McNeil Island Marine Shoreline Restoration

Milewa Creek outlet to Puget Sound

McNeil Island offers a unique opportunity to protect and restore natural habitat in a large setting within Puget Sound. Much of the shoreline of the island is in a natural state, retaining high quality habitat due to limited access by the public. However, development related to the historic use of the island for a federal penitentiary resulted in some locations being highly impacted and relict structures or debris along shorelines.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and the Washington Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) are collaborating on habitat restoration at impacted sites to return as much of the island to natural conditions as possible in partnership with Washington Department of Corrections (WDOC). The projects meet common goals for reduction of infrastructure and maintenance needs, while improving habitat conditions for fish and wildlife.

We have worked together to identify potential beach cleanup and habitat restoration sites. Two marine shoreline habitat restoration projects were completed in fall 2018 along Still Harbor and in 2019 at the vehicle barge landing. Additional marine shoreline habitat restoration efforts are in planning and design stages at Milewa Creek estuary, Bodley Creek and Floyds Cove.

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Milewa Creek Estuary Restoration

The road crossing at the mouth of Milewa Creek acts as a dam, impounding approximately 2.5 acres of former tidal marsh and impeding fish passage to the stream. The existing road embankment was constructed after 1965 and replaced a 300-foot long bridge that was originally constructed at an unknown date. Some tidal exchange appears to be taking place with the undersized, perched culvert or the overflow culvert above the lower culvert, although both are in poor condition or non-functional. Within the impounded pond there are remnants of 2 barges and other concrete and construction type debris. The existing roadway is armored along the marine shoreline with WWII era torpedo netting, concrete slabs, and other debris. There is a large concrete groin extending to low tide that is inhibiting beach sediment transport and changing beach material composition.

With re-establishment of full tidal exchange, brackish/marine waters would extend to the stream, improving habitat connectivity and providing unimpeded fish passage. Our proposal includes removal of the failing culverts, shoreline armor and re-connection of the marine waters to the stream through a restored opening at the estuary mouth. This area would be available for juvenile salmonids, birds, marine fish and saltmarsh plants. In addition, we will remove the large concrete groin, re-establishing beach profiles and connectivity. Forage fish, shellfish and migrating juvenile salmon will benefit from this work. As mitigation for the increased transit time along the Coastal Road, we will work with DOC and DSHS to identify and fund improvements for safety and security.

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