

Grapeview talks fisheries, restroom economics

By Kirk Boxleitner

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Port of Grapeview commissioners voted in Mike Blaisdell as president, and Art Whitson as secretary and public records officer at their meeting Jan. 17.

Brad Pomroy, with the Case Inlet Fisheries Task Force, said members met that morning for their first meeting of 2023. Pomroy noted that over the preceding three weeks, Coulter Creek is up and running, and is raising fry salmon for release this coming year. He added that the Department of Fish and Wildlife has been funding work at Coulter Creek.

"They've replaced all of the bird netting with a long-term solution there," Pomroy said. "They spent probably a month or more putting in pilings and new netting over the ponds. They've also resurfaced the ponds, all of this before they started running again."

Pomroy said the task force is optimistic that Fish and Wildlife "sees a future for Coulter Creek," even though "we don't know what that future looks like."

Among the task force's goals, Pomroy said, would be to return to the practice of releasing fry salmon "from that hatchery, and have the capacity to receive returning fish as well."

Pomroy said "from the early 1990s to the early 2000s ... we had very healthy runs of salmon here in Case Inlet."

Task force members agreed they need to attend a Fish and Wildlife meeting, Pomroy said, and during its public comment portion, "learn more about what the Department of Fish and Wildlife plans for the future of Coulter Creek. Is it really just continuing to raise juvenile salmon for release elsewhere, as they're doing today? Or do they see it as more of a full-fledged hatchery, where they can do everything from release to recapture?"

Such a meeting would be an opportunity for the task force to inform Fish and Wildlife of its own plans, Pomroy said, and about the task force's dealings with the Squaxin Island Tribe.

Pomroy also emphasized the importance of "either building or becoming a member of a consortium of like-minded bodies," citing "several entities around South Sound that are also focused on increasing salmon populations."

Pomroy said partnerships would give the task force increased credibility, and perhaps even a measure of influence over Fish and Wildlife decisions.

Pomroy acknowledged the need to update the task force's website, so it can refer such prospective partners to an up-to-date source of information.

Commissioner Jean Farmer suggested arranging field trips of the relevant areas for her fellow commissioners, and Pomroy agreed it would be useful for them and the new members of the port's Strategic Planning Advisory Committee. He further

mentioned Port of Allyn Commissioner Ted Jackson as someone whose contacts could facilitate such outings.

"Now is the ideal time, because both of those hatcheries are up and running, and preparing for a release later this spring or early summer," said Pomroy, who pledged to contact Jackson about arranging such excursions.

Bob Pastore credited his study of those who used the port's restrooms in 2022 to the port's managing official, Amanda Montgomery, for downloading that data from the restroom locks Jan. 1.

"When someone puts in a code, or uses their key fob, it's recorded," said Pastore, who counted and categorized the number of times people entered the restrooms, including how many times janitorial staff and port personnel went into the restrooms to inspect them, and how many daily users and annual pass users used them.

"Taylor Shellfish, by far, is the heaviest user," Pastore said. "They used it 230 days a year. They did 230 launches a year. They were in the area 230 times. There's only 250 work days, and they don't work weekends."

Pastore said the data was helpful when talking to the Economic Development Council of Mason County, as he cited it as evidence that Taylor Shellfish qualifies as a "key generator of economics in the county."