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2219 State, county fund salmon recovery task at Ala Spit

Project will prevent erosion

By JENNY MANNING

Staff reporter

Salmon may eventually swim and spawn with ease in North Whidbey waters.

Washington state Salmon Recovery Funding Board awarded Island County a \$267,538 grant for the second phase of a salmon recovery project at Ala Spit, a North Whidbey county park.

"This grant will help us protect and restore Ala Spit county park and its nearshore and marine ecosystems," Island County Commissioner John Dean said, adding that the county is "committed to salmon recovery."

The Planning Department's Resource Enhancement Program will use the state grant to remove a riprap revetment that was installed in the 1960s to reduce erosion. But instead of reducing erosion, the riprap is causing it along the spit's narrow neck.

Now the project is aimed at halting the erosion that has made it vulnerable to being breached, expand fish spawning habitat and increase the pocket estuary's complexity of functions, according to a press release.

In addition to the grant, Island County will contribute \$47,199 in labor, equipment, materials and resource donations to the project.

Ala Spit open house

Island residents, fishers, bird watchers, outdoor enthusiasts and other park visitors are invited to learn more about the Ala Spit project at an open house on Saturday, Feb. 28, from 10 a.m. to noon at the Cornet Bay Retreat, 400 Cornet Bay Rd.

Following the open house, the Island County WSU Waste Wise Program and Lighthouse Environmental Program will host an "all comers" beach walk and litter cleanup at Ala Spit. Ala Spit county park is located off Jones Road on Skagit Bay.

"The health of salmon populations is essential to our Puget Sound region, and beyond," Dean said. "The Ala Spit project will be good for many aspects, besides returning our citizens' state tax dollars to benefit our local communities."

The first phase of the project, also funded by the Washington state program, encompassed a two-year scientific assessment by Herrera Environmental Consultants, who reviewed historic information and photographs, shoreline and sediment development, aquatic and fish habitat, and vegetation, among other

area characteristics.

The Washington state Legislature established the grant program supported by state and federal funds, and passed the Salmon Recovery Act in 1999, which set up a locally driven process for each Water Resource Inventory Area to identify projects to protect and restore salmon habitat and return salmon harvests to sustainable levels.

Island County adopted its Salmon Recovery Plan in 2005 with the help of citizens, agencies, private groups and government officials.