



## Protecting Natural Resources on State-owned Aquatic Lands with Guidance from Tribes

THE WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND THE TRIBES SHARE A COMMITMENT TO PROTECT THE HEALTH OF AQUATIC ECOSYSTEMS

Northwest native cultures enjoy traditions that depend on harvesting fish, wildlife, and other natural resources. Because natural resources are such an integral component of the native way of life, the Washington tribes play an important role in protecting them.

In the 1850s, the U.S. government negotiated treaties with tribes in what is now the Washington State. Through these treaties, the tribes gave up most of their land but reserved certain rights to protect their way of life, including the right to fish, hunt and gather on public lands.



Skokomish Tribal Beach Seining, Hoodspout, WA  
Photo by: L. Amiotte

At statehood in 1889, some of these lands became the property of the state. Submerged lands – 2.6 million acres of land that lie beneath marine and fresh water – are the responsibility of Washington’s Department of Natural Resources (DNR). DNR protects these resources while also providing for navigation, commerce, use of renewable resources, and public uses to benefit all people of the state. Because DNR and the Washington tribes share a commitment to protect the health and productivity of these aquatic ecosystems, DNR relies on input and guidance from the tribes about everything from fish forecasts to habitat restoration projects. Input and support from tribes is valuable to Washington DNR.

### Long-term plan to protect at-risk fish and wildlife

With ongoing input from the Washington tribes, DNR has prepared an Aquatic Lands Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP). This HCP identifies actions to avoid and minimize the negative effects of authorized activities on at-risk fish and wildlife species and their habitats as defined by the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). These species protected by the HCP are listed on the following page.

Some protections specified in the Aquatic Lands HCP include:

- New activities must avoid aquatic vegetation in order to promote food web dynamics.
- Building materials and structural components such as treated wood and tires will not be allowed below the water line in new construction to minimize effects to food web dynamics and larval development.
- Work on aquatic lands will only be permitted during specified periods to protect sensitive life stages for amphibians, reptiles, birds, salmonids, marine fish, and forage fish.
- Areas identified as important to covered species are often the same areas within usual and accustomed areas of Washington tribes. Common advocacy of environmental and resource protection exists.

### Which species are covered?

DNR initially considered 90 species for inclusion in the Aquatic Lands HCP, focusing on those that are endangered, threatened, of concern, or rare, and that potentially occur on or use state-owned aquatic land. After DNR scientists examined how each species might be negatively affected by activities that take place on state-owned aquatic lands, 30 species were identified for coverage (see list at right). DNR may add additional species if more information becomes available before the Aquatic Lands HCP is finalized.

### DNR promotes stewardship

In planning this Aquatic Lands HCP, DNR will implement standards, conservation measures and best management practices which will ensure long term protections for covered species and their habitats.

### 30 covered species

#### Amphibians and reptiles

Columbia spotted frog  
Northern leopard frog  
Oregon spotted frog  
Western toad  
Western pond turtle

#### Birds

Bald eagle  
Black tern  
Brown pelican  
Common loon  
Harlequin duck  
Marbled murrelet  
Western snowy plover

#### Unique species

Southern resident orca

#### Fish

Bocaccio  
Bull trout  
Canary rockfish  
Chinook salmon  
Chum salmon  
Coastal cutthroat trout  
Coho salmon  
Eulachon/Pacific smelt  
Green sturgeon  
Pacific herring  
Pacific sand lance  
Pink salmon  
Sockeye salmon  
Steelhead trout  
Surf smelt  
White sturgeon  
Yelloweye rockfish

### In focus: Lake Roosevelt White Sturgeon Recovery Project

The white sturgeon, North America's largest freshwater fish, can grow up to 19 feet long, weigh 1,800 pounds, and live for over 100 years! However, only about 3,000 of these fish remain in the upper reaches of the Columbia River, between the Grand Coulee Dam and the Canadian border. Almost all of them are more than 30 years old, with few young to replace the aging fish.

Why is the white sturgeon, which has thrived since dinosaur times, in danger of becoming extinct now? Hydroelectric dams have changed the fish habitats of the upper Columbia. Contaminants, development, and non-native fish have also dramatically altered their environment. To restore sturgeon to a healthy and sustainable population, it is critical that we learn more about the upper Columbia's aquatic habitats.

Experts from over 25 U.S. and Canadian government and tribal agencies, environmental and community groups, and industries are working to help the sturgeon recover in the upper reaches of the Columbia. U.S. recovery activities are coordinated through the Lake Roosevelt Sturgeon Recovery Project, which is managed by the Spokane Tribe of Indians.

Conservation hatcheries developed by the project partners are one of several activities aimed at helping the sturgeon population recover. These hatcheries raise young white sturgeon that are released into the Grand Coulee reservoir and upper Columbia River each year. This helps to ensure that the population survives until the fish are successfully reproducing on their own in the wild. During Student Discovery Week, school kids can learn about sturgeon and release young fish that have been outfitted with a radio tag. As the fish begin their life in the wild, their transmitters send data back to the researchers and the students about how far they travel and conditions they experience in river and reservoir habitats.

