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# Little Squalicum Estuary

Managing Agency: City of Bellingham, Washington. Primary Contractor: Glacier Environmental Services.  
Primary Consultant: Natural Systems Design + Coastal Geologic Services Nominated By: City of Bellingham, Washington



Photo by: BTV – City of Bellingham

The Little Squalicum Estuary project culminates a 15-year effort to restore a portion of lost aquatic land in Bellingham Bay, Washington. The project created an estuary to restore lost tidal and sedimentary processes, improve fish passage, and return saltmarsh, mudflat, and estuary habitat to Bellingham Bay, just 2.2 miles east of the Nooksack River Delta. The project is in Little Squalicum Park—a protected greenway—that provides a critical rearing habitat for juvenile salmon migrating out of the Delta and fulfills a community vision in the City of Bellingham’s 2010 Little Squalicum Park Master Plan.

The \$6.1 million project restored 4.85 total acres of coastal wetland habitat, including creating a 2.4-acre estuary; removed a fish passage barrier at the mouth of Little Squalicum Creek; and beneficially reused excavated material from project construction as beach nourishment to enhance degraded and documented forage spawning habitat.

In addition to a renewed estuary that benefits several species of salmon and other critical aquatic species, project achievements include a new system of park trails, new pedestrian bridges, and extensive native plantings. Accomplishing these goals within a functioning city park with former contamination, multiple in-water

work windows, known cultural resources, five landowners, and an adjacent elevated railroad trestle required overcoming many engineering challenges.

Communication was also key. During construction, the contractor managed the construction site in a way that provided more access than originally conveyed to the public, as construction conditions allowed. To keep the community informed of trail access changes and construction progress, the city:

- Maintained a project website that was regularly updated
- Sent email updates to a contact list that included people who had attended an open house about the project
- Shared posts on social media
- Published information in city news releases
- Answered questions from local news media for articles about the project
- Replaced and updated temporary signs at the project site as needed.

The project was funded by a range of federal, state, and local government agencies, as well as environmental and community-based groups. Substantially completed in October 2023, it is immediately benefiting the area's aquatic wildlife, including the threatened Puget Sound Chinook.