

Improving Public Access to Puget Sound

The Challenge

Public access to Puget Sound offers the general public the opportunity "to reach, touch, and enjoy the water's edge, to travel on the waters of the state, and to view the water and the shoreline from adjacent locations" (WAC 173-26-221(4)). This access, and subsequently use and enjoyment, is important to the health and well-being of the region's citizens as it offers recreational opportunities such as swimming, boat launches, and beachcombing to everyone. Public access also provides a means to get up close and personal with the surrounding environment through activities such as bird and whale watching and low tide hikes, which provides hands on education experiences and further promotes the desire to maintain the health of the Sound.

The most common type of public access to shorelines is physical access, such as that provided by trails, docks, promenades, and bridges. Physical access may be implemented through dedication of land or easements, cooperative agreements, or acquisition of land along the shoreline. Public access can also be visual, such as via viewing towers and bridges or breezeways between buildings. A third type of access is "cultural access" to interpretive, educational, or historical features of the shoreline.

Public access to Puget Sound and its shorelines is threatened by numerous pressures. Geographic aspects such as natural topography, ongoing coastal erosion, and natural weathering make implementation and preservation of beach accesses challenging. In addition, anthropogenic sources such as population growth, privatization of coastal land, and waterfront commercial development all create demand for and limit public access to shorelines. It will be important to find ways to create and preserve public access as the natural and built environment around the shorelines of Puget Sound continues to change.

B5.1 Increase access to publically owned Puget Sound shorelines

No near-term Actions identified; the Partnership seeks comment on potential near-term actions.

B5.2 Increase public access to the marine ecosystem.

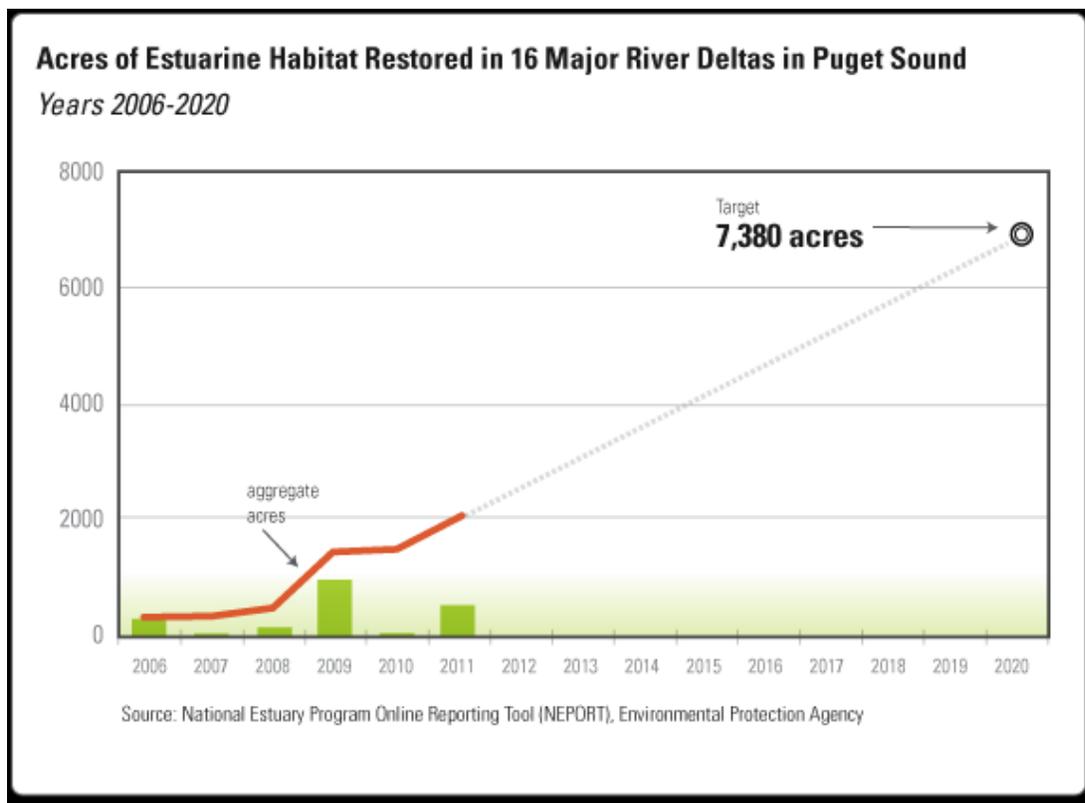
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Target View: Estuaries

River delta estuaries are where river floodplains meet the sea, creating a uniquely important environment that provides a feeding and resting habitat for young salmon, migratory birds, and many other species. Young salmon that can rear longer in delta estuaries have been observed to grow faster and are more likely to survive their ocean migration.

In Puget Sound there are 16 large river-mouth estuaries: nine larger deltas drain the Cascade Mountains, and seven smaller deltas drain the Olympics. Of the approximately 62,000 acres of mapped historical swamp and marsh, only an estimated 14,640 acres remain. The 'great swamps' of the Skagit and Snohomish once contained over 37,000 acres alone (compared to around 1,620 acres for all the Olympic deltas combined). Across the region, estuaries and tidal wetlands have been diked, drained, or filled, either converted to farms and agriculture, or developed into modern ports and industrial sites. In the most highly developed river mouth estuaries, such as the Duwamish and Puyallup Rivers, estuarine habitat covers only a minute fragment of its original extent, and may never be recovered.

The 2020 target for estuaries is that all Chinook natal river deltas - Nisqually, Skagit, Stillaguamish, Skokomish, and Elwha - meet 10 year salmon recovery goals (or 10 percent of restoration need as proxy for river deltas lacking quantitative acreage goals in salmon recovery plans); and 7,380 quality acres are restored basin wide, which is 20 percent of restoration need. The graph below illustrates the acres of estuarine habitat that need to be restored from 2006 – 2020 to achieve the 2020 recovery target.



Green columns show acres restored in each year and the orange line represents the cumulative acres restored between 2006 and 2011. The dashed line projects the restoration required to achieve the target of 7,380 quality acres restored by 2020. The figure represents restoration projects completed between 2006 and 2011 within the 16 major Puget Sound river mouth estuaries, as defined by the Puget Sound Nearshore Ecosystem Restoration Project (PSNERP).*

**The target of 7,380 acres represents only 20 percent of the total estimated estuary restoration needed for a fully functioning, resilient ecosystem.*

There are several strategies related to achieving the recovery target for estuaries, including:

- Create a Comprehensive Conservation and Ecosystem Services Market focused on resource lands for the Puget Sound region (A3.2)
- Implement and maintain priority floodplain restoration projects (A5.3)
- Ensure complete, accurate and recent information directly assists shoreline planning and decision making at the site-specific and regional levels (B1.1)
- Where armoring is aging or non-protective, seek opportunities for permanent removal or the use of soft armoring replacement or landward setback techniques (B2.3)
- Take actions to protect migratory corridors and vegetation particularly in sensitive areas such as eelgrass beds (B2.4)
- Use a variety of mechanisms to advance priority restoration projects (B3.1)
- Provide incentives to encourage removal of armoring and associated fill and use of soft armoring techniques when bulkheads fail, need repair, and during redevelopment (B3.2)
- Accelerate restoration projects on public lands where government can lead by example (B3.4)
- Expand funding for restoration projects (B3.5)

In the following results chain, or logic model, yellow polygons identify strategies and actions from the Action Agenda that we believe will contribute significantly towards meeting the target. Arrows to the blue boxes describe the intermediate results the strategies and actions are expected to achieve. The purple boxes show the reduced pressure on the ecosystem that is expected to occur, the green ovals show the areas of the ecosystem where the change will be observed, and the dark green square shows the recovery targets.

**Puget Sound Recovery -- Estuary Restoration Target View
v. Nov 21, 2011**

