



HENDERSON INLET & NISQUALLY REACH

news

July 2010

EASY ACTIONS FOR WATER



- | **Inspect septic systems and pump tanks regularly.**
- | **Pick up pet waste with a bag – both in the yard and in public places – and place it in the trash.**
- | **Take cars to a commercial car wash, where water is handled properly.**
- | **Fix car leaks, or place cardboard under the car in the short term to catch leaking oil or fluids.**
- | **Use compost instead of fertilizers to grow a healthy lawn and garden.**

Restoration of Henderson Inlet and Nisqually Reach - It Can Happen!

With every splash upon an oar, with every oyster harvested on a serene day, with every beautiful view that leaves us breathless, Puget Sound begs us to not be complacent about its future. Here in the Henderson Inlet - Nisqually Reach region, we've heard the call and have good news to report. Improvements in water quality in northern Henderson Inlet have enabled the state Department of Health to reopen 240 acres of shellfish-growing tidelands for harvest without weather restrictions.



Henderson Inlet at the mouth of Woodland Creek

These improvements are due largely to the homeowners, local governments, state agencies and other organizations that have been working within the framework of the Henderson Inlet - Nisqually Reach Shellfish Protection District. The district establishes and funds projects to improve water quality in Henderson Inlet and Nisqually Reach.

The shellfish protection district began as two separate districts in 2001 under a much different scenario: back then, the state Department of Health had closed or restricted shellfish harvesting along the

two inlets due to unacceptably high levels of fecal coliform bacteria, the latest in a series of restrictions that began in 1984. The department's actions triggered a state law that required Thurston County to create two shellfish protection districts, which later merged into one entity. Funding for the shellfish protection district comes from the Thurston Conservation District, grants, county and city resources, as well as the taxpaying public.

Although the quality of water in northern Henderson Inlet has improved remarkably, we must remain vigilant. Water quality can degrade easily

if our commitment ebbs, and much work still remains. More than 400 acres of the southern inlet are still either prohibited for harvesting shellfish or restricted when it rains.

This publication shares news on how the shellfish protection district community is working to ensure the waters of Henderson Inlet and Nisqually Reach are safe – whether residents are digging clams, gathering oysters, playing in the surf or simply immersed in the view of south Puget Sound.



THURSTON COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES, ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH DIVISION

Henderson Septic System Program a Success

Hats off to Henderson Watershed homeowners! The first three years of the Henderson Watershed Protection Area Septic System Operation and Maintenance Program have been successful. Most homeowners have completed inspections of their septic systems and performed the needed maintenance and repairs. Many owners attended a workshop and became certified to inspect their own septic systems; others hired a septic professional to do the job.

There are now 6,127 parcels in the program. Almost 80 percent of the homeowners have been issued operational certificates as a result of showing that their systems are in good working order.

More than 60 septic tanks have been replaced due to cracks, leaks and damage beyond repair. Sixty-two systems have been repaired and several sand filters and mounds have been rebuilt.

Hundreds of minor repairs have also been accomplished. At the top of the list for minor repairs is the repair or replacement of septic tank baffles.



Septic system maintenance courtesy Puget Sound Starts Here

Baffle damage is common due to the corrosive nature of sewage and sewer gas in the tank. The most common maintenance item has been septic tank pumping.

About 90 percent of the septic systems in the program are gravity, pressure, mound or Glendon septic systems. Owners of these systems can participate in a 5-hour training workshop and become certified to do their own system inspections ... and 1,623 owners have done just that!

The \$50 riser rebate program has been very popular! Access risers for the septic tank makes doing the inspection every three years so much easier, and without any digging. Total number of risers installed ... a whopping 1,020!

Financial assistance has been available to low-income property owners. Small grants (less than \$500 each) for inspections, pumping and minor repairs have been given to 71 owners. Eleven owners have received low-interest loans and grants to repair failing systems.

Together, we are making a difference!

Septic Program May Head to Nisqually Reach

Are septic systems contributing to water quality problems in Nisqually Reach? Previous water quality studies show they are.

Between 1994 and 1999, the Thurston County Public Health and Social Services Department dye tested septic systems

after 1,000 acres of tidelands were restricted for shellfish harvesting. More than one in four systems tested were failing, in other words, sewage was pooling in the yard or flowing to the beach.

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PET WASTE AWARENESS

Manure from dogs and other pets contains excess nutrients and disease-carrying pathogens that can harm humans and wildlife.

For the past five years, the Pacific Shellfish Institute (PSI) has conducted a pet waste education campaign within the Henderson Inlet - Nisqually Reach Shellfish Protection District.

With funding from Thurston County, Pacific Shellfish Institute has distributed about 20,000 "Don't Let Your Pet Pollute!" brochures to pet stores and veterinary offices and at community events in Thurston County. This message is also displayed on bus signs for two months of the year, and a banner is displayed prior to the Pet Parade and other events.

PSI staff also uses a dog mascot named "Scoop Doo" to spread the message at local events.



"Through funding received from the Thurston Conservation District, grants, county and city resources as well as the taxpaying public, Henderson Inlet and Nisqually Reach are showing surprising improvements. This is due to implementation of many of the recommendations made by the shellfish protection district stakeholders group, which were fairly and efficiently implemented by the government and embraced by the public."

- Tris Carlson, chairman, combined shellfish protection district stakeholders group.

MAKE CLEAR CHOICES FOR CLEAN WATER



The Clear Choices for Clean Water program provides generous incentives to encourage people to take simple actions to protect water resources. Items such as free native plants selected for your particular growing conditions, dog-leash bag dispensers, slow-release fertilizers and coupons for septic system pumping help you make and keep commitments to protect Puget Sound.

We have enrolled 169 households in the Henderson and Nisqually watersheds to date. Join your neighbors to protect your family's health and leave a legacy of clean water for the future! Call Thurston County Public Health at (360) 867-2577 or the Thurston Conservation District at (360) 754-3588 ext. 136 or e-mail johnsoj@co.thurston.wa.us.

So What Made the Difference?

One word sums up the reason behind the accomplishments made by the shellfish protection district thus far: teamwork. Homeowners, local governments, state agencies and organizations have set a common course toward cleaner water in Henderson Inlet and Nisqually Reach.

- Homeowners in the Henderson Watershed have been diligently inspecting septic systems and making repairs as part of Thurston County's septic system operation and maintenance program.

- Working with the Thurston Conservation District, hobby farmers and livestock owners have improved land-management practices to keep manure out of feeder streams and the inlet.

- Homeowners have become more aware of the need to pick up pet waste, thanks largely to a 5-year effort by the Pacific Shellfish Institute.

- Long-standing organizations such as the Nisqually River Council and the Puget Sound Restoration Fund have contributed expertise, funding and projects to help meet the shellfish protection district's goals.



Shellfish farm volunteers, courtesy Robert Kangas

- The City of Lacey has protected roughly 750 acres along the Woodland Creek corridor through required shoreline buffers, zoning requirements and land acquisitions. Similar efforts by Thurston County have protected an additional 120 acres along the Woodland Creek corridor.

- The City of Lacey also invested millions of dollars on major stormwater-control projects so stormwater that once dumped directly into Woodland Creek – the main source of freshwater entering the inlet – is treated and stored before it's released. The largest project

was construction of the College Regional Stormwater Facility, which collects and treats stormwater for 430 acres in Lacey, including St. Martin's College and Lacey's central business district.

- Thurston County has launched two projects to reduce the amount of fecal coliform bacteria that enters Henderson Inlet from Woodland Creek. The county has applied for state and federal funding to convert septic systems to municipal sewer for 136 residences in Woodland Creek Estates and Covington Place. The county is also repairing drywells and installing rain gardens in the Tanglewilde neighborhood to improve infiltration on-site so less polluted stormwater runoff flows directly into Woodland Creek.

IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT SHELLFISH

For some of us, shellfish eating and harvesting is a way of life; for others an occasional recreation. Some people get no closer to shellfish than seeing an item on a menu.

However, the health of the environment where shellfish grow ultimately affects us all. If pollution levels are too high to produce consumable shellfish, then we're not only hurting shellfish growers, we're degrading the very water that makes our region such a desirable place to live.



Wading in Puget Sound, courtesy Tex Batmart, flickr.com

Local Organizations Make a Splash

Community Shellfish Farm

If you've ever slurped Pacific Oysters, you've had a tasty reminder why it's so important to protect the quality of water in Henderson Inlet. Thousands of these oysters are planted and harvested at the Henderson Inlet Community Shellfish Farm, a project launched by the Puget Sound Restoration Fund and the Pacific Shellfish Growers Association in 2002 to raise awareness about pollution problems in the inlet. The oysters are sold to residents, the Olympia Seafood Company and Elliott's Oyster House in Seattle. A dozen free oysters are available to homeowners within the Henderson Watershed who bring their septic inspection certificates to Olympia Seafood Company.

Thanks to the work and generous contributions of many, the community shellfish farm is now located on approved ground. Visit www.restorationfund.org or call (206) 780-6947.

Thurston Conservation District

The Thurston Conservation District provides technical assistance to help farmers and livestock owners improve land-management practices for the benefit of the environment. Since 1995, the conservation district has offered a cost-share program for farmers within the shellfish protection district for projects that help improve and protect water quality. Thus far, the conservation district has distributed \$65,118 for 16 projects in the shellfish protection district. In many cases, participants have contributed more than the minimum cost match. Projects include manure storage sheds, a composting facility, confinement and heavy-use areas, a grass swale and roof runoff systems. Visit www.thurstoncd.com or call (360) 754-3588.

Informing the Next Generation

- **The Nisqually River Education Project:** The Nisqually River Education Project (NREP) is one of the main programs of the Nisqually River Council (described on the right side of this page). On behalf of the shellfish protection district, the NREP works with students and teachers at River Ridge High School in Lacey and Columbia Crest Elementary School in Ashford (near Mount Rainier Park) to monitor local streams and rivers for the benefit of shellfish beds downstream. Adults, too, can receive training through the Nisqually River Council's "Stream Stewards" program. Participants complete a rigorous 6-week course to become qualified as fisheries and riparian watchers and site-specific reporters on the Nisqually River and its tributaries. Visit nisquallyriver.org or call (360) 438-8715.



- **South Sound GREEN:** Kids explore the beach and touch marine creatures through South Sound GREEN's nearshore-marine education program. Since 2005, South Sound GREEN has taken more than 2,500 students to experience Puget Sound shorelines in the Henderson Inlet and Nisqually Reach watersheds. Participating classes learn about nearshore/marine habitats and protecting water quality. Students also have an opportunity to sign the "Scoopy Doo" pet-waste pledge, promising to pick up pet waste at their homes (see "Pet Waste Awareness" on the next page). Call (360) 754-3588, ext. 108 or e-mail ssgreen@thurstoncd.com.

QUICK PICS



Slurping oysters, courtesy Robert Kangas



Nisqually River Education Project students

NISQUALLY RIVER COUNCIL

The Nisqually River Council has been the backbone of watershed cooperation and organization for 23 years.

The council was created by legislative mandate and is comprised of representatives of the Nisqually Tribe; state and federal agencies; Joint Base Lewis-McChord; Lewis, Thurston and Pierce counties; the cities of Yelm, Eatonville and Roy; and local citizens. The council serves as a clearinghouse for prioritizing salmon enhancement projects and is the final authority for approval while working very closely with the Nisqually Tribe Chinook Salmon Recovery Team.

News from the State Dept. of Health

The Washington State Department of Health monitors water quality monthly at a network of sampling stations in Henderson Inlet and Nisqually Reach. Over the past year, the department has upgraded harvest classifications in both areas due to improved water quality conditions.

Henderson Inlet

For the first time since the mid-eighties, the Department of Health in January 2010 was able to lift harvest restrictions on most shellfish growing areas in Henderson Inlet. The areas had been off-limits to harvesting for five days after rainfall of one inch or more. The southern part of the bay remains prohibited to harvesting due to pollution concerns from Woodland Creek.

Nisqually Reach

In October 2009, the Department of Health lifted harvesting restrictions on 12 acres of the Nisqually Reach shellfish growing area. The area is located where McAllister Creek enters Puget Sound just west of the Nisqually flats. This is the fourth and final upgrade in classification of 1,000 acres that were initially downgraded in 1992.

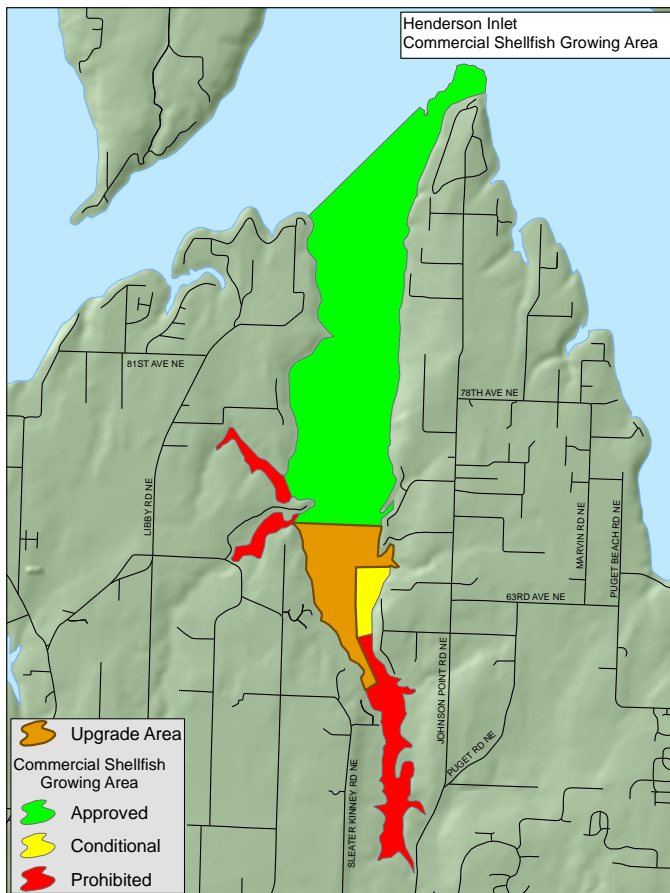
While marine water quality is improving in most of the growing area, shellfish harvesting is prohibited in portions of the area due to elevated fecal coliform levels in the shoreline drainages.

WORK REMAINS

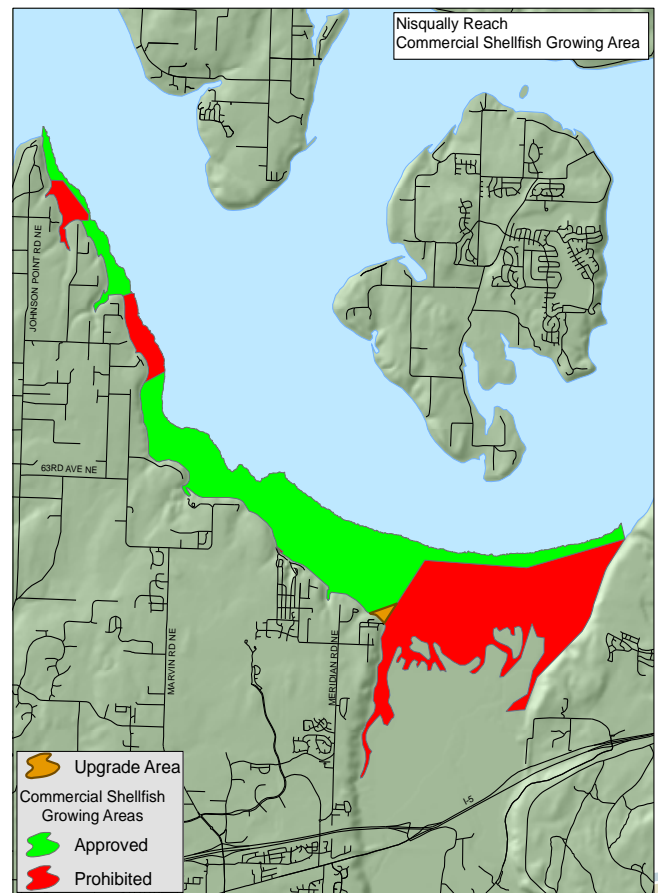
Many actions featured in this newsletter also advance broader cleanup plans by the state Department of Ecology. Ecology was required under the federal Clean Water Act to write the plans, commonly known as "TMDLs," because Henderson Inlet and the Nisqually River are listed on the state's list of impaired water bodies. (TMDL stands for "Total Maximum Daily Load.")

Ecology will continue to coordinate efforts to reduce fecal coliform in these watersheds. Reductions are needed for the Nisqually Watershed by 2015 and Henderson Watershed by 2018.

Henderson Inlet Upgrades



Nisqually Reach Upgrades





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Shellfish Protection District News

Produced by Thurston County Public
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Septic Program May Head to Nisqually Reach...continued

In 2006 and 2007, septic systems along a 2-mile stretch of shoreline near Mill Bight were tested after the state Department of Health reported numerous drainage pipes discharging fecal contaminated water to the beach. One in three systems tested were failing. While all of those failing systems were repaired, many have never been tested. Pollution projects throughout Puget Sound have shown that "fix it and forget it" doesn't last.

A stakeholder committee, appointed by the Thurston County Board of Health, is now working to develop a proposal

to help improve water quality all along the Nisqually Reach. The committee is made up of property owners, homeowners associations, shellfish growers, business owners, realtors, developers, septic professionals, the Nisqually Tribe, and local and state government representatives.

The advisory committee met for the first time in March 2010 and plans to have a draft proposal by September. Public meetings will then be held to talk about water quality issues and details of a draft proposal.

The success of any program depends on the support of people who will live with it and implement it, so your concerns and perspectives are VERY important to us.

You can follow the committee's progress on www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/ehrp/nisqually.html. You can also e-mail environmental_health@co.thurston.wa.us to place your name on the project e-mail list. Watch for mailings and public announcements soon!