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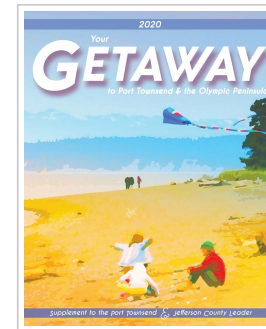


Thursday, October 29, 2020

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Salmon passage restored with the return of historically linked waterways



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LATEST NEWS



A multi-agency effort to restore tidal flow between Kilisut Harbor and Oak Bay has been met with success according to organizers with the North Olympic Salmon Coalition.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Posted Friday, August 28, 2020 11:14 am

Nick Twietmeyer
ntwietmeyer@ptleader.com

Kilisut Harbor and Oak Bay have once again been reconnected, providing a critical link for migrating juvenile salmon and other wildlife in the area.

Historically the land between Indian Island and Marrowstone Island was made up of tidal channels and salt marsh through which Oak Bay and Kilisut Harbor exchanged tidal waters freely. The connection allowed juvenile salmon to migrate northward from Oak Bay up into supportive habitat in Kilisut Harbor. While the construction of a causeway between Kilisut Harbor and Oak Bay eased traffic issues, it also constricted the flow of water and sediment which eventually accumulated and formed a barrier, filling the channel.

The Kilisut Harbor Restoration Project took aim at removing two undersized in-ground culverts and replacing the earthen causeway spanning the connection with an elevated, 440-foot long bridge.

According to Rebecca Benjamin, executive director at the North Olympic Salmon Coalition, the resumption of water flow between the bay and the harbor served as the culmination of about nine years of work by the group and its partners.



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The SmileMobile team is returning to Jefferson County Wednesday, Nov. 4 through Wednesday, Nov. 11. The dental team will see babies, children, teens and pregnant/postpartum people on Apple Health ...



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“I wish you could see my smile,” Benjamin said.

“It’s hard to put it into words, it feels gratifying that all the hard work of the salmon coalition and our partners has finally come to fruition and it’s beneficial to the larger ecosystem, specifically salmon, forage fish and shore birds,” she said.

Benjamin explained that the project stemmed from numerous partnerships at the private, state, federal and tribal levels.

In addition to providing funding for the project, Benjamin said the Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe provided critical scientific data, which illustrated the need to re-establish the connection between Kilisut Harbor and Oak Bay to benefit the local salmon populations.

“That really helped prove to the funding community that this was an important project for salmon,” Benjamin said. “[The fish] really want to be in this pristine habitat between Indian Island and Marrowstone.”

According to the coalition’s website, the reconnection “will restore natural processes, conditions, functions, and biological responses to 27 acres of marine intertidal habitat and tidal fringe salt marsh that have been severely impacted by the construction of the earthen causeway in 1958.”

Salmon aren’t the sole benefactors of the connection either. Shorebirds, shellfish, eelgrass and waterfowl will also reap the rewards of the returning water, not to mention the area’s amphibious, bipedal primates.

“It’s not just for habitat; a lot of the near-shore work is also beneficial to people,” Benjamin explained. “We now have a bridge that is resilient to sea-level rise, and will withstand those conditions than that little causeway has.”

Without the causeway and the pair of culverts in the way, Benjamin said the area will also be a boon for local paddlers.

“If you’re careful with the tides and understand that there’s a strong current under the bridge, it can be a fun place to recreate, as long as you respect the nearby property boundaries,” she added.

Kilisut Harbor and Oak Bay have also been identified as “Important Bird Areas” by the Washington Audubon Society, supporting bald eagles, brants, harlequin ducks, pileated woodpeckers, purple martins and up to 13,500 wintering shorebirds and waterfowl.

Benjamin added that the coalition has already observed a reduction in water temperature at Kilisut Harbor as a result of cooler water now flowing in from Oak Bay.

Of the approximately \$12.6 million price tag for the Kilisut Harbor Restoration Project, Benjamin said some \$8 million was offered through the Puget Sound Partnership. Significant contributions to the project also came from National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife’s Estuary and Salmon Restoration Program.



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226 Adams Street
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98368
1-360-385-2900

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