

Cascade Chapter

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Sierra Club urges counties to adopt strong protections for shorelines and beaches - Industrial aquaculture should not take priority over people & native species

Shorelines in South Puget Sound (Mason, Jefferson, Thurston and Pierce Counties) are the aquatic nursery of Puget Sound's wildlife. At the same time, shellfish aquaculture operations are expanding in these Counties, which are currently updating their Shoreline Master Programs. In order to protect the food web for native species including endangered salmon and orcas, strong protections from the impacts of aquaculture are needed in the Shoreline Master Program updates. In Totten Inlet alone, along a 33-mile shoreline, 30 miles are already covered with industrial aquaculture operations.

Llyn Doremus, Sierra Club activists said, "Washington State is home to 3 of the most famous and well-loved orca families in the world. They can be viewed all over Puget Sound, but since the early 1990s this population of whales has been in decline for several reasons including the loss of their food supply of Washington wild salmon. Endangered orcas need this critical food source that shoreline environments provide—we need to keep our remaining wild shores healthy and productive for orcas and all Puget Sound wildlife."

Geoduck aquaculture is particularly invasive. It involves placement of many PVC tubes, plywood, log booms, plastic lines and nets as part of the growing operations. The tubes are inserted every square foot, with a total of more than 43,000 tubes placed per acre of tidelands. **This high concentration of cultivated geoducks depletes** important nutrients and microorganisms, needed as **food for salmon** and other native animals in the vicinity.

Under the direction of Washington state legislation passed in 2007 (HB 2220), geoduck aquaculture regulations are being developed by the Department of Ecology. A Shellfish Aquaculture Regulatory Committee was established by the bill to recommend regulatory guidelines for geoduck aquaculture operations. The Department of Ecology is seeking public input on those guidelines at two public hearings to be held March 26 in Olympia. We support strong protections for our beaches and shorelines from the impacts of industrial aquaculture, like those in the Committee's recommendations.

The Shellfish Aquaculture Regulatory Committee's recommendations and legislative report can be viewed at: http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/sea/shellfishcommittee/index.html.

An accompanying Seagrant study found that geoduck harvest depletes food sources for young salmon and other native shoreline species in the surrounding areas. The geoduck aquaculture video from the February 26, 2009 VanBlaricom SeaGrant research seminar is available at: http://www.wsg.washington.edu/research/geoduck/index.html.

Sierra Club's new aquaculture policy supports aquaculture practices that reduce impacts to the habitat in the near shore environment. Impacts from industrial aquaculture need better regulation in order to balance the needs of the native species with the production from extensive aquaculture feedlots.