



WESTERN WASHINGTON AG REPORT

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WHAT IS HAPPENING WITH THE ISLAND UNIT?

An explanation of the latest Skagit Valley planned restoration project

WWAA staff continue to track the Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife’s (WDFW) recent decision to fully restore 270 publicly owned acres of estuarine habitat in the Island Unit, southwest of Conway. This site is categorized as a Tier 1 (highest priority) project in the HB 1418 report (2005), and it’s the only Tier 1 project that

has not been completed. WDFW says that, historically, the site was a tidally influenced estuary that provided rearing habitat for juvenile Chinook salmon. The agency says the restored habitat could produce 73,000 smolt—the Chinook lifestage that estuary restoration projects are designed to support. The site has been diked, and since the 1950s, it has been farmed to raise forage crops for area waterfowl.

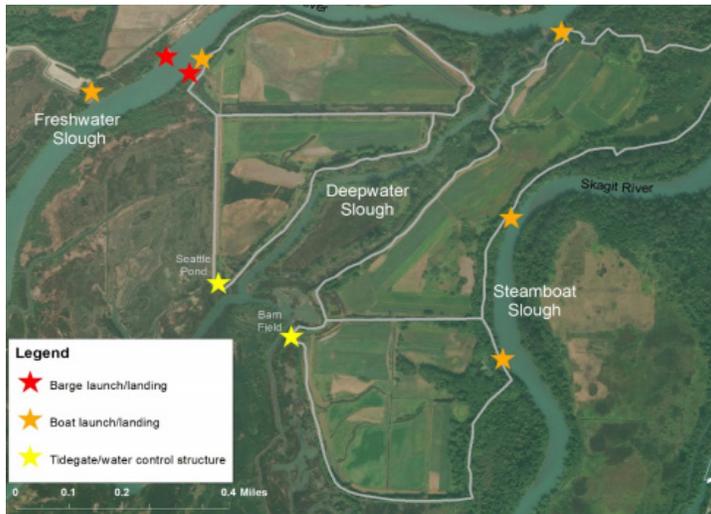
“We support WDFW’s decision to proceed with this Chinook habitat project,” explained WWAA Executive Director, Brandon Roozen. “WWAA supports the prioritization of public lands restoration. As the Department and others highlight the project’s relevance and importance, however, we are

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- Restoration vs. repairs in the Skagit Valley
- Tulip Festival information

also at a point where it is necessary to measure and report restoration project benefits and results. We will continue to follow the progress of this and all the region’s restoration projects, and we look forward to seeing where we are in relation to our TFI commitment of 1.35 million Chinook smolt.”

The WDFW plans to remove all the current tidegates in the area and at least half of the dikes on the island. WDFW is now securing the funding to design and obtain permits for the restoration project.



TOP: Project site location in the south fork Skagit River within the Skagit River Delta. BOTTOM: Current site layout.

PHOTO CREDIT: Washington Dept. of Fish & Wildlife

WWAA MISSION

To represent agriculture by providing services to the entire agricultural community

WWAA COMMITMENTS

Engage in internal and external (economic, environmental, regulatory) pressures on agriculture

Interact with county, state, and federal legislators and regulators

Pest and nutrient management control

Network with and support of the agricultural research community

Seek out and develop opportunities and technologies for agriculture

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The importance of public lands restoration first

An explanation of HB 1418

It's no surprise that balancing agriculture protection and salmon recovery efforts keep WWAA staff incredibly busy. Membership has made it clear that being a voice that supports all of agriculture in the region is our priority. The Skagit Delta Tidegates and Fish Initiative supports the attainment of 1.35 million smolts, or the conversion and restoration of a maximum of 2,700 acres of agricultural land (whichever is achieved first), as described within the Skagit Chinook Recovery Plan .

To date, the majority of the acres that have gone towards Chinook habitat restoration have been state-owned public lands. This is because of the public lands priority outlined in a 2003 piece of legislation that passed nearly unanimously.

Engrossed Second Substitute House Bill 1418 (HB 1418) was sponsored by Senator Mary Margaret Haugen, with strong support from WWAA staff, leadership, and members—many of our agricultural partners and leaders testified in support of the bill. The bill directed the Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife (WDFW) to conduct Salmon Intertidal Habitat Restoration Planning. It further empowered the agency to work with local governments and appoint a task force of interested parties to collaborate and develop a plan. The bill directed that the task force must:

1. review and analyze the geographic area's limiting factors analysis;
2. initiate and oversee intertidal salmon habitat studies;
3. review and analyze completed assessments;
4. develop and draft an overall plan to address intertidal salmon habitat goals; and
5. identify appropriate demonstration projects and early implementation projects for the geographic area.

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Table 3. Priorities Based On Ownership and Infrastructure. The lower the score, the higher the priority, such that 1= high priority.

Project Site	Ownership Type	Priority Score based upon Ownership	Infrastructure Priority Score	Total Priority Score (Ownership + Infrastructure)
Milltown Island	Public	1	1	2
Deepwater Slough	Public	1	1	2
South Pole Site public lands only	Public with Adjacent Private Land	2	1	3
Leque Island public lands only	Public with Adjacent Private Land Public	2	1	3
Wylie Slough public lands only	Public with Adjacent Private Land Public	2	1	3
Rawlins Road public lands only	Public with Adjacent Private Land Public	2	1	3
Dry/Brown Slough public lands only	Public with Adjacent Private Land Public	2	1	3
Wylie Slough entire site	Public/Private	3	2	5
Rawlins Road entire site	Public/Private	3	2	5
Dry/Brown Slough entire site	Public/Private	3	2	5
Leque Island entire site	Public/Private	3	2	5
Cross Island connector	Public/Private	3	2	5
South Fork pole yard entire site	Public/Private	3	3	6
Dodge Valley	Private	4	2	6
La Conner	Private	4	2	6
Halls Slough	Private	4	3	7

CHART CREDIT: Washington State Conservation Commission 2005 report

RESTORATION VS. REPAIRS

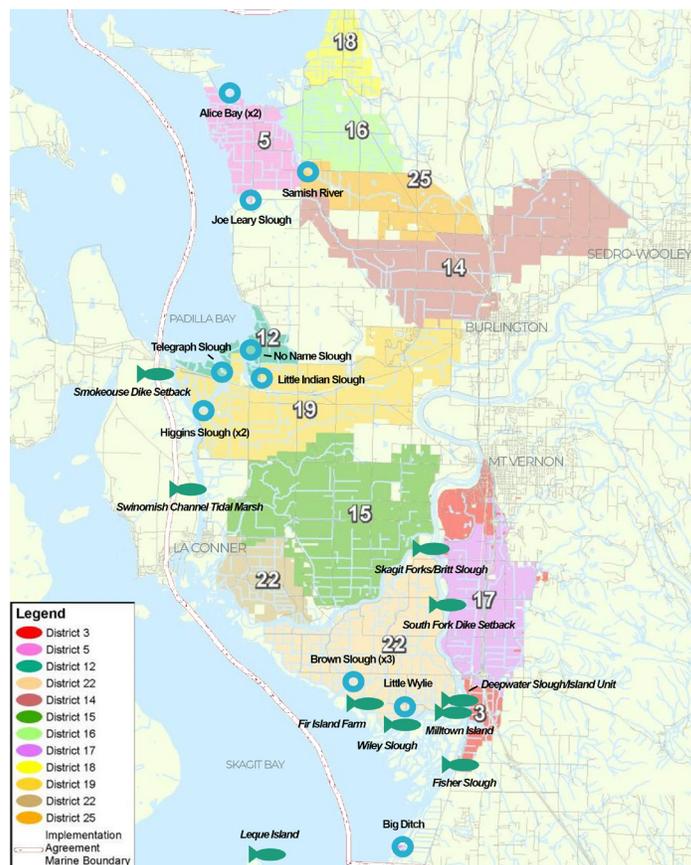
Showcasing locations of restoration vs. dike and drainage projects in the Skagit Valley

For the past ten years, through implementation of the Skagit Delta Tidegates and Fish Initiative (TFI), WWAA and partners have been facilitating and administering tidegate repairs in the Skagit Valley. The goal of this historic agreement is to facilitate tidegate maintenance and advance estuary restoration on the delta.

The map below illustrates the implementation agreement area of the TFI, the boundaries of the signatory drainage, irrigation and diking districts, and the estuarine restoration target based on the Skagit Chinook Recovery Plan. These

areas include the tidal delta areas of Skagit Bay, the Swinomish Channel, and Padilla Bay. Since the State's adoption of HB 1418 and the creation of the TFI, 1,000+ acres of estuarine habitat have been funded for restoration, and 14 district tidegate maintenance projects have been approved.

The map below highlights repair projects to date since the TFI's implementation, as well as restoration projects. Also below is a chart that showcases each project specifically.



Project	Project Type		Landowner	Year of Completion	District	TFI Acreage
	Restoration	Repair				Acres restored
Smokehouse Floodplain	🐟		Swinomish	ongoing	--	120
Swinomish Channel Tidal Marsh	🐟		Swinomish	ongoing	--	4.4
Fir Island Farm	🐟		WDFW	2017	22	131
Wiley Slough	🐟		WDFW	2009	22	156
Deepwater Slough/ Island Unit (x2)	🐟		WDFW	ongoing	22	270+
Milltown Island (x2)	🐟		WDFW	ongoing	22	212+
Little Wylie		🔵		2011	22	
Brown Slough (x3)		🔵		multiple	22	
Skagit Forks/Britt Slough	🐟		WDFW	2021	3	7.8
Fisher Slough	🐟		Private	2011	3	56
South Fork Dike Setback	🐟		District 3	ongoing	3	37
Little Indian Slough		🔵		2017	19	
Higgins Slough (x2)		🔵		multiple	19	
Telegraph Slough		🔵		2011	12	
No Name Slough		🔵		ongoing	12	
Alice Bay (x2)		🔵		multiple	5	
Big Ditch		🔵		2017	17	
Samish River		🔵		2021	25	
Joe Leary Slough		🔵		2020	14	
Leque Island	🐟		WDFW	2019	--	250



An aerial view of the Island Unit, Skagit Wildlife Area.

PHOTO CREDIT: Washington Dept. of Fish & Wildlife



PHOTO CREDIT: Brandon Roozen



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- The plan had to incorporate certain elements, including:
- an inventory of existing tidegates, with specified information on these gates;
 - an assessment of the role of tidegates and intertidal fish habitat addressing numerous issues; and
 - a long-term plan for intertidal salmon enhancement to meet the goals of salmon recovery and agricultural lands protection.

Like in Washington's Growth Management Act, a primary consideration of HB 1418 is the protection of agricultural lands. The goal of HB 1418 was to identify intertidal salmon habitat restoration sites to meet the goals of salmon recovery while protecting agricultural land. The task force agreed to first prioritize sites located along Skagit Bay, south of the Swinomish Channel, within the 13-foot high tide zone, because these sites would more likely directly benefit wild Skagit Chinook. It is the intent of the 1418 plan that among these sites, restoration on public lands will be the highest priority. Intertidal salmon restoration sites lying on private land will be identified with the understanding that activity on private land will be voluntary and will not adversely impact adjacent agricultural land. The 1418 task force prioritized assessment sites based upon land ownership, level of infrastructure, and benefit to Chinook salmon.

In 2005, WWAA contributed to the Washington State Conservation Commission's report on the bill and continues to support its original goals. There is much more to HB 1418, and you can find the full report on our website at <https://www.westag.org/issues>.

The 2021 Tulip Festival

The Tulip Festival is underway! Through the month of April, our Valley will again be the home to blooms and beauty. The festival is designed as a driving tour as there

is no one "site" to enter. The fields of tulips are scattered throughout the Skagit Valley, as are the many events and activities that comprise the festival. The tulip fields are the crops of RoozenGaarde/Washington Bulb Co., Inc. and Tulip Town. RoozenGaarde has set its ticket pricing, and you can find out more details at <https://roozengaarde.ticketspice.com/skagit-valley-tulip-festival-tickets>. For more information, visit <https://tulipfestival.org/>.

