



Pilot Pulse

An update on Bellingham Bay Demonstration Pilot Work Group activities

November 2003

INTRODUCTION

In October 2000, the Bellingham Bay Comprehensive Strategy was finalized via issuance of the Bellingham Bay Comprehensive Strategy Final Environmental Impact Statement. The Comprehensive Strategy integrates sediment cleanup, control of pollution sources, habitat restoration and aquatic/shoreline land use on a bay-wide scale.

The Work Group for the Bellingham Bay Demonstration Pilot, including representatives from 12 different federal, state, local and tribal agencies, is moving forward to implement various elements of the Comprehensive Strategy under a broad framework of jurisdictional authorities. The Work Group also functions as a board of directors, tracking implementation activities and providing a forum to address policy issues and areas of disagreement.

Work Group meetings are typically held on a quarterly basis and are advertised to encourage public participation. The next Work Group meeting is scheduled for **January 29, 2004**. The Pilot Pulse is published periodically, usually in between Work Group meetings, to provide an update to Work Group members and interested citizens regarding ongoing activities. Additional information on the project can be found at www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/tcp/sites/blhm_bay/blhm_bay.htm.

SEDIMENT CLEANUP AND SOURCE CONTROL

Whatcom Waterway – Georgia-Pacific, under an addendum to a legal agreement with the Department of Ecology (Ecology), investigated soils in the Aerated Stabilization Basin (ASB) in July 2003. The results of this investigation as well as an evaluation of potential cleanup alternatives will be issued for public review in a draft supplement to the Whatcom Waterway remedial investigation/feasibility study.

Using the information in the Whatcom Waterway Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study and the Bellingham Bay Comprehensive Strategy Environmental Impact Statement, including all supplemental documents, Ecology will preliminarily select a remedy for the Whatcom Waterway site. The selected remedy and the basis for selection will be presented in a draft Cleanup Action Plan (CAP) for public review. The CAP will be an exhibit to a Consent Decree, the legal instrument that ensures implementation of the CAP.

Harris Avenue Shipyard – The Port of Bellingham (Port) and Ecology have signed a legal agreement under which the Port, in coordination with the Department of Natural Resources, will investigate contaminated sediments and evaluate a range of cleanup alternatives. An important element of the investigation and cleanup is ensuring sources of pollution are controlled. To that end Ecology's Water Quality and Toxics Cleanup Programs have been meeting to coordinate discharge permitting and cleanup activities at the site.

Weldcraft Steel and Marine/Gate 2 Boatyard – Construction activities began in September with the removal of most of the inactive marine railway and some creosote pilings. Installation of a new steel sheet pile bulkhead should be completed in November. The interim cleanup of contaminated marine sediment will begin in December with all in-water work completed by mid-February 2004. The interim cleanup is being performed by the Port of Bellingham (Port) under a legal agreement with the Department of Ecology. Under this agreement the Port will also complete a remedial investigation/feasibility study for the site.

Other Sites –

- Ecology has begun negotiations towards a legal agreement to conduct a remedial investigation/feasibility study of the Central Waterfront site which is comprised of the Chevron, Colony Wharf, Olivine, and Roeder Avenue Landfill properties.
- The Holly Street Landfill cleanup is entering the design and permitting phase, with public review of the engineering design report planned for mid-January of 2004. Construction activities are slated to begin late summer/early fall of 2004.
- The City of Bellingham (City) has received an EPA Brownfield's grant to assess the Little Squalicum Creek area for redevelopment into a public park. The grant will enable the City to move forward under a legal agreement with Ecology to conduct a remedial investigation/feasibility study of the Little Squalicum Creek area.
- Ecology, the Port of Bellingham and the City of Bellingham are currently negotiating a legal agreement to conduct a remedial investigation/feasibility study at the Cornwall Avenue Landfill site.
- Ecology and Douglas Management are currently negotiating a legal agreement to conduct a remedial investigation/feasibility study at the R.G. Haley site.

HABITAT RESTORATION

Inner Bellingham Bay Juvenile Chinook Study (Baseline Fish Study) – Data compilation is still occurring, with sampling to continue through November. Preliminary data indicate that the bulk of the fish passed the lower Nooksack river trap at the end of May. The entire nearshore data set is expected to be ready for distribution in January 2004.

Invasive Species – The use of imported clean sediments for capping contaminated areas in Bellingham Bay may not be necessary given the natural capping that has occurred and the availability of domestic materials from navigational maintenance projects. Therefore the issue of invasive species introduction via imported sediment will not be addressed at this time.

Bellingham Bay Circulation Study - Knowledge about the circulation patterns in the bay could be quite useful to help explain or predict fish migration patterns and natural recovery processes. The potential for compiling existing circulation information and implementing studies that will expand the understanding of water circulation patterns in Bellingham Bay is being investigated.

Squalicum Harbor Breakwater – In conjunction with the cleanup/redevelopment activities at the Weldcraft/Gate 2 site discussed above, clean sediments dredged from Squalicum Waterway by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will be used to construct a new marine habitat bench on the outside face of the breakwater for Squalicum Harbor. This work is scheduled to begin in early December 2003.

Whatcom Creek Estuary – As part of the Holly Street Landfill cleanup slated for late summer/early fall of 2004, additional fill material at the mouth of Whatcom Creek will be excavated to regain historically lost habitat.

Information Sharing – Follow this link to the habitat section of the Bellingham Bay website:
www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/tcp/sites/blhm_bay/bb_habitat/bb_hab_Part1.htm

LAND USE

In response to a number of land use changes and planning efforts, the Land Use Action Team will convene later in November to evaluate the status of these activities and their relationship to the work group efforts to implement the Bellingham Bay Comprehensive Strategy. Key land use actions include the following.

The Waterfront Futures Group, sponsored by the Port and City, continues to make progress on their visioning project for Bellingham. From November 6th through the 9th they conducted an intensive visioning effort, supported by two expert organizations that have been invited to town, the Waterfront Center and an American Institute of Architects Design Assistance Team. These groups provided recommendations to the community at the end of their visit.

Georgia-Pacific has also recently selected a consulting team to support their redevelopment planning for property that is surplus to their current tissue mill operations. The multi-disciplinary consultant team is led by Collins Woerman and will work closely with the Waterfront Futures Group.

And finally, at the 2003 National Brownfields conference, “Growing a Greener America”, the Port of Bellingham was announced as the first candidate on the west coast to demonstrate a new federal program for revitalizing waterfront communities. “Portfields” is an innovative federal project that will focus on waterfront redevelopment with an additional emphasis on restoring important marine habitat. The program goals are very compatible with both the Bellingham Bay Demonstration Pilot and the Waterfront Futures Group. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) is the lead agency for the project. Other federal agencies involved in the Portfields initiative include EPA, the Corps, the Economic Development Administration, the Department of Labor, and the Maritime Administration. The Portfields designation is expected to bring a new level of national interest to the Bellingham Bay Demonstration Pilot. For additional information visit EPA’s website at www.brownfields2003.org, or www.icma.org.