

SHORE STEWARDS NEWS

December 2010

Island County, Washington

Issue No. 74

Photos and article by Scott Chase, Island County Shore Stewards Coordinator

The Problem with Creosote

Living in a marine environment, we are all familiar with the look and odor of wood that has been treated with creosote. Creosote logs are used in building bulkheads, piers, and bridges. You see them used in ferry terminals and marine pilings. Creosoted poles are used for your telephone, cable and power lines, and treated lumber is often used for walkways and stairs leading to the beach. However, thousands of tons of creosote soaked wood — pilings and debris — litter Puget Sound and its beaches. When out for a beach walk, you'll often see pieces of creosote logs in the form of driftwood, or possibly the remnants of someone's dock that has broken up during a storm and washed up on the beach.

Originally used since the 1850s for protecting railroad ties, creosote has also been used for more than 100 years as a marine wood preservative. And it has been quite effective in killing the wood-damaging critters that would otherwise damage our bulkheads, piers, pilings, and other structures. But more than a decade of research is telling us that the toxic chemicals that do such a good job of killing organisms that are destructive to structures *also* leach out into the surrounding environment and are a danger to the health of animals and people. Evidence shows that the toxicity of creosote causes damage to the eggs of small forage fish and other organisms that are the foundation of the food web, and which are essential to salmon, birds and other wildlife. Because of this, removal of creosote from our beaches has been a priority of our state's Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Northwest Straits Commission, and the Marine Resources Committees (MRC) in many Puget Sound counties.

Creosote Log Removal: One Volunteer's Story

When Ken Urstad looked out onto his community beach near Greenbank Farm on Whidbey Island this summer, he was understandably dismayed by all the creosote logs and treated lumber that had washed up and accumulated along the shoreline in recent years. Ken has been a member of the Island County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) for eight years, and a Shore Steward and WSU Beach Watcher since 2005. For the past 3 years, Ken has been instrumental in helping rid Whidbey Island's shorelines of creosote logs, working closely with Beach Watcher volunteers, DNR, and the Island County MRC. Though Ken had helped in the removal of over 700 tons of creosote logs and treated lumber in the past few years, mostly on the west side of Whidbey, he understood that DNR was as much of a victim of budget cuts as most other government agencies, and could probably not afford the crews and helicopters that they have used in the past. Yet Ken did not want to leave those highly toxic logs on the beach, as he understood how many dangerous chemicals they contained, and how they affected the marine life around them.



Though he knew DNR did not consider his beach a high priority use of their limited funds, over the years he had worked with Lisa Kaufman, the DNR Reforestation Manager in charge of creosote removal for the Orca Straits District, and gave her a call, with the idea of a local community being involved in removing creosote logs from their beach. She approved of the idea, and the local community chosen was the North Bluff Association, where Ken, and his Beach Watcher wife Peg, live on land that has been in their family for many decades. Using the hydrology permit obtained from the Department of Wildlife,

other permits obtained from the Department of Ecology and protocols that were set up by the DNR, Ken began marking the logs on a half mile stretch of beach, towing them by boat to a central location where a 20 yard refuse (shipping) container, had been dropped off. Ken stacked the logs and lumber onto large blue tarps to contain the toxic sawdust. About 35 man-hours and 3 boat hours were put into this part of the operation.

On the day that was chosen to cut and load the logs, the “crew” gathered to perform their duties. Ken was in charge of cutting the logs, making sure none exceeded six feet in length. Saw chains soon became dull, and Ken had replacements sharp and ready to use. He and Scott Chase, Shore Stewards Coordinator for Island County, rolled and pushed the logs into the scoop of the backhoe operated by neighbor Ron Wimmer, who then dumped them into the container, where the logs were periodically adjusted to fit neatly together. As the blue tarps were cleared of logs, they were rolled up like tortillas, trapping the toxic sawdust, and then folded into bundles. These bundles were dropped into the container, with logs and lumber placed on top to secure them when they were hauled away. Part way through the operation, Peg Urstad came to watch and offer moral support, and towards the end they were joined by Lisa Kaufman and Tammy Olson, Whidbey Island DNR Marine Manager, to supervise the final loading.



Over a few hours, 4½ tons of creosote logs and treated lumber were cut and loaded into the container, which was hauled to a special landfill in eastern Washington. The total cost to DNR was \$795, a small fraction of what they usually spend to remove creosote logs, yet added to the more than 6,000 tons of logs DNR has been instrumental in removing since 2003. Marine life most likely benefitted from the removal, and Ken and Peg enjoy the satisfaction of having a creosote-free beach... at least until new logs drift in with the tides. For more information on why DNR removes creosote logs, see their article from October 2010 at

<http://washingtondnr.wordpress.com/2010/10/06/science-behind-the-choices-why-dnr-pulls-creosote-laden-wood-from-marine-waters-and-beaches/>

Ken Urstad looks out from inside waste container, where logs had been neatly stacked

Resources

1. Literature Review, Computer Model and Assessment of the Potential Environmental Risks Associated With Creosote Treated Wood Products Used in Aquatic Environments. Prepared for: Western Wood Preservers Institute, 7017 NE Highway 99, Suite 108, (360) 693-9967. Prepared by: Kenneth M. Brooks, Ph.D...
2. Brief Science of Creosote, Washington Department of Natural Resources, 2008. http://www.dnr.wa.gov/Publications/aqr_cleanup_creosote_brief.pdf
3. Science behind the choices: Why DNR pulls creosote-laden wood from marine waters and beaches. <http://washingtondnr.wordpress.com/2010/10/06/science-behind-the-choices-why-dnr-pulls-creosote-laden-wood-from-marine-waters-and-beaches/>
4. Seattle P.I. article: Many Working To Restore Puget Sound, November 22, 2002. http://seattlepi.nwsource.com/local/96481_sound22.shtml
5. Northwest Straits Projects: Creosote Removal. <http://www.nwstraits.org/Foundation/Completed-Projects.aspx>
6. Washington DNR Map Showing Creosote Removal Locations in Puget Sound http://www.dnr.wa.gov/Publications/aqr_cleanup_creosote_overview_map.pdf

Events

SOUND WATERS



Sound Waters 2011: Registration opens January 7

Now in its 16th year, Sound Waters will be held on February 5, 2011. Sound Waters is a “one day university for all” put on by WSU Island County Extension Beach Watchers and will take place at the South Whidbey High School. The conference includes keynote presentation by Dr. Rick Keil, University of Washington School of Oceanography, three class sessions all related to our marine environment and where we live, and an extensive exhibition area open all day. More than 35 of our 65 classes are *new* this year. Classes fall into eight different categories that are about “All Things Puget Sound:” Earth, Education, Energy, History, Island Living, Marine Environment, Plants, and Wildlife. Come learn: how over population affects all things in our natural world, how raptors make their living, how to buzz bomb for pinks, how to connect kids to nature, the history of farming the Ebey Prairie, about the possible underwater turbine projects off our shores, the importance of eelgrass beds for marine life, oil spill threats here, and much more. Learn about what *you* can do in your home, yard, and shore to make a difference to the health of our waters.

Registration begins January 7 and will close January 28. Classes fill fast. We urge you to register on-line at: www.beachwatchers.net/soundwaters

Ways of Whales workshop
Saturday, January 29, 2011
9:30 am – 4:30 pm

Coupeville Middle School Performing Arts Center
501 S. Main St, Coupeville

Come learn about the wonders of Pacific Northwest Whales: who they are, what they eat, threats to their habitat and health. To register, contact Orca Network at info@orcانetwork.org or 360. 678.3451.
More info. at: <http://www.orcanetwork.org/news/events.html>

~~~~~

**Orca Network Five-day Expedition to Baja, Mexico: March 9 - 13, 2011**

Visit the Gray Whales of San Ignacio Lagoon, Baja, Mexico and learn about the amazing ecosystems of Baja's Biosphere Reserve. The trip raises much needed funding for Orca Network while providing an amazing opportunity to learn about the gray whales on the southern end of their migration.

Cost: \$2500 (includes biosphere & tourist card fees). Trip departs from San Diego, CA; trip expenses paid from there, including transportation to Campo Cortez, Baja, meals, lodging, and whale watching twice daily. Participants are responsible for flight to San Diego & lodging the nights before/after the trip.

Call 360-678-3451 or email [info@orcانetwork.org](mailto:info@orcانetwork.org), or go to: [www.orcanetwork.org/news/2011bajatrip.html](http://www.orcanetwork.org/news/2011bajatrip.html) for more information, photos and registration form.

~~~~~



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/>

Extension programs and policies are consistent with federal and state laws and regulations on nondiscrimination regarding race, sex, religion, age, color, creed, national or ethnic origin; physical, mental or sensory disability; marital status, sexual orientation, or status as a Vietnam-era or disabled veteran. Evidence of noncompliance may be reported through your local Extension office.

If you would like to download or view previous Shore Steward newsletters, please visit www.shorestewards.wsu.edu/island/newsletter. Your Shore Stewards Coordinator is Scott Chase, (360) 387-3443, ext 258, or email at shorestewards@wsu.edu