

NAME: Port Susan Bay Estuary Restoration

LOCATION: Snohomish County, Washington

ACRES: 150 acres

NON-FEDERAL SPONSOR: The Nature Conservancy (TNC)

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

The Port Susan Bay Estuary Restoration Project proposes to reintroduce the full tidal prism and inundation regime to 150 acres of diked farmland in the Stillaguamish River estuary in Puget Sound. In doing this, self sustaining native tidal wetlands that support estuarine-dependent animals will be restored, juvenile salmon access to restored rearing habitats will be improved, and the connectivity between the river and tidal habitats in the northeastern portion of Port Susan Bay will be increased. This project will restore estuary-scale sediment and freshwater distribution, and is therefore critical to improving the resilience of the broader ecosystem to sea level rise. Further, the project will address a major community flood challenge, improve the ability of fish in flood waters to return to the natural system, and allow for greater public access to the site.

EXPECTED BENEFITS:

The project will promote tidal channel and wetland development and ultimately provide habitat benefits for estuarine-dependent species at both the project and system scales. Increased habitat access and complexity are expected to lead to increased utilization by both fish and waterbirds. Abundant prey resources will support this increased utilization. The project will benefit locally occurring at risk salmon species including the following: Chinook salmon and bull trout (ESA Threatened); coho salmon (ESA Species of Concern); and steelhead trout (ESA Threatened Species). This project will also provide flood attenuation to the community in the lower river valley. Finally, restoration success will require an understanding of site and ecosystem scale vulnerabilities, and the ability to project future delta habitat structure and function in the face of climate change. Without restoration, the acreage of low marsh in the estuary is projected to decrease due to sea level rise; however, with the project, the area of low marsh will be maintained.

STATUS: Construction