



News Release

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Ecology funds Samish Tribe's study of Fidalgo Bay project

OLYMPIA – The Samish Indian Nation will use money from the Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology) to study how an old railroad causeway may impact habitat in Fidalgo Bay in Skagit County.

Fidalgo Bay is among several early focus areas under Governor Chris Gregoire's Puget Sound Initiative, which aims to clean up and restore the health of Puget Sound waters by 2020. The bay covers about 1,575 acres in the Anacortes area. It includes expansive native eelgrass beds and tide flats that support fish spawning and rearing. Fidalgo Bay also is home to bald eagles, blue herons, peregrine falcons, and a mix of shellfish from Dungeness crab to butter clams.

The tribe will lead a remedial investigation and feasibility study on part of the 3,300-foot recreational Tommy Thompson Trail extending over Fidalgo Bay. The trail stretches from tribal property at Weaverling Spit to March Point. Originally, the entire length was a trestle made up of creosote pilings. At some point, 1,500 feet of rock causeway was placed over roughly half the creosote pilings; 770 pilings remain, leaching into the marine environment. It's not known if the causeway contains other materials. The trail is owned by the City of Anacortes, which signed an agreement with Samish officials to allow the investigation and study.

The Samish believe removing the rock causeway and existing creosote pilings and replacing it with a more open, environmentally friendly support structure that continues to serve the public, will help improve eelgrass habitat by restoring more natural water flow and removing potential contamination. The City of Anacortes must approve any work beyond the investigation and study.

The Samish and Ecology signed an interagency agreement that outlines the terms of a remedial investigation and feasibility study. Ecology will provide up to \$160,000 for the work.

"We've worked hard on this for five years, and to see it come to fruition is amazing," said Christine Woodward, Director of Natural Resources for the Samish Indian Nation.

Woodward said this project could serve as a national model for how communities can get involved in environmental cleanups and preservation. The project also will provide education to the community and the nation on Fidalgo Bay's unique ecosystem.

"Ecology is pleased to support this investigation and study. As proposed, the project would meet several key parts of the Puget Sound Initiative by cleaning up and preventing toxic pollution, restoring and protecting habitat, removing creosote logs, and promoting partnerships with local communities," said Sandra Caldwell, Ecology's project lead for Puget Sound Initiative work in Fidalgo and Padilla bays.

The Nisqually Tribe's Aquatic Technologies Dive Team will do an underwater inspection of the rock causeway and railroad trestle. The inspection will inventory the existing structure and pilings and determine their soundness. Dive sequences will be recorded also for biological monitoring of existing marine life in and around the structure. Divers' movements will be monitored and recorded using web cams placed on dive helmets and state-of-the-art technology.

"The Nisqually Tribe joining the support for the feasibility study shows great support in Indian Country for care and restoration of all the natural resources, no matter what the location. They are all part of the greater whole that we are dedicated to respect, enhance and restore," Samish Chairman Tom Wooten said.

The Samish hired RIDOLFI Inc., a Seattle firm specializing in civil engineering and environmental consulting, to conduct the feasibility study.

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For more information: Go to <http://www.samishtribe.nsn.us/> and click on Natural Resources, Feasibility Study of the Fidalgo Bay Causeway Project.

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