

Governor praises Dungeness valley restoration efforts

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Gov. Gary Locke said he can see why the area has received nearly \$14.5 million in state funds to manage natural resources.

"Based on what I've seen today, it's very clear why you got those funds," Locke told a group of about three dozen at the Dungeness Audubon Center at Railroad Bridge Park after touring Dungeness watershed and salmon restoration projects in Sequim Feb. 27, Locke's visit to the Dungeness basin was the fourth in a series of visits around the state to view and discuss water-related issues with local communities.

During his visit, the governor viewed some of the innovative projects occurring in the Dungeness basin watershed and discussed water use and watershed planning issues affecting both the region and state.

Locke credited county leaders for their strong commitment to finding ways to conserve and use water wisely, to improve the environment and to help restore the salmon population by bringing people together to find solutions and secure funding for the projects.

Jimmycomelately Creek salmon restoration project

The Jimmycomelately Creek project is a cooperative effort between the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe, Clallam Conservation District, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and property owners to return the creek to its natural condition and help recover an almost nonexistent salmon population – particularly the chum salmon.

That project includes realignment of Jimmycomelately Creek and rehabilitation of its estuary. Sometime between 1904 and 1915, the creek was moved to its existing location - which follows an unnatural course along a higher elevation.

That contributes to problems such as flooding and eroding fish habitat. Summer chum runs in the river have dropped to as low as seven fish, said Byron Rot, habitat program manager for the tribe. The project's first stage - to dig a new channel that will effectively restore the historic channel in the lowest portion of the creek floodplain, about 200 feet west of the current creek bed - is nearly finished.

Shoreline plantings will be done in early March, he said. Additions such as gravel and woody debris are also planned.

Project leaders had anticipated the restoration effort to be completed by next summer, but work on the estuary scheduled for this summer is on hold due to a Fish and Wildlife grant that is held up in the Legislature, Rot said.

"That's going to kill us for the summer's work," said Rot. "We won't be able to do that work."

Also to be completed are a new Highway 101 bridge to span the restored creek bed and removal of an old logging road and part of Old Blyn Highway. A \$1.3-million grant was secured to build the bridge, which will span the entire 100 feet of floodplain.

Locke called the county's commitment to the restoration of the Jimmycomelately area "striking a balance" that will make it possible to plan for the conservation of those resources in the future by ensuring their existence.

"The key to all that is bringing people together to fashion solutions. To do that, you need very clear targets, and will know when you have arrived at the recovery of wild salmon. What you're doing here is a model for the rest of the state."

Clallam County Commissioner Steve Tharinger agreed.

"Extinction is not an option," Tharinger said.

Watershed by watershed

Ongoing watershed resource management planning and drafting a recovery plan for Dungeness chinook salmon are part of the Puget Sound Salmon Recovery Plan.

Those working with river management and salmon restoration programs agree that state and federally driven solutions won't fit local resource problems.

"It took 100 years to break, and will take at least 20 years to fix," said Scott Chitwood, natural resources director for the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe.

Chitwood said keeping the level of efforts high is critical to ensure continued funding.

Locke agreed.

"Local citizens and governments are actively involved in watershed planning in the Dungeness watershed," said Locke of the region's river management team. "I believe the success we see in the watershed illustrates exactly the type of effort we need in other areas of Washington."

"The projects that have been implemented to address water issues and salmon health have been very successful," said Tharinger. "I'm pleased the governor is interested in seeing the work the community is doing on these issues."

Balancing growth with conservation

Locke said he believes the Growth Management Act gives counties the tools they need to reduce urban sprawl and protect an area's natural resources.

"I'm a firm believer in the Growth Management Act," said Locke. "It provides flexibility. If counties plan for growth, it's cheaper. You can indicate where you want the growth to occur and reduce urban sprawl."

He said another way is to create incentives for protecting natural resource areas.

--by Robin Singleton

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