

Hood Canal Environmental Council

Spring 2017 Newsletter

Protecting Hood Canal since 1969

A MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD

The HCEC and other environmental organizations are growing increasingly alarmed over the election of Donald Trump, an outspoken anti-environmentalist, as our 45th U.S. President. In the first few days of his new administration, President Trump is already making good on campaign promises to abolish or weaken hard fought environmental protections. Unless environmental groups put up a strong defense, he and his newly appointed cabinet members, most of whom are also openly hostile to environmentalists, could undermine decades of progress toward protecting our priceless natural resources including, air, water, fish and wildlife, and forests in the Hood Canal watershed and throughout the country.

The HCEC Board of Directors wants our members to know that we are committed to making sure that any new federal environmental policies, laws and regulations are based on best available science, especially when dealing with issues like climate change. We fully intend to continue monitoring political actions and, in coordination with other groups, will aggressively push back on any attempt to weaken or abolish policies, statutes and regulations that would adversely impact Hood Canal. We will keep our members informed about our activities and alert them when we need their voices to be heard.

We know that our success in defending strong environmental laws that are currently in effect depends largely on the continued support from our members. The HCEC has fought uphill battles before and we are confident that grassroots activism will prevail over the next 4 years of a Trump administration. Future generations of Hood Canal residents and visitors are depending on us.

Thank you for your continued support. If you would like to know how you can get involved, contact the HCEC President, Donna Simmons, by phone at (360) 877-5747 or e-mail to nana@hctc.com.

HCEC SUPPORTS WSCC IN SHORELINE PROTECTION EFFORTS

The HCEC recently sent a letter to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) declaring its support for the recommendation made by the West Sound Conservation Council (WSCC) regarding the reissuance by USACE of Nation Wide Permit (NWP) 48 *Commercial Shellfish Aquaculture Activities*. According to the USACE November 23, 2016 public notice, NWPs are issued to “. . . streamline the authorization of activities resulting in no more than minimal individual and cumulative adverse environmental impacts.”

In a letter dated December 30, 2016, the WSCC, of which the HCEC is a member organization, recommended that the USACE apply Regional General Conditions (RGCs) 10 and 14 to the 2017 NWP 48 to protect eelgrass and forage fish from industrial aquaculture. RGC 10 addresses submerged aquatic vegetation and forage fish; RGC 14 covers temporary impacts and site restoration. The earlier decision by the USACE not to apply these RGCs in the NWP 48 during the permitting process ignores numerous studies, including its own Biological Assessment report, which recognize the importance of these resources in maintaining the overall health of marine shoreline ecosystems.

The controversy over the spread of industrial aquaculture appears to be growing, especially when it comes to the commercial production of geoduck. Lucrative markets in Asia have created a huge financial incentive for the industry to expand its operations throughout Puget Sound.

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Shoreline Protection

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Further, the “Shellfish Initiative” adopted by Washington State encourages commercial shellfish farming as a way to improve water quality and the economy. While most aquaculture companies have historically been strong advocates for protecting water quality and preventing pollution, the impacts from modern, intensive, industrial geoduck farming techniques have led to increasing concern among environmental groups, researchers, government agencies and others. In Hood Canal, local residents in the Squamish Bay area are witnessing firsthand the destruction of nearby tidelands from commercial geoduck farming.

While the industry appears to be calling for fewer restrictions and claims that their operations are not environmentally harmful, shoreline residents have been documenting aquaculture activities, including the use of heavy vehicles on beaches, the liquification of the substrate, acres covered in plastic tubes, birds injured or killed by becoming trapped in netting or by ingesting small plastic particles, eelgrass removal, poisoning of native “pest” species, and reduced forage fish habitat.

At a public meeting attended by HCEC board members, marine biologist James Brennan, specializing in Puget Sound’s nearshore ecosystems, pointed out serious problems with reports such as the 2013 Washington Sea Grant report commissioned by State legislators which concluded that geoduck harvesting did not affect infaunal abundance or biodiversity. Despite these significant deficiencies, however, the Sea Grant Study is still used by the industry and legislators to advocate for expanding shellfish industrial aquaculture.

As of this writing, the HCEC has not received a response to numerous environmental groups’ requests that proposed RGCs designed to protect eelgrass and forage fish from industrial shellfish aquaculture activities be included in the USACE’s new NWP 48 regional conditions. We will continue to be involved in the decision-making process and keep our members informed about the potential negative impacts from aquaculture activities on the shorelines of Hood Canal.

Devil’s Lake and Dabob Bay NRCA Boundary Expansion

Good News to end 2016 on! Thanks to the support of a number of groups, including the HCEC, which submitted written comments and testified at a public hearing in support of the proposal, the State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has decided to expand the boundaries of the Devil’s Lake Natural Resource Conservation Area (NRCA) and the Dabob Bay Natural Area. This decision will allow the DNR to apply for grants through the Intergrant Exchange and Trust Lands Transfer process, to purchase lands from willing landowners and transfer state timber lands from timber management to permanent natural area protection.

Expanding the NRCA boundaries will protect forests, including some older forests, along with their unique plant and animal communities in the Quilcene and Dabob Bay shoreline and upland areas, adding nearly 4,000 acres of critical habitat on the west side of Hood Canal. The salt marsh estuary in Thorndyke Bay is particularly important as these areas may prove to be a crucial hedge against as yet unknown impacts to fish and other natural resources from a changing climate. Establishing a protected corridor between Thorndyke Bay and Dabob Bay will allow local wildlife to move freely back and forth within the corridor.

The HCEC places a high priority on protecting largely undeveloped natural areas in the Hood Canal watershed. Compared to the rest of Puget Sound, this watershed is still relatively undeveloped. Protecting what is left of our natural areas – particularly along our shorelines – will preserve the environmental integrity of this region for future generations.

For more information about the DNR’s decision, contact Donna Simmons by phone at (360) 877-5747 or e-mail to nana@hctc.com.

PORT GAMBLE BAY CLEANUP

At an HCEC board meeting in November, 2016, Roma Call, Environmental Program Manager for the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe (PGST), gave a presentation about the Tribe's history, treaty guaranteed rights regarding fish, shellfish, plants, wildlife and cultural resources, and current tribal environmental restoration and protection programs and activities. Among the many projects undertaken by the PGST in recent years is the cleanup of pollution and wood waste left behind by an old sawmill at the mouth of Port Gamble Bay. This project has been carried out in cooperation with the Washington State Department of Ecology (WDOE), and the property owner, Olympic Property Group (OPG).

For over 20 years, the PGST, along with HCEC and other environmental groups and agencies, had been concerned about the threats to water quality, related resources and public health from toxic pollution associated with 150 years of sawmill operations. In 2013 the HCEC expressed its concerns in a letter to the WDOE commenting on the Draft Cleanup Action Plan for Port Gamble. HCEC's letter confirmed its strong support for the PGST's recommendations for remedial action.

The PGST has spent about \$2 million on the cleanup effort, including funding for research. Its scientists were monitoring the health of the water quality and eelgrass in the bay before and during the cleanup. Other important elements of the research efforts include sampling mussel tissue for paralytic and diarrhetic shellfish poisoning and initiating studies of the bay's herring population, since Port Gamble Bay is considered to be one of the last pristine habitats in Puget Sound for nearshore fish.

Currently, the WDOE and the OPG are wrapping up a two year cleanup project. Over 6,000 creosote pilings, docks, approximately 120,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediment and wood waste, and a derelict vessel, were removed. This project is considered to be one of the biggest creosote pile removal projects in Puget Sound. As the project wraps up, the tribe will continue to monitor water quality, shellfish and eelgrass health. The OPG will monitor sediment in the bay.

The cleanup of Port Gamble Bay has been a huge undertaking with implications for the bay, surrounding uplands and ultimately, Hood Canal and Puget Sound. For the PGST, it is a recognition that tribal members have and still rely on shellfish and other resources living in the bay and that the protection of those resources is critically important.

Other issues include the PGST's concern about the cumulative effects on tribal fishing rights of proposed Navy projects, the proposed Pleasant Harbor Master Planned Resort in Brinnon, and the many mooring buoys in the nearshore areas. Regarding the proposed Whitney pier at Tekiu Point, which HCEC opposes, PGST fishers oppose the issuance of an Army Corp of Engineers (ACOE) permit for that project due to the potential effects on fish and shellfish. HCEC board members expressed their intention to work with the Tribe on these and other issues of shared interest.

For more information about the Port Gamble Bay cleanup project, contact the Natural Resources Department for the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe at (360) 297-6294.



Gamble Bay Save the Oysters prior to piling removal.
Photo by Don Willott



Great Blue Heron by Phil Best

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The Board of Directors meets the third Wednesday of each month. If you would like to attend, call Donna Simmons at (360) 877-5747.

HCEC WELCOMES NEW BOARD MEMBER

HCEC Directors welcomed its newest board member, Warren Lewis, last fall. As a young boy, Warren began his love affair with Hood Canal at a rented waterfront cabin in Holly. Later in life, he built the family's home on a Seabeck hill overlooking the Canal. Since 1957 his family has owned a once-deserted beach cabin at Nellita built in 1932 by the Kitsap Council of Boy Scouts. Warren subscribes to the Shoreline Stewards program and considers caring for Hood Canal a personal responsibility.

Kitsap Forest and Bay Community Campaign

(Guest column by Judy Willott – Kitsap Audubon)

The Kitsap Forest and Bay Community Campaign is in the final phase of a multi-year effort to purchase the Port Gamble Forest. These 3,000 acres of forest have served as timber production for over 160 years and Pope Resources is providing the public with an opportunity to conserve this piece of forested watershed that now lies at risk for development. Over the last 5 years, with broad community support, the Port Gamble Forest Heritage Park shoreline and (as of December 31, 2016) 1,355 acres adjacent to the shoreline have been put into public ownership as a Kitsap County Park.

Now, the Campaign goal is to finish raising the \$3.5M required to purchase the remaining 1645 acres of Pope timberland. If we fail to act to preserve this last tract in the forest south of Port Gamble, the land can quickly be sold for development in 20 acre parcels. With that, all opportunity for ecological and cultural restoration of this piece of uniquely situated lowland forest will be lost.

Some background: In 2011, Forterra was asked by Kitsap County constituents and Tribes to negotiate on their behalf with Pope Resources to conserve as much as 6,700 acres of land - including the Port Gamble Forest. The Kitsap Forest & Bay Coalition, composed of a broadly representative group of community stakeholders backs this campaign. The coalition includes Forterra, Pope Resources, the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe, the Suquamish Tribe, Kitsap County, and the Great Peninsula Conservancy, as well as Kitsap Audubon Society, the North Kitsap Trails Association, Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance - West Sound, and many other groups and individuals. The active support of so many community groups has been key to the Campaign success so far.

For the People. For the Land. Forever.

The Port Gamble Forest is one of the largest intact forests in the Hood Canal watershed. The Forest provides important habitat for wildlife, is a cultural resource for the Port Gamble S'Klallam and Suquamish Tribes, protects the Port Gamble Bay & Hood Canal marine ecosystem, gives the community a large multi-use recreation site—including six miles of the regional Sound to Olympics Trail, and holds exciting potential to boost economic growth for neighboring communities. This forest, six times the size of Seattle's Discovery Park, offers the entire Puget Sound community year-round access to over 65 miles of trails—accommodating cyclists, runners, mountain bikers, equestrians, birdwatchers and people of all ages and abilities. Learn more and donate at www.savepg.org

**UPDATE:
PLEASANT HARBOR PROPOSED MPR**

2017 marks year eleven of HCEC’s continued involvement in the effort to prevent a Canadian developer from constructing and operating a large Black Point/Pleasant Harbor Master Planned Resort (MPR) proposed to be located south of Brinnon. Since our last update, several developments have resulted in slowing down the approval process.

The Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (FSEIS) for this project was released by Jefferson County in late 2015*. In written and oral comments on the FSEIS, the HCEC joined other groups in stressing that the latest proposal, even with substantial changes, still failed to adequately address critical environmental and economic issues and concerns. After the county issued a response to public comments, the FSEIS was sent to the Jefferson County Planning Commission (PC) last spring.

A public meeting on the FSEIS and development regulations was held by the PC where a number of groups and individuals spoke in opposition to the proposal. Three months later, the Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe provided detailed concerns about the proposal and informed the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) that the required consultation with the Tribe had not been completed. In response, a government-to-government meeting was held during which the BOCC agreed to hold technical meetings with the Tribe, county staff, and developer staff to try to resolve the Tribe’s issues. These meetings started in December 2016. In May the PC was ordered to make its recommendation on the development regulations in spite of its concerns about the process. The PC subsequently rewrote the regulations and presented its recommendation to the BOCC.

Last October the developer presented a new proposal to the county and the Tribe. The “Vision,” as it was called, represented a significant departure from the earlier preferred alternative. Now titled “The Pleasant Harbor Marine and Recreation Community,” it is a scaled down version of earlier proposals that would set up a private-public venture financed largely with \$37,750,000 of taxpayer money. The attorney for the Brinnon Group, a local citizen organization formed to oppose the proposed MPR, identified serious problems with the new proposal, stating that it essentially: shifts much of the financial burden to Jefferson County and the State of Washington to start the project, lacks details which the county needs to evaluate it, and consists of multiple and substantial changes

HOOD CANAL ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL
YEARLY MEMBERSHIP REGISTRATION

Individual—\$10 _____

Family—\$30 _____

Group—\$50 _____

Patrol—\$100 _____

Contributions in any amount are welcome

NAME _____

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HOW I CAN HELP _____

from previous ones, and therefore a new Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) is required. The county attorney Michael Haas decided in November 2016 that the vision was only a conceptual document and that the plan under discussion was the one in the FSEIS. The HCEC continues to support the Brinnon Group, which has taken the lead in opposing the proposed MPR, in any way it can, including writing letters, attending hearings, donating money and keeping the public informed. Anyone wishing to learn more about how to get involved or donate to the cause is encouraged to check out the Brinnon Group’s website at www.brinnongroup.org/take-action/. Checks can be mailed to P.O. Box 572, Brinnon, Washington, 98320-0572.

Anyone wishing to learn more about the HCEC’s efforts to make sure that our environmental concerns are addressed may contact Donna Simmons at nana@hctc.com.

*Although the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) has been labeled final, it is not, since not all the conditions set by the county commissioners in 2008 have been met, including completed agreements with various government agencies.



Hood Canal Environmental Council

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“CHANGING THE NATURE OF PUGET SOUND—A look at the **impacts of industrial aquaculture**” is a free BI Enviro Conference at Islandwood on Bainbridge Island on Sunday, May 21, 2017 from 12:30 to 5:30 pm.

Summer Chum Symposium, sponsored by Hood Canal Coordinating Council, at Kitsap Conference Center in Bremerton on June 28, 2017 from 10am—4pm. Recovery Planning, Population Modeling, Habitat & More.



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