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County, partners receive $5.7 million for salmon recovery

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The Nature Conservancy's Port Susan Bay Preserve project will receive $750,000 from the $5.7 million from the state Salmon Recovery Funding Board to improve chinook salmon habit. This is one of 13 habitat improvement projects in Snohomish County, with five of them along the Stillaguamish River.

"We have a responsibility to protect our region's ecology and cultural heritage, and we can only do that by working together," said Snohomish County Executive Aaron Reardon. "These projects strike a balance between the need to protect salmon and a desire to maintain a high quality of life for our residents."

The projects are sponsored by Snohomish and King counties, the Stillaguamish Tribe, the Tulalip Tribes, Seattle City Light, the Stilly-Snohomish Fisheries Enhancement Task Force, the Nature Conservancy and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Each project proposal was subjected to a rigorous review by local panels of scientific and community members. The prioritized projects were then forwarded by Snohomish County to the state Salmon Recovery Funding Board for further evaluation before being selected.

The project recommendations are part of comprehensive efforts in the Stillaguamish and Snohomish River basins to implement long-term salmon habitat conservation measures. Salmon conservation plans for both river basins were completed in 2005 as part of the regional recovery planning effort focused on chinook salmon, which is listed as a threatened species in the Puget Sound under the federal Endangered Species Act.

Project sponsors are expected to match the state grants with additional funds from other sources, making a total value of more than $8 million.

The funding for Snohomish County projects is part of a larger distribution of $42.8 million for salmon habitat projects statewide.

For information on Snohomish County projects, contact Tim Walls at 425-388-3781 or tim.walls@snoco.org.

Snohomish County project list

• Restoring Port Susan Bay Estuary

The Nature Conservancy will use its $750,000 to remove nearly 1.4 miles of dike at its Port Susan Bay Preserve and build or augment nearly a mile of new dike to protect neighboring farmland. When complete, this project will fully restore riverine and tidal processes to 150 acres of former marsh and increase the quantity and quality of habitats for salmon, shorebirds and other estuarine-dependent species. The Nature Conservancy will contribute $1.25 million from a federal grant.

• Designing the restoration of Jim Creek

The Stilly-Snohomish Fisheries Enhancement Task Force will use $123,675 to partially design and apply for permits for projects to restore a one-mile reach of lower Jim Creek, home to South Fork chinook salmon, which are at the threshold of extinction. The task force will conduct field investigations on habitat conditions. Potential project elements include protection and enhancement of an existing logjam, adding logjams and installing fences and plants along the creek's banks.

• Designing a project to treat the Gold Basin landslide

The Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians will use $125,000 to develop alternatives for reducing the fine sediment deposited in the south fork of the Stillaguamish River from the Gold Basin landslide. The tribe will contribute $25,000.

• Fixing Canyon Creek roads

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The Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians, working with the U.S. Forest Service, will use $522,366 and contribute $92,250 in donated materials to replace culverts and fix roads to minimize erosion and sediment deposition in Canyon Creek and the south fork of the Stillaguamish River. Canyon Creek has 26 miles of fish habitat.

• **Protecting and restoring Klein Farm**

The Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians will use $900,000 to buy 60 acres of floodplain, remove 300 feet of bank armoring and enhance 28 acres of riverbank on the south fork of the Stillaguamish River. Restoring floodplain functions has been identified as a cultural priority for the tribe. The tribe will contribute $160,000 in donations of labor, materials and cash.

• **Reconnecting the Blue Slough Side Channel**

The Stillaguamish Tribe of Indians will use $200,000 to reestablish a nearly half-mile side channel that was cut off by the railroad in the 1930s. In the past 80 years, the river channel has filled with organic debris and fine sediment from nearby logging and livestock grazing. The tribe will place a logjam, donationg $38,000 in labor and materials.

• **Removing a levee for the Qwuloolt Estuary Restoration**

The Tulalip Tribes will use $500,000 to breach a levee along Ebey Slough and build a setback levee to protect properties in the floodplain. The project is part of a larger, $7.8 million project to restore the Qwuloolt estuary and reconnect it to 350 acres of isolated floodplain. The Tulalip Tribes will contribute $90,000 from a federal grant.

• **Studying how to restore Ebey Island**

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife will use $200,000 to study how ecological functions can best be restored on 1,237 acres owned by the department south of SR 2 on Ebey Island. The department will contribute $136,000 from a grant and donated labor.

State offers help on RCO grant requests

The state Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) will present two workshops in February to provide information about grants available in 2010. One in Moses Lake Feb. 23 and the other in Tacoma Feb. 26. Grants available in 2010 include aquatic lands enhancement, boating infrastructure, land and water conservation, recreational trails and wildlife and recreation.

More information will be released in January or see the Web site at www.rco.wa.