



Swantown Marina from the East Bay Overlook

Photo by Melinda T. Spencer

### **Healthy aquatic lands are the foundation of a healthy Puget Sound**

It's been said that Puget Sound is where the turbulent Pacific comes to relax. But the Sound's relatively placid waters should not lull us into complacency. The waters of Puget Sound blanket over 1.7 million acres of state-owned aquatic lands—lands that are rich, complex, and vital components of a healthy Puget Sound ecosystem. From the deep waters to the near shore areas, you will find critical habitats for wildlife populations that are of biological and economic value, including shellfish, salmon, seabirds, and marine mammals.

A healthy Puget Sound ecosystem is vital to a healthy economy for communities rooted around the Sound. But some of the activities authorized by DNR in the Puget Sound, such as docks, mooring buoys, aquaculture, and log booming and storage, could affect species that depend on these habitats during migration, breeding, and foraging.

To prevent or minimize these impacts on aquatic species, DNR's Aquatics Resources Program is developing an Aquatic Lands Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) that will identify actions that will be taken to protect species and preserve their aquatic habitat. The 22 species covered in this HCP (some of which are listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act) were selected by DNR's ESA Team. Members of this team examined how each species and their associated aquatic habitat might be impacted by activities authorized by DNR on state-owned aquatic land.

When the Aquatic Lands HCP is released for review later this year, it will also include guidelines intended to help balance the public benefits and the long-term health of state-owned aquatic lands. These guidelines will begin to be implemented in 2009.