



KILISUT HARBOR, OAK BAY FINALLY RECONNECTED

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Juvenile salmon can move freely from Oak Bay to Kilisut Harbor for the first time in 75 years, following the recent removal of an earthen causeway that supported a road and undersized culverts.

The man-made structures were replaced with a 450-foot-long bridge between Indian and Marrowstone islands this year, improving tidal flow, fish passage and water quality, plus giving salmon access to 2,300 acres of nearshore habitat.

Data from the Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe’s 2014 intensive salmon habitat study helped the project jump the final hurdle to make the restoration happen.

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The study showed where and how juvenile salmon were using nearshore environments in Hood Canal and Admiralty Inlet. The



Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe marine biologist Julianna Sullivan takes measurements in Oak Bay before the culverts were removed. *Photo: Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe*

tribe found salmon using small bays such as Kilisut Harbor instead of larger estuaries at the mouths of the Duckabush and Dungeness rivers.

“The tribe is really excited to see the historic connection reestablished between Oak Bay and Kilisut Harbor because of the value it will have to out-migrating juvenile salmon,” said Hans Daubenberger, the tribe’s senior research scientist. “It’s created an additional corridor for these fish to travel during their out-migration to the ocean.”

The tribe also expects the restoration to benefit the water quality conditions in Kilisut Harbor. Prior to the removal of the road, the water registered higher temperatures lethal to fish.

“When the tidal flow was disconnected, it created a dead end in Kilisut Harbor,” Daubenberger said. “During the summer, the water stopped exchanging and would heat up to temperatures in excess of 70 degrees – like bathtub water – which is not good for fish that inhabit Puget Sound. So we’re pretty confident that this restoration will alleviate that issue.”

The S'Klallam people have deep cultural and historic ties to Kilisut Harbor and the surrounding landscape, said Josh Wisniewski, a cultural anthropologist who does research for the Port Gamble S'Klallam and Jamestown S'Klallam tribes.

“Archeological evidence from lands adjacent to Kilisut Harbor provide evidence of thousands of years of

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continuous occupation by the S’Klallam and Chemakum ancestors of S’Klallam tribal members,” he said. “Today S’Klallam people continue to carry out traditional cultural harvesting activities in Kilisut Harbor that were protected by treaty rights and reaffirmed by the Boldt decision. By doing so, Kilisut Harbor remains an essential part of the S’Klallam cultural landscape.”

“Mother Nature has definitely started her work,” said Rebecca Benjamin, executive director for the North Olympic Salmon Coalition, which oversaw the project. “The tide is scouring deep pools and it’s looking more like a tidal channel. We’re seeing tons of forage fish such as surf smelt, as well as crab.

“It’s creating a lot of spawning habitat for forage fish, which we didn’t realize at the beginning of the project,” she said. “The edge of the tidal channel is now forage fish habitat.”

NOSC was able to secure the \$15 million in funding from more than 20 sources and partners. The Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe supplied \$1 million from a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration grant and joined the Jamestown S’Klallam and the Lower Elwha Klallam tribes in supporting the US Navy in providing \$1 million from U.S. Navy mitigation funds.

Other partners and supporters included Washington Department of Transportation, U.S. Navy, Jefferson County Parks, Washington Department of Resources, Puget Sound Partnership, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington Department of Ecology, the state Estuary and Salmon Restoration Program, local landowners and Marrowstone Island residents.

North Olympic Salmon Coalition Executive Director Rebecca Benjamin, left, and Kevin Long, project manager, paddle into Oak Bay from under the new bridge that allows Oak Bay to flow into Kilisut Harbor, between Indian and Marrowstone islands. An earthen causeway was in place of the bridge for 75 years, preventing juvenile salmon from migrating between the two bays. Photo: T. Royal



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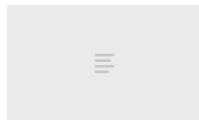
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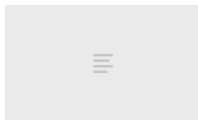
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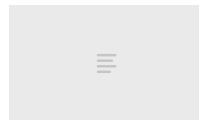
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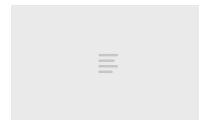
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