

News Release

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
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For Immediate Release

Date: October 29, 2009

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Celebration Event to Welcome the Return of the Nisqually Estuary to be held at Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge

A celebration welcoming the return of the Nisqually estuary will be held at Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) on November 12 from 1:15 p.m. to 2:15 p.m.

This event will highlight the largest estuary restoration in the Pacific Northwest. Nisqually NWR, Ducks Unlimited and the Nisqually Indian Tribe worked tirelessly for more than 12 years with the help of many partners to restore 762 acres of estuary – reconnecting it with the tides of Puget Sound.

This celebration will include speakers and a ribbon-cutting ceremony to open a portion of the new Nisqually Estuary Trail for public viewing of the restoring estuary. This one-half-mile trail will be part of a longer estuary trail, which will include a boardwalk to be built directly in the estuary in 2010. This will allow visitors to experience the wonders of a restoring estuary up close. The event will also include the naming of the longest historical tidal slough in the restoration site Leschi Slough, in honor of Chief Leschi of the Nisqually Indian Tribe.

After many years of planning and design, restoration construction began in 2008 and culminated in the removal of the last portion of the old exterior dike and the breaching of several sloughs on October 2, 2009. The construction work was done by Nutter Corporation of Vancouver, Washington.

“The project is an important step in the recovery of Puget Sound, and it is estimated that it will increase salt marsh habitat in South Puget Sound by 50 percent,” said Jean Takekawa, Refuge Manager. “Combined with the 140 acres previously restored by the Nisqually Indian Tribe, more than 900 acres of the Nisqually estuary have been restored.”

“This is the top priority to recover Chinook salmon in the Nisqually watershed and it is hugely important for fish and the overall health of Puget Sound,” said David Troutt, Natural Resource Director for the Nisqually Indian Tribe.

At the close of the 19th century, the Nisqually estuary was intact but in the early 1900s, 1,000 acres were diked for farming, cutting off much of the estuary’s salt marsh. Since the 1970s, the Refuge has managed the area as freshwater wetlands but these areas were difficult to manage and were dominated by invasive plants. By reconnecting these wetlands with the Nisqually River, McAllister Creek and the tides of Puget Sound, more than 21 miles of tidal sloughs and channels will be restored in the Nisqually estuary.

“Being involved in a project of this scope and scale for more than a decade has been a once-in-a-lifetime project for all of us and it will benefit many fish and wildlife species for years to come,” said Tom Dwyer, Conservation Director, Ducks Unlimited, Pacific Northwest Field Office.

In addition to U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service funds and Ducks Unlimited contributions, more than \$5 million to construct the project was received in grants from donors including: Puget Sound Acquisition and Restoration funds from all five South Sound watersheds and Salmon Recovery Funding Board funds from the Nisqually River Council; Estuary and Salmon Restoration Program funds administered by Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife; National Fish and Wildlife Foundation; and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

“The project is the result of the efforts of many people and partners over the years. It is a great example of what can be accomplished by working together,” Takekawa said. “We hope many will come to help celebrate the return of the Nisqually estuary and view the natural processes that are already at work.”

NOTE: The event will take place at Nisqually NWR near the Twin Barns, located at Exit 114 on Interstate 5 near Olympia, Washington. The Twin Barns can be accessed by walking one-half mile on the Twin Barns Loop Trail from the Refuge Visitor Center. A free shuttle bus will also be running from the Refuge Visitor Center to the Barns from 12:30 to 3:30 pm. Attendees are encouraged to arrive early to view the restoration at the ceremony site.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit www.fws.gov.