



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 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 ROUTE & DATES

The expedition will begin in the Strait of Juan de Fuca at Freshwater Bay (1). We will then explore vibrant kelp beds at Smith & Minor Islands Aquatic Reserve and North Beach near Port Townsend (2). Then onwards to sites at Edmonds (3), Doe-Kag-Wats/Jefferson Head (4) and the Seattle waterfront (5), before visiting waters off Squaxin Island (6), the Nisqually Reach Aquatic Reserve and Olympia (7), Washington's state capital. **Proposed dates: July 15–23**

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 multi-pronged 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:

Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission • 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, conservation, restoration, indigenous knowledge and engagement, including:

- Map current kelp distribution
- Establish new kelp index sites
- Conduct underwater biodiversity surveys
- Survey plant health 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 celebrate kelp
- Identify high-priority sites and strategies for conservation and restoration
- Accelerate 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



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