

Breakthroughs in Skagit Basin Estuary Projects



K. Neumeyer

An excavator makes the last cut in a berm, allowing the tide to flow into the Crescent Harbor salt marsh for the first time in 100 years. Watch a video of the final cut at nwifc.org/section/video.

The Skagit River System Cooperative (SRSC) celebrated the success of two major estuary restoration projects in August. The SRSC is the natural

resources management arm of the Swinomish and Sauk-Suiattle tribes.

On Aug. 19, an excavator made the final berm cut to allow

full tidal flow to 200 acres of the Crescent Harbor salt marsh on Naval Air Station Whidbey Island for the first time in about 100 years.

The salt marsh had been cut off from fish access, with a minimal tidal exchange through a tide gate built in the 1900s.

"Our ancestors walked this earth right here before there were any non-Indians," said Brian Cladoosby, chairman of the Swinomish Tribe. "They lived out here when all of this was marsh land, so to have the tidal flow reintroduced is really amazing."

Marking the success of another project, on Aug. 18, crews removed the last of the old dikes and levees that prevented the tide from flowing into a former

estuary around Wiley Slough in the Skagit River delta.

The state-owned parcel of land, known as the Headquarters Unit of the Skagit Wildlife Area, was converted from an estuary to a recreational area in 1962 – using dikes, drainage ditches, culverts and tide gates.

The 175-acre Wiley Slough restoration was proposed in 2002. It was completed in partnership with the tribes, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Seattle City Light and the Skagit Watershed Council, with funding from several agencies including the state Salmon Recovery Funding Board, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs and NOAA Restoration Center.

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