



NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release – March 9, 2001

01-002

Contacts: Tim Ransom, Outreach Coordinator, (360) 407-7323
Denise Clifford, Public Information Manager, (360) 407-7312, Pager: (360) 534-4161

STRATEGY TO RESTORE SHELLFISH BEDS IN THURSTON COUNTY RELEASED TODAY

OLYMPIA – The Henderson Inlet/Nisqually Reach Closure Response Team today released its proposed strategy to restore two shellfish growing areas in Thurston County and is seeking concurrence by the state and local agencies, tribes, and citizen groups responsible for carrying out the strategy.

Last fall, the state Department of Health announced downgrades that further restrict shellfish harvesting in Henderson Inlet and the Nisqually Reach after monitoring showed declines in water quality from contamination that can render shellfish unsafe to eat.

The Puget Sound Management Plan – the state’s overall strategy for protecting Puget Sound and its natural resources – calls for swift, concerted action when a shellfish area downgrade occurs. Within 30 days of a downgrade a closure response team of state, local and tribal agencies, shellfish growers and citizens groups is convened to develop a strategy to restore water quality and “reclaim” the area for harvesting. In addition, state law requires the county where the shellfish beds are located to form a shellfish protection district within 180 days of a downgrade and carry out programs to protect water quality in the affected areas.

The Response Strategy for Shellfish Growing Area Downgrades in Henderson Inlet and The Nisqually Reach is the result of the Shellfish Closure Response Team’s effort since the downgrades were announced. The strategy proposal outlines aggressive actions designed to reverse the serious decline in water quality at both shellfish growing areas. The focus of the strategy is to identify and reduce pollution from all sources, especially from failing on-site sewage systems, poor agricultural practices, and stormwater runoff.

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Success of the strategy will depend on the cooperation and commitment of the state departments of

Ecology, Health, and Transportation and the Puget Sound Water Quality Action Team, Thurston County, the cities of Lacey and Olympia, the Nisqually Tribe, Thurston Conservation District, community and educational organizations and watershed residents.

As the strategy is being released, Thurston County is proceeding with efforts to establish the required shellfish protection district. The county has begun a process to inform watershed residents about the pollution problems and engage them in developing solutions. The county is asking for feedback on the decisions it must make about district boundaries, funding options, and programs needed once the district is created. The resulting decisions will become part of the *Response Strategy for Shellfish Growing Area Downgrades in Henderson Inlet and The Nisqually Reach*.

“We are impressed with the way in which the shellfish closure response team addressed the urgent and difficult issues in both of these watersheds,” said Nancy McKay, chair of the Puget Sound Water Quality Action Team. McKay said she hopes that the groups responsible for carrying out this response strategy – including people living in the Henderson and Nisqually watersheds – will commit themselves to this effort to ensure swift and sure results.

To receive a copy of the *Response Strategy for Shellfish Growing Area Downgrades in Henderson Inlet and The Nisqually Reach*, contact Tim Ransom at the Puget Sound Water Quality Action Team, (360) 407-7323 or 1-800-54-SOUND, or Sue Davis at Thurston County, 360-754-4111 (Ext. 7316). For more information on Thurston County’s efforts to form a shellfish protection district, contact Sue Davis at (360) 754-4111 (Ext. 7316) or Art Starry at (360) 786-5456.

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