Skokomish Watershed Cleanup Puts Locals to Work

Local News

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Shelton, WA - Work is underway this month in the Skokomish watershed of northwestern Washington, as local contractors close or repair old logging roads. This area in Olympic National Park is known for serious annual floods, and the restoration efforts should improve conditions, not only for endangered salmon, but for tribes and farmers downstream.The project is part of the Legacy Roads and Trails Remediation program, championed by Washington Congressman Norm Dicks. Dicks says the U.S. Forest Service budget hasn't allowed it to keep up with road maintenance, and this is a way to put people to work getting it done."People really like this program. It's needed; we've got these same kinds of problems throughout the Forest Service, throughout the country. Y'know, this is very good aesthetically, but also it has a direct impact on salmon and the ability of salmon to reproduce in the Puget Sound region."

Ron Gold of Shelton is one of the contractors. As a former logger, he sees the road decommissioning as a way to heal old scars on the land that have also affected streams in the area with landslides and washouts."It's really helping fisheries; it's helping water quality. You're not putting a lot of turbidity in the water, dirt and fine material in the water, so there's a whole bunch of benefits by going in there and taking these old roads out."The Forest Service estimates up to 24 jobs are created for every $1 million spent on Legacy Roads projects. For Gold, this project is making a big difference to his small business."We used to have 40, 50 jobs lined up at a given time, and had maybe three to five calls a day for work, and it went to where we might have one call a week. This program saved my business, is what it did, and so it saved ten families from trying to find other work."Some 18 groups are part of the Washington Watershed Restoration Initiative, from agencies and tribes to recreation and fishing advocates. Nationally, $90 million is being spent on the program. The Skokomish project received $2.7 million, the largest amount in the country.