-00076-16.pdf](#) .

## **Gass Preserve: Restoring Seabeck Shoreline (Bernadette Olson)**

The newly protected Gass Preserve in Seabeck encompasses 13 acres of forest, tidelands, and over 500 feet of Hood Canal shoreline at the mouth of Johnson Creek—an important habitat for summer chum and Chinook salmon. Structures were removed and volunteers gathered in February 2026 to plant native trees and shrubs, launching the first phase of ecological restoration. Great Peninsula Conservancy will continue habitat restoration, monitor ecological recovery, and evaluate opportunities for low-impact public access to support both conservation and community benefit. When this acquisition was proposed in 2023, HCEC supported it and pledged \$500 worth of volunteer hours. Anyone interested in volunteering, please contact Bernadette at 360-710-4165.

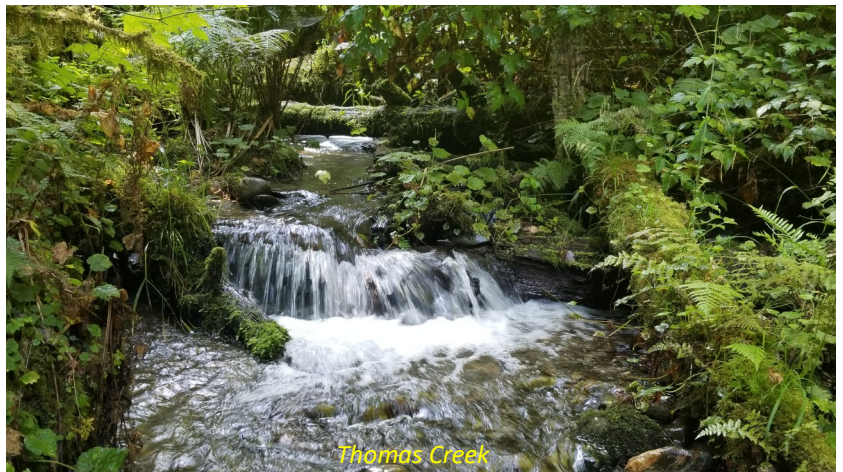


*Aerial view of Gass Preserve right after demolition  
(Samantha Hale, Great Peninsula Conservancy)*

## **Thomas Creek: Looking for a Bridge**

Thomas Creek at Holly teems with mostly Chum salmon every Fall, but some Sockeye, Cutthroat trout, juvenile Coho and Chinook also call the creek home. The creek goes under Seabeck-Holly Rd via a culvert filled with sediment. Last Fall, though the diligence of property owners, Kitsap County Public Works, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, and HCEC the culvert was cleared just days before the Chum Salmon run started.

Kit Kuhn and other dedicated volunteers improve the creek with the advice of a DWDFW Biologist to facilitate the salmon passage. They also advocate that a bridge replace the culvert and with the support of the Holly community seek to have this project put on a funding priority list. Several tribes and nonprofits are working with Kit to get preliminary bridge design funding as a first step. Many road and bridge areas need our attention for the salmon's sustainable future. Kit Kuhn and many others hope Thomas Creek will be one of those.



*Thomas Creek*

## **Harding Creek: An estuary worth Preserving**

Harding Creek enters Hood Canal between Seabeck and Holly, draining a steep forested watershed before fanning into a broad, shallow intertidal delta. It is a beautiful estuary with wide tidal exposure. It has a mixed sand-gravel substrate which is ideal for clams and geoducks. There is a Public Health record of wild shellfish harvesting there by tribes and various small shellfish operations. Washington State Seafood (WSS) requested a permit to farm oyster, clam and geoduck on 15 acres. The owner of WSS leased the Harding Creek tideland but emerged from Chapter 11 bankruptcy last February. It is unclear if a Letter of Permission was issued. At last check Coastal Zone Management approval was still pending. Most NWP48 permits were re-issued as of 3/15/2026. HCEC opposes shellfish farming at Harding Creek, bordered by a subtidal conservation easement managed by Great Peninsula Conservancy and donated by Bill and Judy Matchett to protect it from commercial shellfish operations. In June 2022, GPC did a drone survey so there is record of the pristine tidelands, extensive eelgrass and a healthy fish-carrying creek. GPC sends a stewardship crew every year, standard for every conservation easement. HCEC continues to watch the situation at Harding Creek.



*Harding Creek tidelands behind GPC intertidal conservancy area*



Derelict oyster farm structures near Harding Creek

## Celebrating Our Stewards: Introducing the HCEC Grant Program (Bruce Morse)

We are thrilled to officially announce the launch of the **Hood Canal Environmental Council (HCEC) Grant Award Program**, designed to celebrate and fuel the projects that make a lasting, positive impact on the environment and the vibrant communities that call Hood Canal home.

### Honoring the Past, Recognizing the Present and Promoting the Future

What makes this program unique is its flexibility. We aren't just looking for new ideas; we are also seeking to recognize existing actions and past achievements. Whether you are nominating a completed or ongoing project that deserves recognition for or proposing a bold new "future plan," we want to hear from you.

### Who Can Apply?

The short answer: **Everyone**. We believe great ideas come from every corner of our community. Applications are open to:

- Individuals
- Schools and Youth Groups
- Non-profit Organizations
- Local Community Groups

### A Broad Scope for a Better Canal

Your project doesn't have to be strictly "scientific" to qualify. We are welcoming proposals and nominations across all subject areas that benefit the region, including:

- Environmental Science & Conservation
- Cultural Heritage & Local History
- Community Development
- Education & Outreach

### The Selection Process & Rewards

A committee of local leaders and environmental experts will review all submissions. Beyond the grant funding to support their work, awardees will be publicly recognized through HCEC events, our newsletters, and regional media outreach.

### No Deadline, No Pressure

To ensure we capture the best ideas as they happen, there is **no deadline for submissions**. You can apply or submit a nomination whenever you are ready.

Together, we can honor the hard work already accomplished and ongoing, and inspire the next generation of stewardship.

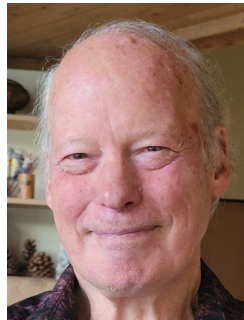
[\[Click here to Apply for an HCEC Grant\]](#)

## Board Members Passing (Karen Best)

Two HCEC Board members have passed away since the last published HCEC Newsletter: Terry Reeve and Paul McCollum. We miss them both and the expertise they brought to our board.

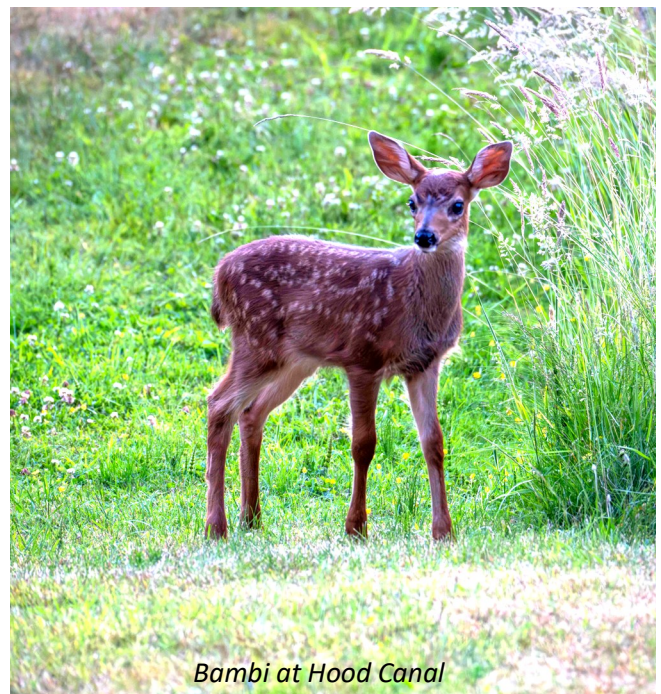


**Terry Reeve** brought his fishery awareness from his fisheries work in Alaska (with the Marine Advisory Program under the auspices of the University of Alaska) and his longtime historical knowledge from living on Hood Canal while growing up and again in his retirement years. He was the one who suggested the conservation of the large piece of undeveloped property at the end of Misery Point with its tidal pond, as he had known and valued it as a getaway in his teens. HCEC mentioned the property to GPC, who in contacting the owners, was able to purchase it and bring it into GPC conservation.



**Paul McCollum's** experience from a fisheries background and as former Director of Natural Resources with the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe, gave HCEC insights and understandings into native tribes. We miss that connection. He adopted and raised 3 children from Nepal and helped to support several Nepali orphanages and projects concerning women and children. A fine person he was.

We appreciate both Terry's and Paul's contributions to the HCEC Board's decision making. They seem irreplaceable, but we know that others with knowledge and talents will come aboard.



*Bambi at Hood Canal*

## Shoreline Rules Update — What It Means for Hood Canal (Bernadette Olson)

Washington’s Department of Ecology is undertaking a major update to the Shoreline Management Act (SMA) rules — the framework that guides how counties and cities manage development, habitat, and public access along marine and freshwater shorelines. This is a substantial revision, and it will directly influence the future of Hood Canal.

A central feature of the draft rule language is a new requirement that local governments plan for sea level rise and Climate-driven storm impacts when updating their Shoreline Master Programs. For Hood Canal communities, these changes reflect conditions we already see: king tides reaching farther inland, storm surges overtopping aging bulkheads, and habitat squeezed between rising water and hardened shorelines.

The rulemaking also proposes clearer shoreline permitting standards, updated enforcement tools, and revised lists of “shorelines of the state.” While technical, these updates matter here because Hood Canal’s narrow, fjord-like structure and sensitive habitats leave little margin for error. Strong, consistent shoreline rules help protect eelgrass, forage fish spawning areas, salmon migration corridors, and the rural character that defines Hood Canal.

Ecology has emphasized public and local government involvement throughout this process. Since September 2024, a Local Government Sounding Board has been meeting monthly to identify implementation challenges, and residents have had opportunities to participate through webinars, open houses, and an informal comment period (June-August 2025). A formal proposal (CR-102) and public hearings are still ahead (Sept-Nov 2026), meaning there is still time for Hood Canal voices to shape the outcome.

For shoreline homeowners, tribes, conservation groups, and anyone who cares about the long-term health of Hood Canal, this rulemaking is an important moment. Updating the SMA now offers a chance to align state policy with the realities of climate change — and to ensure that Hood Canal’s unique ecological and cultural values remain protected for generations.

For more information, visit the Washington State Department of Ecology Website at: [SMA Rulemaking Quarterly Update](#)

## Low Tide on Hood Canal



*Moon snail egg casing and red rock crab molt*



*Sea star*



*Squid eggs*



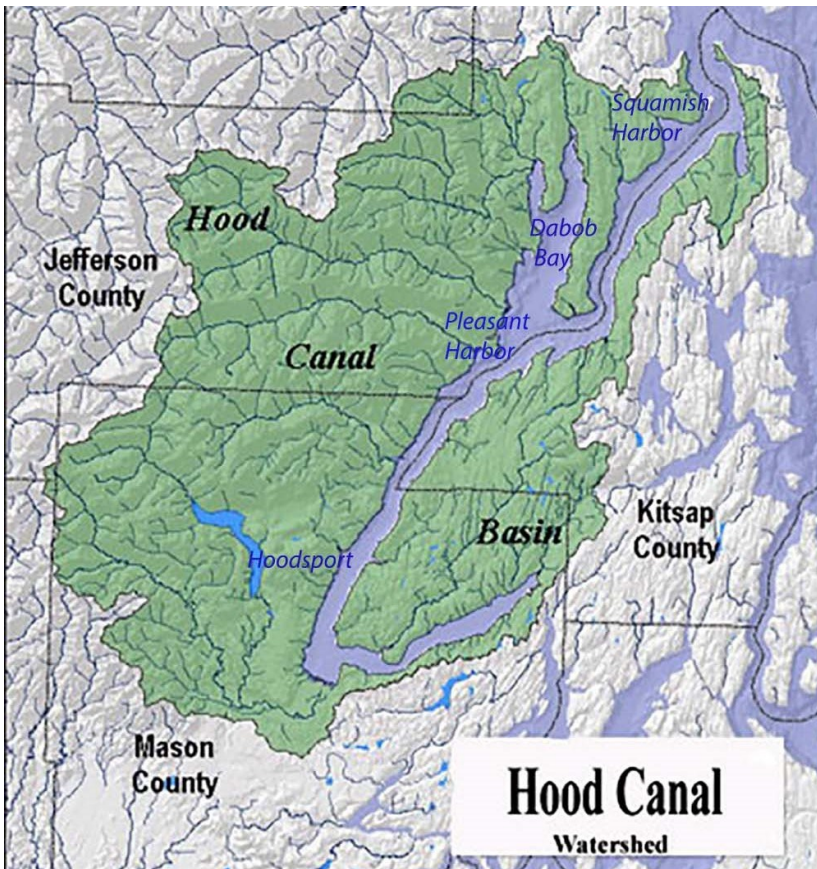
*Kelp crab*

**Hood Canal Environmental Council**

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hoodcanalenvironmentalcouncil.org



**HOOD CANAL ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL  
YEARLY MEMBERSHIP REGISTRATION**

Individual \$10 \_\_\_\_\_

Family \$30 \_\_\_\_\_

Group \$100 \_\_\_\_\_

Contributions in any amount are welcome

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Please send this coupon and your check payable to: HCEC, PO Box 87, Seabeck, WA 98380

**OR GO ONLINE AT**

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