

Stanwood, WA
(Snohomish Co.)
Stanwood Camano
News
(Cir. W. 16,400)

JAN 15 2008

Allen's P. C. B. Est. 1888

Salmon study to shape future of south Camano

*"Spectacular"
habitat reviewed,
findings support
preservation*

By BRIDGET BUDBILL
Staff Reporter

There's something fishy about the south end of Camano Island.

In this case, protecting salmon spawning habitat is the cause for investigation, and area environmental advocates are thrilled to begin their sleuthing.

Last month, the Whidbey Camano Land Trust (WCLT) was awarded \$1.23 million from the Washington State Salmon Recovery Funding Board for three projects that will assist salmon habitat protection in Island County, one of which is on Camano, and two others are on Whidbey Island.

The southern end of Camano Island is among the region's most "intact" shorelines, according to WCLT, with existing high-quality fish and wildlife habitat.

Of the state money allotted to WCLT, \$70,000 will be spent on a feasibility study focused on Camano land to identify salmon protection priorities, said Patricia Powell, executive director of WCLT.

"The results of this study will guide future protection priorities," said Powell, who said the project would include an assessment of the shoreline and surrounding bluff habitats.

Data gathered will also be synthesized by a WCLT land protection specialist, in conjunction with Island County watershed protection manager Kim Bredensteiner, who has extensive knowledge of salmon spawning habitats.

Bredensteiner said Camano's south end is unique in that it still contains unaltered wilderness.

"There is naturally functioning habitat there that hasn't

been changed. It's in spectacular shape," she said.

Combined with other pristine qualities, such as near-shore feeder bluffs and an eel grass bed where salmon spawn, the area provides young salmon with copious terrestrial and aquatic insects, as well as three kinds of forage fish, upon which older salmon prey, Bredensteiner explained.

The study will also, in-part, measure the willingness of property owners to participate in future permanent protection efforts, said Powell, including such options as conservation easements or fee acquisitions.

Powell stressed that any efforts made on the part of the homeowner would be entirely voluntary, and that there are no regulatory consequences of the study.

Upon announcing the funding, Governor Christine Gregoire said the health of salmon is an indication of the health of the state's overall environment.

The two other projects are located on the northeast side of Whidbey Island adjacent to Skagit Bay, according to WCLT, and the remaining money from the state will help secure the acquisition of approximately 65 acres of uplands and 40 acres of tidelands.

The Whidbey acreage is among the highest priorities for protection and future enhancement of salmon habitat, said WCLT, in a released statement.

To receive the state grant funds, WCLT must come up with a 15 percent funding match, which will be raised from private donors or other sources.

Powell said the south Camano study will begin within the next two months, and WCLT will keep the public updated, perhaps through future workshops, as to its findings.

For more information visit www.wclt.org.

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