

Saratoga Passage Marine Stewardship Area



We protect what we love. We love what we understand.

Welcome - Did you know you are looking at a salmon freeway? Saratoga Passage is not only a maritime highway for boaters but a salmon highway serving three large, fish-producing rivers -- the Skagit, Snohomish and Stillaguamish. Juvenile salmon leave these rivers and adult salmon return every year. All life is connected. To assure the future of our Island County lifestyle, we must care for these shores wisely.



Pigeon Guillemot

Bluff Erosion Brings Life to Our Shores

Eroding bluffs help create our salmon-friendly shores. Currents carry sand from these bluffs to nearby beaches. This creates ideal conditions for surf smelt, sand lance and Pacific herring -- our three forage fish. They use the sandy beaches and offshore eelgrass beds to lay their eggs.

Salmon, Orcas and Marine Birds Feed Here

Magnificent orcas visit our waters every summer. They feed on the salmon that eat the forage fish. Orcas and Chinook salmon are federally listed as threatened due to habitat-loss, pollution and other stresses. Marine birds such as the pigeon guillemot nest in bluff burrows and also feed on forage fish. The guillemot is the only sea bird to regularly breed here. Population trends provide vital clues about forage fish and habitat health.



Eelgrass and Forage Fish – Our Bed and Breakfast!

Forage fish prowl Saratoga Passage in vast schools, laying a banquet for salmon, sea birds and marine mammals. Eelgrass beds offer hiding places from predators. Creek mouths, outfalls and small estuaries create transitional areas for young salmon to feed and adjust to the sea's salinity.

What Does This Have To Do With Me?

By understanding all these connections, we can make wiser decisions about our beaches, bluffs, forests and gardens. Our actions as individuals add up, for better or worse. We are all stewards of these waters for the next generation.

For More Information

Island County has declared Saratoga Passage an educational marine stewardship area, calling for more study, understanding and care. This signage by Island County Marine Resources Committee is part of that work. To learn how you can help, visit the websites of Shore Stewards, Washington State University (WSU) Beach Watchers, or Island County Marine Resources Committee (MRC).



Pacific Herring

Sand Lance

Surf Smelt

www.islandcountymrc.org • www.shorestewards.org • www.beachwatchers.wsu.edu



Signage design and illustration by Kris Wiltse