

SQUALICUM CREEK PROJECT

STATE PROGRAM: Washington Department of Ecology

ASSISTANCE RECIPIENT: City of Bellingham

ASSISTANCE AMOUNT: \$2.5M



PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Squalicum Creek in Washington State is a tributary that flows from the Cascade foothills through the City of Bellingham and drains into Bellingham Bay in the northern Puget Sound. Puget Sound is a Section 320 designated estuary of national significance. The Creek historically provided approximately 32 miles of habitat for multiple salmonid species, including Chinook and Steelhead, which are both listed under the Endangered Species Act. In the 1960s, excavation during construction of Interstate-5 created two large pits in the path of Squalicum Creek that filled and became known as Bug Lake and Sunset Pond.

In 2015, a multi-phase project began to re-route Squalicum Creek around both Sunset Pond and Bug Lake to restore natural conditions. The process reactivated remnant channels and reconnected the stream with Photos Courtesy of Florida Department of Environmental Protection its floodplain while restoring riparian buffers. The next phases will continue the re-routing for an additional 0.5 miles around culverts and a major traffic intersection. After completion, water quality and shade monitoring will provide quantitative data to measure the project's success. Throughout the Squalicum Creek project, the City of Bellingham widely engaged the community with mailings, signage, project web page, videos, an open house, and planting events. The community is viewed as an important project partner. The public helped inspire the project concept and will be instrumental as longterm stewards.

Therefore, providing public outreach and events allows the community to participate in and celebrate the projects that make a difference in their day-to-day lives. The City of Bellingham leveraged resources from state and federal grants and CWSRF loans that included over \$620,000 in principal forgiveness to fund this project. Total CWSRF funding for all phases totals over \$2.5 million, or over 30% of \$8.2 million total project cost. Interest rates on the CWSRF loans averaged less than 3%.

The logo features a stylized white letter 'S' with two fish swimming in a circular path around it, set against a blue background with wavy lines.

Clean Water State Revolving Fund

This project is an example of sustainable restoration with benefits to water quality, habitat, and recreation. In addition to decreased water temperatures, improved dissolved oxygen levels, and reduced fecal coliform concentrations, the re-routed channel and floodplain reconnection will enhance biotic integrity with native vegetation and sustain natural stream dynamics. The new channel is narrower to prevent stagnation, has large woody debris for complexity, and can accommodate 1.5-year storm events with wetlands and forest to absorb higher flows. In 2016, the Phase 1 and 2 projects were named the American Public Works Association's national habitat project of the year.

To read more about this case study, please visit https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2019-04/documents/cwsrf_section_320_estuaries.pdf.