New partnership aims to restore vandalized American Lake boat launch

Local News

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Olympia, WA - The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and Eyes in the Woods, a non-profit volunteer organization, have joined forces with approximately 25 members of a newly formed citizen’s group to improve public safety and reduce vandalism at the American Lake public boat launch.

Managed by WDFW, the American Lake boat launch and public recreation site in Pierce County is used by thousands of boaters and anglers each year, but vandalism and other illegal activities present ongoing challenges, said Steve Sherlock, WDFW statewide access site coordinator.

"At the American Lake access site we constantly deal with vandalism, gang activities, illegal dumping and criminal activities of all kinds," said Sherlock, who oversees more than 700 outdoor access sites - mostly boat launches - around the state. "We’re concerned that these activities could put visitors using the site for fishing and enjoying the outdoors at risk."

The new partnership formed by WDFW, local citizens and Eyes in the Woods, which recruits community volunteers to help protect natural resources, aims to change that situation, Sherlock said.

"Eyes in the Woods has played a valuable role with WDFW over the years in recruiting volunteers to observe, document and report criminal behavior and poaching violations on state and private lands," Sherlock said.

Trained in these non-confrontational reporting techniques by WDFW enforcement officers and Eyes in the Woods, the local American Lake volunteers will provide a presence at the launch site and monitor recently installed surveillance cameras.

The combination of eyewitnesses and camera footage will be particularly helpful to WDFW enforcement officers responsible for the area, said Lt. Steve Crown, WDFW’s enforcement training coordinator.

"The data gathered will help WDFW officers follow through on arrests and hopefully deter destruction of department lands and facilities," Crown said. "Our intent is to work with these volunteers and other people using the site to keep the area open for its intended purpose."

Dave Anderson, a local activist whose family has owned Bill’s Boathouse on the lake since the 1970s, is a key backer of the effort. As president of the Tillicum/Woodbrook Neighborhood Association, Anderson said community members have come together before to clean up the site, but he hopes this new monitoring and reporting approach will be more effective.

"Past clean-up projects helped for a time, but the new relationship with Eyes in the Woods and training from WDFW enforcement offer a more long-term approach for keeping the site safe and clean," Anderson said. "We’re pleased that folks have turned out for the training and are taking an active role to preserve public access to American Lake."

A kick-off work party for the newly trained and certified volunteers is scheduled Saturday, Sept. 26, 10 a.m. - 1 p.m., at the American Lake Tillicum boat launch. The volunteers will pick up garbage, re-paint restroom facilities, trim vegetation, post Eyes in the Woods signs and clean the boat launch

site.
More information on WDFW’s water access sites is available at http://wdfw.wa.gov/lands/water_access .