

Task force seeks to return hatchery fish to Case Inlet

By Kirk Boxleitner

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The Port of Grapeview received an update from the Case Inlet Fisheries Task Force on its progress during the port commissioners' Aug. 17 meeting.

Brad Pomroy, facilitator for the fisheries group, described how the task force was formed between late 2020 to early 2021 by Grapeview Commissioner Jean Farmer and Port of Allyn Commissioner Ted Jackson in response to worries from residents about diminishing salmon runs in the area.

According to Pomroy, state Rep. Dan Griffey, R-Allyn, was on a call with the group when the salmon topic surfaced, and Griffey suggested they create a task force to assess the conditions and offer recommendations. Pomroy and two others were the first members of the panel, volunteering during that call,

and several others have joined the effort since, while additional volunteers have offered to contribute time and talents, including people with backgrounds in branding, marketing and communications.

Pomroy, who hopes to add representatives from Harstine Island, and Kit-sap and Pierce counties, praised what the volunteers have shared so far as "very insightful" and predicted their work would "bring validity, community engagement and presence" to the task force's efforts.

"I could not be more impressed with the people who have come together to support this important work," Pomroy said. "Everyone is engaged and excited about the impact we can have."

When reviewing what the task force has accomplished, Pomroy said they spent the start of the year on education, ensuring they understood the

stakeholders, potential benefits, roadblocks and options, before they agreed to focus on potential benefits:

- Improving recreational fishing in Case Inlet.
- Economic development for the communities surrounding Case Inlet.
- Ecological and environmental improvements when salmon are restored to the area.
- Food for the southern resident orca population and "opportunities for generations to enjoy this incredible gift."

The task force decided its best course of action was to pursue investment in the Coulter Creek Hatchery, in North Bay, to support the release of hatchery chinook into Case Inlet, Pomroy said.

Pomroy noted that, until 2001, the state Department of Fish and Wildlife released 1 million chinook from that hatchery annually, but while the hatchery remains in operation and now raises

2 million fish each spring, all of those fish are transported to the Deschutes River system in Tumwater.

"We initially embarked on a letter-writing campaign to the Department of Fish and Wildlife commissioners," Pomroy said. "So far, their response has been favorable, in that they are open to working with us to pursue viable options."

Since then, the task force has connected with a lobbyist for sportfishermen throughout the Northwest who suggested a course of action that Pomroy said the group now needs to review.

"Essentially, we need to garner support from the Port of Grapeview and the Port of Allyn, meet with members from local tribes to ask for their support, and further engage our local representatives to help us with the cause," Pomroy said. "More to come, as we make additional progress."

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