



## Chico Mouth

This 3-acre estuary property features over 1,100 feet of natural and restored shoreline where Chico Creek flows into Dyes Inlet. Chico Creek, with its tributaries, is the most productive salmon stream on the Kitsap Peninsula, and has become a regular stop on the annual Kitsap Salmon Tours. The creek supports spawning and rearing populations of chum, coho, steelhead, and coastal cutthroat. Even chinook are occasionally observed spawning in Chico Creek.

Estuaries are incredibly important for salmon, since this is where their bodies adjust from living in the freshwater streams where they were born to the saltwater where they will spend the rest of their adult lives. Estuaries also provide abundant food resources for young salmon, and offer refuge from larger predators. Some species of salmon, like chinook, may spend nearly six months in estuaries before they head into Puget Sound and the Pacific Ocean. The Washington Department of Ecology notes that over the past 125 years Puget Sound has lost over 70% of its estuaries and salt marsh habitat, which makes protecting the Chico Creek Estuary all the more important.

The Suquamish Tribe owns the three acres of Chico Creek Estuary land / tidelands that are protected by a conservation easement held by Great Peninsula Conservancy. Working in partnership with Suquamish Tribe, Great Peninsula Conservancy will ensure that the property's ecologically-rich shoreline and scenic qualities are preserved forever. The estuary is open to the public, and is popular among fishermen/women, bird watchers, and families. It is a great spot for exploring tidal flats, and spotting wildlife like bald eagles, porpoises, and even orcas that occasionally venture into Dyes Inlet to forage on Chico Creek chum salmon.

An effort to restore Chico Creek and its estuary led by Suquamish Tribe and Kitsap County, has been underway for over a decade, which included removing the Kittyhawk Drive road fill and culvert over the mouth of Chico Creek. This work was preceded by multiple public projects in Chico Creek's lower reaches that replaced old bridges with more fish-friendly designs, restored sections of stream bank, and protected natural areas along Chico Creek, including Kitsap County's 30-acre Erlands Point Park. A planned future project will build a Highway 3 bridge over Chico Creek, remove the underlying fill, and restore the natural stream channel up to Erlands Point Park. This will greatly enhance the wildlife habitat in and around Chico Creek, benefiting native salmon runs and numerous other species.

<https://greatpeninsula.org/property/chico-creek-estuary-conservation-easement/>