

DNR to Conserve Vital Salmon Habitat with 656-Acre Purchase

News Date:

JULY 18, 2019

Kennedy Creek, in Mason and Thurston counties, has one of Washington's most productive chum salmon runs

The Washington State Department of Natural Resources has acquired 656 acres of some of the state's best chum salmon spawning habitat.

The purchase will be put into the Kennedy Creek Natural Area, a 1,465-acre conservation area in Mason and Thurston counties, near the Capitol State Forest. The natural area includes much of the Kennedy Creek stream corridor, from near its headwaters in the Capitol Forest to its mouth in the Totten Inlet estuary.

“By purchasing and conserving the Kennedy Creek watershed, we ensure access to the unique ecosystem for generations to come,” said Commissioner of Public Lands Hilary Franz, the elected official who oversees DNR. “Kennedy Creek provides vital habitat for our iconic salmon, in addition to scenic views and incredible educational opportunities.”

DNR acquired the land, previously owned by Washington-based Green Diamond Resource Co., for \$4.1 million. Funding for the purchase came from the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program, administered by the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office, as well as the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program, funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Kennedy Creek sees an average chum salmon run of 30,000 fish each fall, making it one of the most productive spawning streams in Washington. Once the fish spawn, their carcasses provide important marine-derived nutrients to the surrounding habitat, supplementing the diets of at least 120 wildlife species, including northern river otter, bobcat and red-tailed hawk.

The land and water being conserved is the traditional territory of the Sah-Heh-Wa-Mish/T'Peeksin people of Totten Inlet, predecessors of the Squaxins. DNR is committed to developing its relationship with its Coast Salish neighbors and the shared responsibilities to conserve important natural resources.

Squaxin Island Tribe Chairman Arnold Cooper stated, “The Squaxin Island Tribe looks forward to working with DNR to create a management plan that benefits the public and preserves the Tribe's treaty fishing, hunting, gathering, and cultural rights in this important natural area.”

As part of DNR’s stewardship planning efforts, the department will reach out to the Squaxin Island Tribe, as well as other partners in the watershed, including Green Diamond, Taylor Shellfish, Capitol Land Trust, South Puget Sound Salmon Enhancement Group, and members of the community.

“We are pleased to partner with the Commissioner of Public Lands and the Department of Natural Resources to continue to protect this important stream corridor and ensure it is accessible to the public for passive recreation,” said Douglas Reed, president of Green Diamond Resource Company.

Reed noted that interest in the stream corridor dates back several years when The Olympian included it in a reader-led series identifying “places of the heart.”

“The area around this preserve will remain working forest,” he explained, “providing wood fiber, wildlife habitat and other benefits. Together, we are enhancing the watershed for years to come.”

DNR’s Natural Areas balance ecological conservation with opportunities for environmental education and low-impact recreation. Those educational activities are already established on other parts of Kennedy Creek, with the Kennedy Creek Salmon Trail drawing more than 5,000 visitors each November, including 2,500 students. The trail is jointly managed by Taylor Shellfish and the South Puget Sound Salmon Enhancement Group.

The purchase of the Kennedy Creek watershed adjoins previous conservation work done by DNR. The Kennedy Creek estuary at Totten Inlet was protected within a Natural Area Preserve in 1999. The intertidal salt marsh ecosystem there is a critical feeding area for more than 140 bird species, including shorebirds, migratory waterfowl and raptors.

Media Resources:

A map of the site can be found at bit.ly/KennedyCreek.

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