Puget Sound Restoration Fund


Olympia Oyster Restoration in Puget Sound

10-Year Goal:
Restore 100 acres of native oyster habitat in Puget Sound by 2020

Project Partners:

- Puget Sound Restoration Fund
- Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife
- Tribes
- NOAA
- The Nature Conservancy
- National Fish & Wildlife Foundation
- Commercial Shellfish Growers
- Washington Department of Natural Resources
- Tideland Owners and Community Groups
- Northwest Straits Commission (MRCs)
- University of Washington
- USDA (NRCS)
- US Navy

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Alongside multiple stakeholders, PSRF has embarked on a 10-year endeavor to rebuild dense, breeding populations of Olympia oysters in areas that supported core populations historically. Though Olympia oysters occur currently throughout their historic distribution, less than 4% of historic core populations remain in Puget Sound. Approximately 155 acres have been documented compared to 10,000 acres historically that supported dense assemblages of oysters. The purpose of restoring native oyster habitat in historic locations is to restore the ecosystem services that dense accumulations of living oysters once provided – including complex nearshore habitat, natural filtration and larval production.

Globally, "shellfish reefs are the most imperiled marine habitat on earth," according to The Nature Conservancy. The dramatic reduction of historic core populations in Puget Sound makes a compelling case for local action. In their current, low density aggregations, Olympia oysters do not provide habitat structure or nutrient mitigation benefits. When restored in specific areas, however, Olympia oyster beds can provide critical ecological services currently missing in those locales. To illustrate the importance of rebuilding efforts, the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation has designated Olympia oyster restoration in Puget Sound as one of its Keystone Species Initiatives.

Ecological Benefits:
The proposed project will enhance structured native oyster habitat in the lower intertidal, providing three dimensional, complex habitat attractive to fishes (including salmonids), invertebrates and other marine organisms. Restored beds will provide increased ecosystem services associated with larger assemblages of native oysters, including nutrient cycling, benthic-pelagic coupling and suspension feeding (see Coen and Luckenbach, 2000). To illustrate the ecological values associated with structured oyster beds, Jeff Cordell, at the UW Fisheries Research Institute, has conducted sampling at two native oyster enhancement sites in Puget Sound. Significantly greater total organisms and salmon prey were found on the enhanced sites as compared to the adjacent unstructured sites.

For more information, contact: Betsy Peabody, Puget Sound Restoration Fund, 206-780-6947 or Brian Allen, 360-280-7410 or go to www.restorationfund.org/projects/olympiaoyster