

SHORE STEWARDS NEWS

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Island County, Washington

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This issue of Shore Stewards News will focus on a few different topics that apply to the health of Puget Sound. Newsletter content was prepared by Scott Chase, Shore Stewards Coordinator, Island County.

Protecting our Dungeness Crab

Crabbing is one of the most popular recreational fisheries in Puget Sound, with approximately 230,000 people purchasing crab endorsements with their licenses each year. Whether they use crab pots, ring nets, or wade in the water and catch their crab by hand, these sports fishers catch more than a million pounds of crab each year. One of the ways of ensuring that we have plenty of crab to catch in upcoming years is to make sure that derelict pots do not continue to kill crabs after they are lost or abandoned. According to a study by the state Department of Fish and Wildlife, the University of Washington, and Seattle-based Natural Resources Consultants, there are an estimated 12,000 pots that are lost each year in Puget Sound and adjoining marine waters. When a pot is lost, it will continue to catch crabs; it is estimated that at least 10 crabs per year can be killed by each derelict pot, and some estimates are much higher. The study found that each year there are 129,000 legal and harvestable male crabs that perish in these derelict pots.

Fortunately, the Northwest Straits Initiative, the non-profit organization that also funds the Marine Resources Committees around Puget Sound (as well as our county's Shore Stewards program), has been taking important steps in removing these derelict crab pots. Since 2002, they have overseen the removal of over 2,000 crab pots from Puget Sound, as well as 3,800 derelict fishing nets, restoring 528 acres of important marine habitat. (It is estimated that that removing those nets alone protects more than 2,300,000 animals each year; over 211,000 animals were found entangled in the gear that has been removed so far.)

What can you do to help? One way is to make sure that you use weighted line on your pots, and that you don't use far more line than you actually need. Make sure that your pot has enough weight that it isn't pulled into deeper waters by strong currents. And always make sure that your pot's escape panels and lids are secured with biodegradable cotton or hemp cord, also called escape cord or rot cord. If your pot is lost, the cord will decompose, allowing the crabs to escape. It is estimated that crabs can live for about 50 days stuck inside a pot, which should be enough time for the cord to rot away.



Most parts of Puget Sound are expected to open for crab harvest on July 1, 2011, with the season ending on September 5. Crabbing will be allowed from Thursday through Monday, a change from previous years. Be sure to check state regulations for the area you plan to harvest crabs. Refer to the Shellfish Rule Change toll free hotline at 866-880-5431, or go to <http://wdfw.wa.gov>

Photo by Scott Chase

Oil Spill Response in Washington

In April, exactly one year after the BP well rupture in the Gulf of Mexico, Gov. Chris Gregoire signed a bill into law that will enhance the response to oil spills in Washington State. With new rules that will be created by the Department of Ecology, it should be easier for crews to respond to oil spills, as well as help volunteers and fishermen who may be available to help.

According to Curt Hart, the spokesman for Ecology, 15 to 20 billion gallons of oil are transported across our state waters each year, either as fuel or cargo. Ecology will now be able to improve the current rules for tanker companies, and what equipment they will need to purchase to respond to oil spills. Currently, Ecology organizes about 1,200 field responses each year for the approximately 3,800 reports of (mostly minor) oil spills they receive. Hart reports that the industry has a good safety record, and our state has not had a major spill since a Conoco Phillips tanker spilled about 1,000 gallons of oil in Dalco Passage near Commencement Bay in 2004.

The new law will require Ecology to develop new standards regarding not only the kind of equipment the tanker companies keep on hand, but also the equipment required for use by the oil response contractors they employ. This may not only include better skimming equipment and booms for containment of spills, but may also include infrared technology to “see” oil slicks at night. (The Dalco Passage spill occurred at night, so response teams could not fly over to assess the size of the spill until daylight, when it had already dispersed and had reached the shore.)

Ecology will also be required to enact rules that help spill-response volunteers to be more easily coordinated, and to improve the “vessel of opportunity” system, a network of private boats available to respond to a spill. A spill in Puget Sound can reach the shoreline more quickly than in the Gulf of Mexico, so the new rules will allow for quicker reaction times.



Dept. of Ecology Updates Stormwater Runoff Information

The amount of oil and petroleum products that wash off our driveways and parking lots and into Puget Sound has been widely reported as being much more than it actually is, due to an unfortunate combination of assumptions and errors in data. The head of our Department of Ecology told a PBS Frontline team in 2008 that the amount of oil that washes into Puget Sound equals an Exxon Valdez oil spill every two years. Others in state government repeated the statement, which now has been found to be significantly less. How did this happen?

In 2007, Ecology relied on historical data gathered elsewhere in the country and manipulated the data to apply to Puget Sound, based on our land-use patterns. This showed that oil and petroleum products were the largest contributors to pollution in the Sound, at tens of millions of pounds per year. A Seattle Times reporter took that figure and compared it to the 10.8 million gallon Exxon Valdez spill, and calculated that the amount of oil and petroleum flowing into Puget Sound in two years was equal to that spill amount. That was something that people found easier to grasp, so the anecdote was repeated over and over, and was used as justification for the introduction of a House bill that would have increased fees paid by the oil industry to improve our stormwater management, since it appeared the oil industry contributed more pollution than any other source. The bill failed, and in the last few years the data available to the state regarding toxic loading became more refined. Petroleum is

still considered the biggest contaminant by mass – at least 710,000 pounds per year – but it isn't anywhere near as much as earlier stated. And not as dangerous: pollutants such as copper are far more damaging to marine life in much smaller doses. (Copper wears off our automobile brake pads and gets washed into our streams and rivers, disrupting the sense of smell in salmon and keeping them from finding their spawning grounds.)

The objectives of the current Ecology study were to refine previous estimates of contaminant load contributions to Puget Sound via surface runoff. They accomplished this by monitoring contaminant concentrations and discharge from four land uses: residential, agricultural, commercial/industrial, and forest/field/other. The collected data helped determine the relative contribution from each of these four uses. From August 2009 – July 2010, water samples were collected from 16 streams in the Puyallup and Snohomish watersheds during six storm events and two baseflow events. Each stream received surface runoff originating from one of the four land uses, and these samples were analyzed for an extensive list of heavy metals, organic compounds, and conventional water quality measurements. Most of the chemicals analyzed were found at higher concentrations and with more frequency during storm events than during the baseflow measurements, and were higher in the industrial/commercial basins than the other 3 land use categories. The measurement taken during the fall storm event found the highest amounts of oil and grease, TPH lubrication oil, and other parameters.

On a Puget Sound scale, the relative amount of land area for each of the four land uses had a stronger influence on contaminant loading than did contaminant concentration. Though commercial/industrial areas have higher loading rates than other land uses, they occupy less than 1% of the land area that drains into Puget Sound. Forested lands, on the other hand, showed the highest total loads for most of the contaminants, as they occupied 83% of the land area draining into Puget Sound. Though residential land area was greater in both watersheds than agricultural land area, total loading rates for these two land uses were similar. You can view the entire 257 page Dept. of Ecology document from April 2011, Toxics in Surface Runoff to Puget Sound: Phase 3 Data and Load Estimates, with accompanying charts, at <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/biblio/1103010.html> (Click on pdf Acrobat document near top of page). However, a good 4 page synopsis by Ecology, dated May 2011, can be seen at <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/pstoxics/index.html> (Click on “Focus on Toxics” at bottom of page). This synopsis includes a chart that shows current estimates for five leading contaminants based on the current data, and compared to the former estimates based on historical data.

For more information on the stormwater runoff calculations, see Seattle Times articles: http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/localnews/2015080382_pugetsound18m.html and <http://community.seattletimes.nwsourc.com/mobile/?type=story&id=2015176223&>

Port Susan Marine Stewardship Area: Volunteers on the Beach

If your property is along Port Susan, the large body of water between Camano Island and Snohomish County, you may see two-volunteer teams on the beach this summer, gathering important data about the beach, bluff, and structures. If you see them at all, it will be briefly, as there is a lot of distance to cover in a few short months. This is all part of a long-term effort by several different partners who have been meeting and having workshops to help create a Port Susan Marine Stewardship Area (MSA). This is a conservation designation that encourages citizen participation and a common community goal, and is totally non-regulatory. To see more information on the Port Susan Marine Stewardship Area, see the Snohomish County Marine Resources Committee webpage at <http://www.snocomrc.org/Projects/Stewardship/Port-Susan-Marine-Stewardship-Area.aspx>



Since early 2010, there have been three two-day workshops in which various scientists, experts and other participants determined what they knew about Port Susan, what threats existed, and what strategies should be followed in the future. It was decided that volunteers could be trained to collect some missing important data about Port Susan during the summer of 2011. These “citizen scientists”, who are mostly WSU Beach Watchers from Island and Snohomish counties, will gather information along selected short sections of beach, visiting each section just once and for just a couple of short hours per section. They will have a hand-held GPS unit to measure coordinates, and a wheeled measuring “ruler” to calculate distance. They will be noting locations and condition of bulkheads and other

Photo Courtesy Snohomish County MRC

structures, often referred to as “beach hardening”. They will also be using hand-held convex mirror to see how much shade is provided by the bluff vegetation above. Known as “marine riparian canopy”, this shading helps the sun from overheating sections of beach, protecting forage fish spawning areas and other marine life habitat.

How can you help? Since much of Port Susan is on private land, we are asking landowners along the shoreline to allow a team of two access to their stretch of beach, as well as that of adjacent owners, for a couple of hours. If you are in a community association, you might help get permission from the board. If you would like to help, or have further questions, please contact Scott Chase at (360) 387-3443, ext 258. Also, look for newspaper and other notices of upcoming public workshops on Camano and in Stanwood, if you would like to know more about Port Susan.

Events

Weds, June 22nd, 7:00 pm: WSU Beach Watchers’ 4th Wednesday Program Series. Camano Multipurpose Center (the Blue Building), 141 N. East Camano Drive, Camano Island. Katrina Hoffman of Sea Grant Washington will share with us Emerging Ideas about Sustainable Shoreline Development in the Salish Sea Region. She will talk about an experimental four year program she is leading as project coordinator along Lake Washington, in San Juan County and in the Gulf Islands in British Columbia. The Green Shores for Homes Project will develop and test guidelines and incentives for more sustainable shoreline development choices by shoreline homeowners in British Columbia and Washington. The goal is to improve the ecological function of residential shorelines. The program is free. For additional info on the program call Terry at 360-572-4130.

Saturday, June 18th, 10 am – 4 pm: CamOcean – World Oceans Day Festival. Join the day of fun and learning for the whole family, and enjoy all that Cama Beach State Park, 1880 South West Camano Drive, Camano Island. The Festival, park entry, parking and shuttle rides to and from the festival are FREE. Join the celebration at this beautiful waterfront park. Stroll among the educational booths and enjoy the hands-on activities, educational materials, and demonstrations from over 30 different organizations that work to help restore Puget Sound and make our waters healthy. Enjoy live music from two great bands. For more information: visit “CamOcean” on Facebook, go to <http://camabeachfoundation.org/> or email Christine Longdon, clongdon@frontier.com.



This product is funded by the Island County Marine Resources Committee and the Northwest Straits Commission. You can view the Marine Resources Committee website at www.islandcountymrc.org

The website for the Northwest Straits Commission can be seen at <http://www.nwstraits.org/>



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