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The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

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Investing in habitat restoration to benefit fish, wildlife, and people in Puget Sound



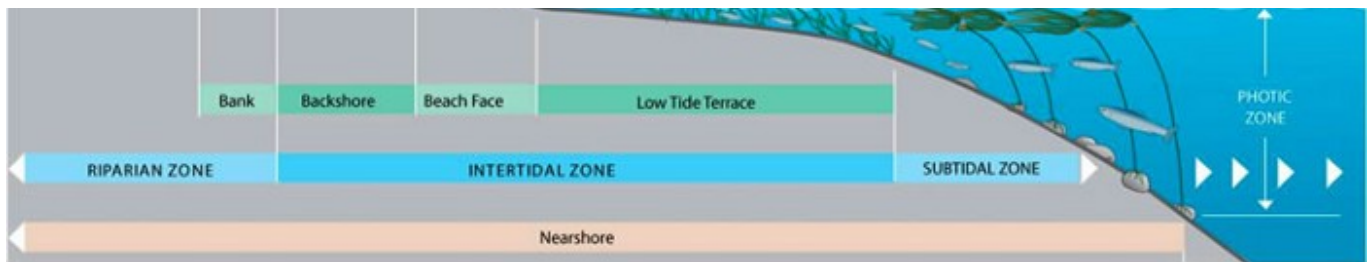
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Funding nearshore habitat restoration

The Estuary and Salmon Restoration Program (ESRP) collaborates with local communities and provides funding and technical assistance to organizations working to restore shoreline and nearshore habitats critical to salmon, shellfish, forage fish, and other species in Puget Sound.

Formed from of a large coalition of partners and scientists in 2006, the ESRP works to develop new ways to recover the most important parts of Puget Sound's nearshore, which is the narrow ribbon of land and shallow water that rings Puget Sound. The nearshore includes shoreline bluffs, tidal portions of streams and rivers, and shallow water areas out to a depth where sunlight no longer supports marine vegetation.





Nearshore cross-section

The ESRP is a partnership between the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), the Recreation and Conservation Office, and the Puget Sound Partnership, and comprises four grant programs. Since its inception, ESRP has received and invested \$52.5 million of state capital funds and nearly \$10 million in direct federal funding. ESRP has a small team that works alongside WDFW's regional nearshore staff who collaborate with local communities.

ESRP-funded projects provide benefits to fish, wildlife, and people by:

- Funding local jobs, directly supporting local economies;
- Restoring and sustaining important fisheries;
- Creating shorelines that are more resilient to changing sea levels and climate conditions; and
- Helping private landowners restore and maintain healthy shorelines.





Groundbreaking ceremony for the Kilisut Harbor restoration project in August 2019. The project benefits many species, including salmon, shorebirds, waterfowl, shellfish, and eelgrass, while also providing transportation between Indian and Marrowstone Islands.

Investing in healthy, resilient estuaries

A strong link to science, paired with an ecosystem-scale approach, ensures that ESRP's investment decisions are strategic and that the program's efforts will translate into healthy and resilient estuaries, bays, and shorelines. The ESRP has a service-oriented approach that strongly values local community cohesion and works to develop and fund regionally significant projects.



The program also has a unique method that strongly integrates science and research into all its investment strategies and actions. These locally developed ESRP projects make shorelines more resilient to a changing climate and provide outdoor recreation opportunities along Washington's beautiful beaches and estuaries.

Each ESRP-funded project has a primary local project sponsor from the county, tribe, conservation district, non-governmental organization, or another eligible local organization.

2021–23 ESRP Preliminary Investment Plan

Every two years, the ESRP creates a Sound-wide prioritized list of projects that weaves together all the investment areas. The [2021–2023 ESRP Preliminary Investment Plan](#) requests \$20 million in funding from the Washington State Legislature for projects across Puget Sound.

Ranking projects

More than 50 volunteer scientists, policy professionals, agency staff, local community members, and regional experts from across Puget Sound work together to review all ESRP project proposals. ESRP technical reviewers assist project sponsors during the early stage of the review process to improve their projects and conduct a final review to evaluate and prioritize the final ESRP list of projects.

Next steps

The ESRP investment plan was submitted through the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO), to the state Office of Financial Management (OFM), and then the Governor's office for his budget proposal to the legislature. The Washington State Legislature considers the list as part of the State Capital Budget.

For more details on how the state biennial budget cycle works, see OFM's [Guide to the Washington State Budget Process](#).

Examples of ESRP-funded projects

Kilisut Harbor Restoration Project

- Restored tidal connection between southern Kilisut Harbor (Scow Bay) and Oak Bay by removing the earthen causeway that contained two culverts. The causeway was

replaced with a 440-foot bridge. This work restored natural processes and biological responses to 27 acres of marine intertidal habitat and tidal-fringe salt marsh.

- The project benefits many species, including salmon, shorebirds, waterfowl, shellfish, and eelgrass, while also providing transportation between the two islands.
- The successful completion of this project will reconnect the large numbers of Hood Canal and Puget Sound out-migrating juvenile salmon that converge at Oak Bay with immense foraging opportunities available within Kilisut Harbor. The project will also restore and enhance important staging and foraging habitat for multiple coastal-dependent and migratory birds.



See a 360-degree view of the project at [high tide](#) and at [low tide](#).

Images by John Gussman

Smith Island Restoration Project

- Re-established historic tidal marshlands that provide critical habitat for threatened Chinook salmon, as well as other salmon species, in the Snohomish River basin.
- The project included construction of a new setback dike to hold back flood and tidal waters to protect the adjacent properties including farmland, local businesses, and Interstate 5.

- After the setback dike was completed, large sections of the existing dike were removed, and the ebb and flow of tidal waters returned for the first time in 85 years. The re-established estuary provides food and shelter to hundreds of thousands of juvenile salmon making their way downstream and out to the ocean each year.

Watch the Smith Island tide return for the first time 85 years.

Leque Island Restoration Project

- Removed over 2.4 miles of levee, excavated over 5 miles of new tidal channels, and created several lower depressions called tidal headwaters to restore 250 acres of tidal marsh habitat in the Stillaguamish River watershed where 85% of historic tidal marsh has been displaced.
- Constructed a 0.7-mile wave protection berm that protects the City of Stanwood and serves as an elevated walking trail.
- Constructed new parking lot and handheld boat launch on David Slough to provide paddling access in the new tidal channels.
- The restoration work will benefit juvenile Chinook salmon as they transition from fresh to saltwater, as well as shorebirds, waterfowl, and a host of other species in the

area.

Explore this [story map](#) to learn more about ESRP-funded projects or visit our [ESRP webpage](#).

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