

A Salmon Nursery Once Again?

'Let us permit nature to have her way. She understands her business better than we do.'

~ Michel de Montaigne

This Was Once a Salmon-Rearing Estuary

This site was once a marshy "pocket" estuary before it was filled and drained decades ago to create the state park. Water seeped from the hillside and flowed down to the shore in a small creek, accumulating in a wetland. A remnant of this marsh is still visible. An open channel connected the marsh to Saratoga Passage near today's boat ramp, allowing fresh and saltwater to mix. Thousands of newborn salmon gathered here to grow.

Why Salmon Love These Places

No one knew then how vital such places are to young salmon born in nearby rivers. Even today, biologists find thousands of tiny salmon swimming just off the park's sandy beaches. They follow the shoreline, seeking shelter in eelgrass beds and searching for small estuaries in which to feed on insects, adjust to the salinity of marine waters and hide from predators before venturing into more open areas of Puget Sound. Surf smelt, a favorite food of larger salmon, spawn here.

Could We Restore the Marsh?

Biologists believe Camano Island State Park holds promise to become a pocket estuary once again that would offer precious habitat for young salmon. The estuary and channel to the open water could be added without giving up the boat ramp and other park facilities.

Large drift logs on the shoreline and in the marsh would provide important cover and habitat complexity. They would provide places for herbs and shrubs to take hold, and for insects and invertebrates to land and fall into the water to become food for fish. They would also help shade beach and marsh areas from the sun's direct rays, reducing heat and creating micro-habitats in deeper pools or channels.

www.islandcountymrc.org



This signage by Island County Marine Resources Committee is funded in part through a cooperative agreement with the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, CZM grant agreement G0800002. Text: Dan Pedersen, www.whidbeywriter.com. Design and Illustration: Kris Wiltse, www.kriswiltse.com.