

[Work begins on joint habitat restoration project in Washington estuary](#)

Local News

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SEATTLE, Wash. - A major project to restore critical estuary habitat along the Snohomish River is underway as part of a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Tulalip Tribes of Washington partnership.

The Qwuloolt Estuary Restoration Project will restore tidal access to about 360 acres of historic floodplain. The tribes partnered with several city, state and federal agencies on other projects in the area designed to restore historic and critical tidal wetlands in the Snohomish River estuary. The Tulalip Tribes hosted a groundbreaking ceremony August 27 at the site.

"At one time the Snohomish River Estuary supported one of the largest fisheries in Puget Sound," said Tulalip Tribes Chairman Mel Sheldon. "Our ancestors built a strong and thriving economy from the salmon trade over many thousands of years. Today, the wild runs are in a state of crisis. Our partnership with the Corps is a vitally important step in the effort to reconnect Qwuloolt to the natural processes of the estuary and will eventually provide critical rearing habitat for salmon. The Corps brings to the project an impressive record of engineering solutions for habitat restoration."

The Corps' \$3.73 million, two-phase construction project will take about two years to complete. Sealaska, of Auburn, Wash., the company awarded the Corps' contract, began construction activities August 19.

"In phase one, we'll construct a 4,000 foot setback levee to protect Brashler Industrial Park, the Marysville Wastewater Treatment Plant and residents surrounding the area," said Corps' Seattle District Project Manager Bill Goss. "Phase two involves lowering 1,400 feet of the Ebey Slough dike and then excavating a 270 foot breach in it to allow tidal inundation."

Qwuloolt is part of a 16-square-mile Snohomish River estuary that historically included marshes, lowland forest, mudflats and interconnected channels which the Tulalip Tribes ancestors traversed by canoes. It offered a wide variety of plant and animal life that helped sustain villages surrounding the estuary. In the early part of the 20th century a dike was constructed on the current project site and tide gates were installed, preventing tidal access, and destroying the estuary's marsh habitats.

"As a result, salmon and other estuarine-dependent species were unable to use the highly-productive environment," Goss said.

Restoring tidal processes to what became fallow pasturelands will improve local streams and wetland for fish such as endangered Chinook salmon, bull trout and steelhead.

“One reason for the low survival rate of young salmon reaching the sound is the fact they are not ready to compete in the ocean environment,” said Tulalip Tribes Qwuloolt Project Manager Kurt Nelson. “Juvenile salmon require an estuarine habitat to feed and to mature before entering the Sound. For generations salmon have been cut off from the Qwuloolt site but thanks to this project, endangered Chinook and other fish will soon be reconnected to quality habitat.”