

Case Inlet Fisheries Task Force reports progress

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Jim Hanson, adviser to the Case Inlet Fisheries Task Force, gave Port of Grapeview commissioners an update July 19, starting with the task force's meeting with representatives of the Squaxin Island Tribe on July 15.

The meeting's attendees also included the task force's group facilitator Brad Pomroy and biologist adviser Mark LaRiviere, plus Carl Burke, an outside adviser and lobbyist for the Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association.

Hanson described Burke as a

30-year veteran in the field, who's been "extremely helpful to our endeavors."

Task force members and Burke met with Joseph Peters and Scott Steltzner of the Squaxin Island Tribe's Natural Resources Department. Hanson described them as the task force's "main contacts in support of what we're trying to accomplish."

According to Hanson, the group's priority remains the completion of the Tumwater facility, so the number of chinook salmon to be reared "will significantly rise," affording "an opportunity to wean some of the fry off the Tumwater facility, to be released on Coulter Creek."

Hanson said the next step toward this goal involves "building a coalition of a number of industry entities," such as Trout Unlimited, which will then be able to address select legislators "we've identified who will be very important for us, as we continue to push this along" with agencies such as the Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The final conversation Hanson foresees in this process would be with, and about, fisheries management at the state level, "to talk about how we can get additional stock to be reared at Coulter Creek."

Hanson acknowledged this process "is a slow-moving truck, but we're going in the right direction, we're very

pleased with our relationship with the Squaxin Island Tribe, and we'll continue to push this forward."

Hanson said the task force has taken part in Allyn Days and Grapeview Water & Art Festival, which he cited as excellent opportunities for community outreach. The task force's website at caseinletfish.com has come online to respond to the public's requests for information about the group, as well as steps the public can take to assist the group's efforts.

Among what Hanson considered the task force's notable topics of conversation with the tribe was that "the

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waters of Case Inlet seem to be thriving," with "seals in abundance" and "transient orcas frequenting our waters," and reducing the seal population in the process, as "the seals are eating all our fish."

Hanson also cited sightings of gray and humpback whales, and dolphins and porpoises, as signs suggesting "our waters are healthy, and that's going to be very important as we continue to push our agenda" for releasing chinook, coho or both into Case Inlet, and chinook salmon fry from Coulter

Creek.

Hanson stressed the task force's aims of bringing fishing and resident orcas back to Case Inlet, as "all of the orcas that come into Case Inlet are transients, and the reason we don't get the residents is because there's no food for them."