



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF
Natural Resources
Doug Sutherland - Commissioner of Public Lands



Whatcom Waterway Cleanup and Bellingham Bay Pilot Project Fact Sheet

Overview

The Whatcom Waterway is the largest of 11 cleanup sites on the waterfront being coordinated through the multi-agency cooperative partnership of the Bellingham Bay Demonstration Pilot. The major partners in this pilot are the Port of Bellingham, City of Bellingham and state Department of Natural Resources — all responsible parties in executing this \$44 million cleanup project. Since 1996, they have worked together, along with federal, state, local agencies, Georgia Pacific, Nooksack and Lummi Tribes, and volunteer organizations — known as the Bellingham Bay Pilot Team — to develop a cleanup plan. In 1996, the partners agreed to work out the payments and solutions in a collaborative way, rather than working out these contentious cleanup issues through the courts; and although difficult at times, they continue to tackle these projects and issues together.

- The Whatcom Waterway site includes more than 200 acres of aquatic land, including a federal shipping channel, state harbor areas and a 37-acre industrial wastewater treatment lagoon on the Bellingham shoreline.
- A cleanup plan accompanies a legal agreement, called a Consent Decree, between Ecology and owners of the contaminated property that have agreed to perform the cleanup, including the Port, City, DNR and Meridian-Pacific, LLC.
- The Department of Ecology and the Port of Bellingham are the co-managers of the Bellingham Bay cleanup effort, which was initiated in 1996.
- The Whatcom Waterway cleanup plan calls for dredging and upland disposal of more than 530,000 cubic yards of contaminated marine sediment and wastewater sludge, capping of the remainder of the site, and restoration of almost 2 miles of urban shoreline to support state-wide salmon recovery efforts.
- The cleanup plan is designed to be compatible with the local community's plan to revitalize the waterfront through a fundamental change from its historically industrial focus, to one that will include a more diverse and sustainable mix of light industry, businesses, homes, public access and institutional uses such as an expanded campus location for Western Washington University.
- Cleanup of the inactive wastewater treatment lagoon will support redevelopment of this idle industrial facility into a new Clean Ocean marina, which will include approximately 450 new recreational boat slips, extensive new habitat, public access and salmon passageways.
- The cleanup is estimated to cost approximately \$44 million (in 2005 dollars).

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Whatcom Waterway Site History

- The Whatcom Waterway sediment pollution resulted from mercury discharges from Georgia Pacific's former chlor-alkali plant in the 1960s and '70s before the current regulatory framework prohibited such discharges.
- Direct wastewater discharges from the chlor-alkali plant were discontinued in 1979 following construction of the Aerated Stabilization Basin (ASB).
- Ecology began investigating the Whatcom Waterway site under an agreed order with GP in 1996.
- In 2001, GP completed a combined sediment cleanup and habitat restoration action in the Log Pond portion of the site as an interim cleanup action under Ecology oversight.
- In 2005, the Port acquired 137 acres of waterfront property from GP including property within the Whatcom Waterway site to develop a portion of the property into a marina and convert the land from industrial uses to mixed uses. In exchange for the property, the Port assumed responsibility for cleaning up the site and is leading the cleanup effort with oversight by Ecology.
- In July 2007, Ecology released a draft Cleanup Action Plan for the Whatcom Waterway for public review and comment.
- In September 2007, Ecology finalized the Cleanup Action Plan for the Whatcom Waterway.

Whatcom Waterway Cleanup Action Plan

- Ecology's cleanup plan for the Whatcom Waterway stems from over 10 years of investigation, assessment and public involvement under state and federal cleanup laws.
- Ecology has determined that a combination of dredging and capping, with long-term monitoring and use restrictions is the cleanup that is safe, effective and long-lasting and protective to the marine environment. The cleanup plan includes:
 - Dredging of approximately 530,000 cubic yards of contaminated material from Bellingham Bay with upland disposal at a permitted facility.
 - Engineered containment or "capping" in areas where future activities are unlikely to disturb bottom sediments.
 - Continued monitored natural recovery in other site areas already in compliance with site cleanup levels.
 - Long-term monitoring to ensure the effectiveness of the cleanup action is anticipated to continue for 30 years after the cleanup is complete.

Whatcom Waterway Habitat Improvements

- Ecology's cleanup plan will result in significant habitat improvements to Bellingham's waterfront including:

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- Adding 28 acres of marine aquatic habitat to Bellingham Bay through remediation of the ASB and reconnection to Bellingham Bay.
- Converting 2,200 feet of industrial creosote bulkheads into soft banks to create and improve large stretches of continuous shallow-water habitat within the Whatcom Creek waterway and estuary.
- Creating 4-6 acres of nearshore habitat with a valuable combination of elevation, wave energy, substrate, and location.
- The removal of 3800 feet of derelict bulkheads, 104,000 square feet of industrial over-water structures, and about 1,150 mostly creosote-treated pilings.
- Creating 4500 lineal feet of near-shore migration corridors for juvenile salmonids.
- Enhances approximately 2 miles of near shore habitat.

Land-use

- The cleanup supports the community's vision of a transition on the waterfront from traditional heavy industrial uses to a mix of light industry, commercial and recreational uses. This redevelopment of this 'brownfield area' will create essential new jobs, a mix of urban housing and extensive new waterfront public access areas.
- The cleanup plan supports the Port's planned redevelopment of the 37-acre into a Clean Ocean marina with new salmon habitat and passageways.

What's Next

- The engineering design, permitting and completion of the cleanup are expected to take six years to complete.
- A draft Engineering Design Report will be developed and issued for public review in 2009 or early 2010 which will contain design details and the proposed caps and other cleanup elements including monitoring and contingency response details.