

Hello again! This is Derek Firenze with your local news and commentary for Thursday, October 5, 2023 on KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington.

As salmon return to the Olympic Peninsula, there's good news for one of their favorite rivers. The Washington Water Trust recently announced that a drought relief program has successfully enhanced stream flows to ensure healthy salmon runs in the Dungeness River. The Dungeness River is one of the most productive and critical salmon-bearing rivers in the Puget Sound region, supporting five species of salmon and Endangered Species Act-listed steelhead and bull trout. The river also happens to be one of the most drought-stricken in the region, with multiple drought declarations on the river over the last decade. The Dungeness River basin is snowpack-dependent and has historically relied on a moderate temperature increase from spring to summer to have that snowpack melt and provide water throughout the season. However, an exceedingly warm spring decimated that snowpack reservoir this year, leaving the river with extreme low flows.

The Washington Water Trust partnered with the Department of Ecology, the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe, and irrigation districts to add drought leases and four river diversion "pulse flows", which are bursts of water that help fish move upstream safely while they migrate. This supported fish passage and sustained Dungeness River flows as they dropped below targets set by a basin-wide instream flow rule. According to the trust, it is projected that, due to climate change, the Dungeness river basin will move from what is called a "transient" watershed, which means a mix of snow and rain, to a rain-dominant watershed over the next few decades. Those projections say that total spring and summer season streamflow in the Dungeness will decrease by upwards of 30% by the end of the century as river and stream temperatures rise. These changes spell trouble for salmon.

Dungeness River salmon and steelhead numbers have decreased significantly over the past 150 years. The trust notes that Chinook numbers have decreased from an estimated 8,000 fish annually in the 1850s to approximately 200-900 fish annually over the past decade. Steelhead have decreased significantly as well from approximately 5,900 fish annually to approximately 600 fish annually.

Washington Water Trust attributes the decline in Dungeness salmon to a variety of land-use activities which have created a decline in both water quality and quantity. Despite their successful efforts to ensure sufficient water flows in recent years, Washington Water Trust believes there is still much work to be done. Their next goal is a permanent solution to restore the flow called the Dungeness Streamflow Restoration Off-Channel Reservoir. Washington Water Trust claims the reservoir could restore up to 35% of habitat area for bull trout, steelhead, chinook, and pink salmon in the lower 11 miles of the river.

The reservoir would work like this: each year, when flows are high in the winter and spring due to precipitation and meltwater, water would be diverted into an off-stream reservoir to be stored until August and September – when water levels are at their lowest – and will then be utilized for irrigation instead of water that is typically diverted directly from the river during that time, allowing the water to remain in the river to benefit the fish instead. In addition to flow and habitat restoration, the reservoir could also provide additional benefits such as a reliable climate-resilient irrigation water supply for Dungeness farmers, reduction of local flood hazards from upland storm events, support for additional aquifer recharge, and maybe even a new community park.

Just as Indigenous voices were key in helping with water protection, they are also at the heart of our local culture. And now you can hear their voices lifted up in honor of Indigenous Peoples' Day, with a celebration of

poetry created and performed by Native poets on Monday, October 9 from 5:30-7:30pm at Peninsula College's Port Angeles campus.

Washington State Poet Laureate Arianne True will begin the event with a reading, followed by an open mic for Indigenous community members to share their poetry. A sign-up sheet will be available at the event and participation by Native poets of all experience levels is encouraged. And, for those unable to make the drive out to PA, you can still watch the livestream on Zoom! To get the link and learn more go to <https://www.nols.org/IPD/>.

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon and 5pm Monday through Friday and at noon on Saturday. You can contact us through news@kptz.org. This is Derek Firenze. Thanks for listening.