

William O'Leary built a home in Grays Harbor in 1848. O'Leary subsisted off the property he settled for many years, enjoying the plentiful salmon and other fish he caught from the creek which bears his name, fresh game from the surrounding woods and potatoes that he planted in the fertile soil next to his cabin. Only a short 150 years later, this same area of bounty is now on the EPA 303(d) list for not meeting water quality standards. The salmon which once abounded are soon to be listed as threatened and/or endangered. What will the next 150 years bring to our Harbor? Will we see the same or greater decline? Our present course suggests that the Estuary will be lost in an even shorter time, if our present practices continue.



The Grays Harbor Estuary

One Hundred and Fifty Years Later

EPA 303(d) Listing

Problem:

Section 303(d) of the 1972 federal Clean Water Act requires states to identify impaired and threatened waterbodies and directs them to develop a priority ranking and establish total maximum daily loads (TMDL) in accordance with the ranking. The TMDL includes an analysis of how much pollution a water body can receive from all pollution sources and still remain healthy for its intended uses, such as fishing and swimming. The Grays Harbor Estuary has flunked these basic water quality standards.

Consequences:

- Existing residents, businesses and industries will be severely limited in the amount of waste that can be produced or handled by the systems now in place.
- Homeowners may face septic repairs and replacements.
- Sewer treatment plants may have to pass on the costs of tremendous repair bills to their rate payers.
- Industry may have to reconsider how they do business on the Harbor.

Responsible development practices suggest that the TMDL studies and analysis should be implemented before further risks to the health of the Estuary are allowed.

Wetland Degradation

Problem:

30% of the available wetlands of the Grays Harbor Estuary have already been filled and converted by development.

Consequences:

- Increased area flooding and loss of water storage.
- Loss of critical fish and wildlife habitat..



- Water quality suffers as the ability to filter out pollution is impaired.

Each portion of wetland that remains has increased in importance. As the "kidneys" of the water process, wetlands serve to cleanse the water that enters them.

ESA Potential Listings

Problem:

The State of Washington faces the prospect of loss of our salmon fisheries if drastic cooperative measures are not taken. Several species of salmonids are candidates for listing under the Endangered Species Act and Grays Harbor is not exempt from the impacts of such listings. The crisis has been caused in part by the lack of coordinated good management practices by agencies that regulate and permit activities within the wetlands and along the shorelines of our State.

Consequences:

- Possibility of the loss of fishing as a critical economic force.
- Restrictions on water use.
- Lack of local decision-making control.
- Change in agricultural practices and water rights use.

Of all the fish that are taken by both commercial and sport fishermen 75% spend part of their life-cycle in estuaries. Estuaries like Grays Harbor provide a unique environment of both fresh and saltwater where food supplies are rich and waters are conducive to a successful early life-cycle.

Development Impacts

Problem:

Salmon and other species have suffered because of human intrusion into the environment with little regard for their sensitive habitat needs. The citizens of our State have given a high priority to saving our salmon. However, development practices are endangering the foundation upon which the salmon

need to survive. The shoreline habitat that runs parallel to State Route 105 (Westport Highway) is an excellent example of prime salmon habitat. The original proposal by the City of Aberdeen and Department of Corrections to lay water, sewer and gas line feeds along 5-1/2 miles of highway and under six salmon bearing creeks, affecting acres of rare estuarine habitat was contrary to the goals of the salmon restoration policy. FOGH fought hard to protect our salmon-bearing creeks along the shoreline and negotiated a settlement which tucked the services under the shoulders of the roadway thus reducing the area affected. Inappropriate development is a risk that is too great for the citizens of this State to bare.

Consequences:

- Loss of prime wetlands habitat.
- Disturbance of salmon-bearing streams.
- Overload of sewer treatment plant with possible raw sewage pollution in the bay and obnoxious odors along the shoreline.
- Increased high-density and/or non-water dependent industrial development along the shorelines

If the fishing industries are further impacted because of inappropriate siting of development projects such as the prison on Stafford Creek or the wetland golf resort called Links At Half Moon Bay, Grays Harbor will suffer a great economic and social loss.

When People Care

If we collectively voice our concerns and work together, we can turn the health of the Harbor around and enjoy once again the Bounty from the Bay and the Splendor of the Ocean.

