

Appeared in Kitsap Audubon Society Newsletter

October 2010

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The season for bird watching is just around the corner! With winter come marine birds such as overwintering loons, grebes, cormorants, and waterfowl like wigeons, scoters, and goldeneyes. With its wooded slopes, open lawns, and bluff viewing platform, there are few places better in Kitsap County to watch for these feathered beauties than Port Gamble Bay. The sparkling waters of the Bay attract nature lovers from all over who want to take in the brilliance of one of the last productive bays in Puget Sound.

Port Gamble Bay, in its heart and on its shores, is teeming with life: Eagle nests have been mapped on the Bay's west side. Blue Heron have been spotted feasting on the shoreline. We even suspect a family of Herons has built a rookery on the southern end of the Reservation. In addition to bird life, Port Gamble Bay is home to one of the largest remaining herring stocks in the Puget Sound. The first herring runs in spring signal the arrival of countless bird species returning home from the winter. Also supported by the herring are Chinook, which resident Orcas rely on. Geoducks and other shellfish are also abundant.

All of this activity hides some stark realities. While Port Gamble Bay is the largest and most productive bay in Kitsap County, its eco-system has been marred by decades of pollution. Much of the Bay's toxic history can be traced back to the Pope & Talbot-owned sawmill, which employed many members of the Tribe and operated on the banks of the Bay for more than 150 years. Soon after the mill split its first piece of wood in 1853, woody debris and harmful chemicals began being deposited into the sentiments. Throughout the mill's lifetime, Port Gamble Bay became the unwilling home to a host of toxic chemicals, which lead to it being named one of seven Puget Sound Initiative Cleanup sites.

The Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe has been working to try and restore the Bay back to health, but it hasn't been easy. It's the proverbial two steps forward and one step back scenario. Now we face two challenges that could, ultimately, destroy this remarkable habitat.

In recent months, there has been a proposal to build a marina—with overnight moorage for up to nine boats—adjacent to the town of Port Gamble. A structure like this would cause unknown levels of damage to the already fragile eco-system of Port Gamble Bay. We've opposed this project because we simply don't see the logic in trading short-term economic gains from tourism for long-term negative environmental impacts.

The other project that has been causing us concern is one you might have read about: the North Kitsap Legacy Partnership (NKLP). This is a public/private partnership between Kitsap County and developer Olympic Property Group (OPG),

who also owns the town of Port Gamble. Under the proposed agreement, a thousand acres around Port Gamble—and consequently Port Gamble Bay—would be intensively developed. Current proposals show development that quadruples housing density limits. This is simply unheard of in Kitsap County and it's disturbing that it's being suggested for the most environmentally sensitive of all the lands under the NKLP. Not only will be Port Gamble Bay be affected in ways that are impossible to measure, but the mostly rural area simply doesn't have the infrastructure to support hundreds or thousands of homes.

The leadership of the Kitsap Audubon Society recently attended an event held by the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe to educate environmentally minded organizations about the plight of Port Gamble Bay. It was clear from that event the Kitsap Audubon Society and its members are passionate about protecting birds and the places they call home.

One of the best ways to support Port Gamble Bay is to love and protect all it has to offer. Undoubtedly, you've been to Port Gamble Bay, but we would like to invite you back! In the heart of bird-watching season this year, make a point to spend a day (or two or three...) at Port Gamble Bay. Whether it's your first time or fiftieth, we guarantee an experience like no other.