



Re-imagining Puget Sound's Kelp Highway

AN EXPEDITION TO SPOTLIGHT KELP AS A VITAL PART OF OUR MARINE WATERS

In July 2021, Puget Sound Restoration Fund (PSRF) will launch a 7-day Kelp Expedition to re-explore and chronicle a stretch of the Kelp Highway in Puget Sound, Washington. An eclectic crew of scientists and kelp enthusiasts will begin the science-based expedition in the Strait of Juan de Fuca and the San Juan Islands and journey to Olympia in southern Puget Sound.

Why Kelp?

Underwater kelp forests are a key feature of our seascape. Historically, they grew densely along the west coast of the Americas, supporting marine life and human migration following the retreat of the last glacier.¹ Teeming with abundance, these living, food-generating structures enabled the development of tribal settlements, indigenous cultures, and coastal communities over time.

Kelp forests are one of the most productive habitats on the planet – and we are among the beneficiaries. Fisheries that humans depend on around the world, including here in Puget Sound, are powered by kelp carbon that works its way through the food web. Kelp forests that hug our shores are more than just habitat; they are lifelines – for crab, salmon, orcas, and us.

proposed 7-DAY ROUTE

The expedition will begin in two locations – in the Strait of Juan de Fuca at Port Crescent (1), and in the San Juan Islands (1). The two groups will converge in Sequim Bay (2) after the northern group visits Smith Island. The crew will then proceed to Port Townsend (3), Point Hannon (4), Suquamish (5), Quarters Harbor (6), and Olympia (7), Washington's state capital.



¹Sources: <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/358/6363/592> and <https://blog.education.nationalgeographic.org/2017/11/08/did-the-first-americans-take-a-ride-on-the-kelp-highway/>

Why Now?

In 2020, a Puget Sound Kelp Conservation and Recovery Plan was completed, with over 15 tribes, agencies, NGOs, and other entities signing onto a shared vision for thriving kelp forests in Puget Sound.

A clear finding of the Plan is that bull kelp forests have declined in both Central and South Puget Sound. These losses have a significant bearing on the health of our communities and the marine ecosystems on which we depend.

- For out-migrating salmon, the loss of marine connectivity imperils their journey from natal stream to open ocean.
- For orcas, declining salmon populations affect their survival as a species.
- For our communities, economies based on fisheries and other natural resources falter when underlying marine ecosystems become frayed.

Why an Expedition?

To build support for kelp conservation and recovery, we need to connect the dots between KELP and US. Our communities and cultures have been nurtured by healthy marine systems for a long time. **When a defining and foundational piece of local abundance begins to unravel, we need to join hands and take a leap toward collective action.**

A boat-based expedition creates a high-visibility communication campaign to illuminate the importance of kelp to marine and human food webs, and call attention to documented losses and the need for actions.

CORE COLLABORATORS INCLUDE:

Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe • Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe • Samish Indian Nation • Squaxin Island Tribe
NOAA • Washington Department of Natural Resources • Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife
Northwest Straits Commission • Marine Agronomics • The Pew Charitable Trusts

Objectives of the expedition meld science and policy with indigenous knowledge and engagement, including:

- Map current kelp distribution
- Establish new kelp index sites
- Conduct underwater biodiversity surveys
- Survey plant health and wildlife at the surface
- Collect samples
- Conduct fishing surveys – where kelp still exists and where it no longer exists
- Meet with Tribes and communities to learn, share food and develop actions
- Identify high-priority sites and strategies for conservation and restoration
- Prioritize and adopt specific actions identified in the *Puget Sound Kelp Conservation and Recovery Plan*
- Develop films, maps, shoreline drawings, posters, web-based graphics, and other materials to create a living portrait of human/kelp connections to engage people more broadly in conservation and recovery actions



credit: Adam Obazza

FOR MORE, CONTACT:
Betsy Peabody
betsy@restorationfund.org
206-909-3946
restorationfund.org



PUGET SOUND
RESTORATION FUND