



Make a Difference

By Anna Toledo

Island County Marine Resources Committee and Shore Friendly Coordinator

MAKING OUR SHORELINES FRIENDLY FOR FISH AND PEOPLE

A walk along the shoreline is one of the activities that has remained a constant this year. Whether you are drawn by the salty breeze or expansive views or the chance to catch a glimpse of a whale, there is peace and adventure to be found along our Island County shores. There are many local organizations working to preserve our beautiful shorelines and many ways for you to help those efforts.

Little fish with a big purpose

The Island County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) is an advisory board to county government, made up of local volunteers, with the goal to protect and restore local marine resources through monitoring, restoration, and outreach. One of the MRC's activities is to monitor beaches around Island County to understand when and where forage fish lay their eggs (or spawn) and how they use restored beaches.

Around our Island County shorelines, small fish known as forage fish utilize our beaches and nearshore habitats. Forage fish represent a critical link in the marine food web, supporting larger species, such as seabirds, seals and salmon, which in turn support our iconic orca population. When we can improve habitat for forage fish, we improve conditions for the many marine creatures that make our shorelines so inviting.

Two species of forage fish – surf smelt and Pacific sand lance – lay their eggs on our sand and gravel beaches. This spawning behavior relies on natural shoreline habitat. The less altered a shoreline is, the more likely it is to support these important fish.

For many years, shoreline armoring, such as bulkheads and seawalls, were installed around Puget Sound to protect shoreline properties from erosion. Over the recent decades, we have learned more about the impact these structures can have on the marine environment, including that they are not always the most effective erosion protection method, and that they cover up important habitat which supports the very marine life that draws us to the shoreline.

Shoreline restoration

The MRC also works to identify and support nearshore restoration projects. The MRC is currently partnering with the Northwest Straits Foundation and local community members to remove shoreline armoring at Seahorse Siesta, a private community on south Whidbey. The project involves the removal of an old grounded barge and concrete bulkhead that jut out into the intertidal habitat.

The armoring sits at the bottom of a feeder bluff. Feeder bluffs are coastal bluffs whose natural erosion contributes sediment to the shoreline that "feeds," or builds up, our beaches. Removing armoring at the bottom of this feeder bluff will restore the natural sediment movement along the shoreline. It will also



This restored shoreline at the Sunlight Shores community provides improved habitat, natural beauty, and shoreline accessibility. Photo by Anna Toledo

uncover habitat for those small, but important, forage fish in which to lay their eggs.

How to make a difference along the shoreline

Whether you live along the shoreline, on a farm, or in the woods, there are actions you can take to protect our beaches. The activities we do on land impact the waters around Island County. Read on to learn about actions you can take to support healthy shorelines.

Manage water runoff

You've seen it after a rain storm – water rushing down streets and into storm drains or ditches. This stormwater can pick up pollutants on its journey, which may end up flowing onto our shorelines and into the waters of Puget Sound.

While you may not live near the shoreline, runoff from your property may make its way to the shore and into the ocean. There are actions you can take to lower pollutants that end up in the water as well as decrease runoff. Here are a few to get you started:

Maintain your car. Fixing car leaks not only keeps your car running well, but also keeps excess fluids from dripping on the road, which contributes pollutants to stormwater runoff.

Install a rain garden. Rain gardens add natural beauty to your property and treat polluted runoff at the same time. Maximize your rain garden's utility by directing water from impervious surfaces (e.g. your roof or driveway) into the rain garden.

Minimize impervious surfaces. Your driveway, roof, deck, and patio are all potential areas where stormwater could be contributing to runoff. You can minimize this potential by utilizing pervious materials, installing a green roof, or converting a paved patio to one with native vegetation.

Whidbey Island Conservation District, as well as Washington State University Extension – Island County, have great resources for implementing stormwater management techniques at your property and in your daily activities.

Make your beach Shore Friendly

If you live along the shoreline, there are actions you can take to preserve or restore natural habitat while also protecting your property. Now through April 2021, shoreline landowners are invited to apply for mini-grants through the Island County Shore Friendly program for actions that remove or prevent shoreline armoring.

Eligible activities include shoreline armor removal, soft shore protection, native vegetation planting, drainage improvements, and moving a house or septic system, when these actions are associated with either the removal or prevention of shoreline armoring. Mini-grant amounts range from \$500-\$5,000, depending on the eligible activity, and can be used for initial consultation, project design, permitting costs, or project implementation.

Grant funding is provided by Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Estuary and Salmon Restoration Program, and administered through Island County. For more information, visit: www.islandcountywa.gov/Health/DNR/Shore-Friendly/Pages/Home.aspx or contact Anna Toledo at a.toledo@islandcountywa.gov or 360-678-2349.

To learn more about the Island County Marine Resources Committee, visit www.islandcountymrc.org.

Make a Difference Column is coordinated by Whidbey Island Conservation District. View current and past articles at whidbeycd.org/make-a-difference-column.

Home for the Holidays

SHOP LOCAL THIS SEASON

GIFTS FOR THOSE YOU LOVE FROM THE ISLANDS YOU LOVE

Whidbey Camano ISLANDS WASHINGTON STATE, USA

THE SHORTEST DISTANCE TO FAR AWAY™

WHIDBEYCAMANOISLANDS.COM

Buy a Bowl to Help Fill a Bowl...

Take home a beautiful, locally handcrafted soup bowl from **Good Cheer Thrift Stores** for a minimum donation of \$20 and support **Good Cheer Food Bank**.

Our annual Empty Soup Bowl Night is via Zoom (meeting ID 882 451 3254) on Friday, November 20 from 6 to 7 p.m. Details at www.GoodCheer.org

Email your favorite soup recipe with produce from local farmstands and markets to carol@goodcheer.org so that we can share it with others.

Langley Good Cheer Thrift Store is open Wednesdays and Saturdays Noon to 5 p.m.
Clinton Good Cheer Thrift Store is open Tuesdays and Fridays Noon to 5 p.m.

Think of it as essential.

Get a flu vaccine.

KnockOutFlu.org

ISLAND COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH

