



NEWS RELEASE

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Helicopters Pull Creosote Logs from Dungeness Spit Wildlife Refuge

*Lands Commissioner Sutherland, dignitaries laud partnerships,
environmental benefits in removal of about 150 toxic tons*

OLYMPIA – After decades, Dungeness Spit Wildlife Refuge is finally cleaned of creosote and toxic-laden debris, announced Commissioner of Public Lands Doug Sutherland at a gathering of dignitaries and observers as they watched helicopter flights remove 150 tons of creosote logs for safe disposal.

Large accumulations of creosote logs were strewn across beaches throughout the federal wildlife refuge. A narrow window provided the opportunity to carry out the work during a time when the area and its wildlife could be disturbed without undue harm. Due to the quantity of toxic debris and the presence of protected birds, salmon and shellfish, this key ecological site was a high priority for creosote removal. The effort was coordinated with the Governor's Puget Sound Initiative 2006 to clean up Puget Sound by 2020.

"Each and every one of us has a vested interest in the long-term health of the Puget Sound," said Sutherland. "A healthy food chain depends on clean aquatic systems that support aquatic plant life, fish, shellfish, other sea creatures, and the health of the human species, too. And so we will continue to rely on partnerships such as this to making headway in accomplishing cleanups throughout the rest of the Sound, and help prevent further creosote contamination of this irreplaceable aquatic ecosystem."

Creosote is a toxic chemical commonly that has been used as a wood preservative for more than a century. It acts as a pesticide, herbicide and fungicide—used widely in both dry land and marine applications. Recent studies have shown that creosote compounds are toxic and carcinogenic to a variety of organisms. Use in wood products may result in acute and chronic adverse impacts to the aquatic environment. The toxic debris from Dungeness Spit will be removed to a contained upland site.

Partners, young work crews, volunteers essential

This project has depended upon the United States Fish and Wildlife Service that attained permits, provided volunteers and shuttled workers throughout the refuge; the Department of Ecology that provided Coastal Protection Fund money (attained from oil spill fines); and the Northwest Straits Commission that provided additional funding.

Lew Moore, Director, Northwest Straits Commission said: "It's a big concern that our shorelines and wildlife refuges are littered with hazardous materials such as creosote wood debris. We are pleased to work with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and Washington Department of Natural Resources to remove creosote debris that has accumulated for decades."

"This project represents an important milestone in protecting and restoring the greater Puget Sound / Hood Canal ecosystem," said Ecology Director Jay Manning. "We congratulate DNR for quickly mobilizing this project to help prevent toxic substances from spoiling our state's amazing inland sea."

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“We are very grateful to have this opportunity to accomplish this cleanup,” said Kevin Ryan, Project Leader for the Washington Maritime National Wildlife Refuge Complex. “We have had this goal for years, but now the time is right. I think that with tight funding, we all have had to work together to get these important projects done.”

Washington’s Department of Natural Resources has handled the logistics and provided Restoration Funds for planning, coordination and additional project funding. And the WSU County Beachwatchers have helped find, mark and prepare treated logs and wood, and the S’Klallam Tribe modified activities to support the effort in the area.

Ron Allen, Tribal Chair, Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe, said: “We really appreciate the partnership with DNR to clean up our aquatic lands and restore them to environmentally healthy conditions.”

The DNR and State Fish and Wildlife’s Cooperative ‘Washington Conservation Corps’ Program has pulled together crews based in Okanogan, Skagit, King, & Thurston counties to work for four days on hauling and positioning the toxic-laden logs and debris at Dungeness and Graveyard Spits.

“The job wouldn’t have gotten done without these 27 able young adults from the WCC, who have moved the bulk of the materials into place for helicopter removal,” said Sutherland. “Many of them are back today as ground crew to set the cables for the helicopter as it picks up the logs for flight to a landing—a challenging job. I really appreciate their effort.”

Leading by example

In 2002, the Whatcom Marine Resources Committee and several partners showed that tons of creosote on the state’s shorelines could be safely and efficiently removed. Now, working with many partners, more than 500 tons of creosote debris have been removed in several counties.

Gov. Chris Gregoire has initiated a long-term effort to help protect and restore Puget Sound, and has created the Puget Sound Partnership, a public-private partnership tasked with developing an aggressive, 13-year plan to solve Puget Sound’s most vexing environmental problems. The Partnership is made up of business, tribal, environmental and government leaders. They will present recommendations to the Governor in November. In the 2006 legislative session, Gov. Gregoire and the Legislature earmarked \$2 million for DNR to use in removing creosote logs from our marine waters.

Steward of state-owned aquatic lands

DNR, led by the Commissioner of Public Lands, manages 2.4 million acres of state-owned aquatic (mostly submerged) lands as a public trust. Aquatic lands are protected by DNR for all the people of Washington. Revenue is generated from the sale of renewable resources such as geoduck and other shellfish, and leases of marinas and other buildings on the aquatic lands. This revenue is used to protect the health and productivity of aquatic resources, and help fund local projects that create public access to aquatic lands. DNR and its many partners began creosote removal projects in 2004.

Doug Sutherland is the 12th Commissioner of Public Lands since statehood in 1889.

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