

Hello again. This is Derek Firenze with your local news and commentary for Thursday, February 8, 2024 on KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington.

How quickly those blankets of snow have been thrown off by our neighboring Olympic mountains! According to the United States Department of Agriculture, snowpack conditions for 2024 started with some of the lowest snow-water equivalent levels recorded. Though the Pacific Northwest received above-normal precipitation for the month of December, it also experienced abnormally high temperatures for the same period, resulting in little snowpack accumulation.

And our little corner of the state is the worst of all. The latest reports say that snowpack on the Olympic Peninsula is 29% of normal levels contrasting with current levels throughout the Puget Sound region hovering between 61% to 49% normal. Around this time in 2023, the Olympic Peninsula had more than twice the amount of snow accumulation as it does now. Snowpack is important because it acts as a giant frozen water bank, melting gradually and flowing into the state's reservoirs when there's room to spare. Without it, much of the rainwater that falls flows into Puget Sound rather than being captured by our reservoirs. The region's snowpack has shrunk by a third since 1955, and it could dwindle up to 70% more by the mid-2080s, depending on how fast global emissions continue to heat the atmosphere.

The end result can mean dry soils and foliage, drought, and wildfire concerns, as well as risk to salmon and other aspects of the environment. State officials declared a drought emergency across a dozen Washington counties last summer, sparking both mandatory and voluntary water restrictions west of the Cascades. This year? We'll see.

While we struggle with how to keep our water flowing, the Washington Conservation Corps crews have been planting native vegetation in the floodplain of a new side channel of Dungeness River. The work is part of a completed salmon habitat project overseen by the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe and North Olympic Salmon Coalition. Over the course of this last winter, nearly 12,000 shrubs and trees were planted within six acres of this floodplain, including snowberry, hazelnut, Oregon berry, oceanspray, cottonwood, and vine maple. Trees planted included red cedar, grand fir, Douglas fir, maples, and coastal redwoods. The tribe now will let Mother Nature take over as the river and side channel naturally shift as the river runs its course. This is part of a long ongoing project. In 2022, at river mile 9.5, the tribe installed four logjams in the main channel to slow the river's velocity, and constructed a 750-foot-long side channel filled with salmon habitat, including more logjams, creating plenty of shallow spaces for salmon reproduction.

Speaking of restorations, next time you stop by the Port Townsend Public Library, check out the bathrooms! The newly renovated rooms feature bright walls in shades of light purple and blue, mirrors featuring local buildings, and bold tile floors in black-and-white. Thanks go to the City Facilities and the Library for managing and directing the project.

And the library isn't the only part of town getting cleaned up. The Trash Task Force is hosting its 2nd annual Cupid's Cleanup this year. If you want to show some love for our beautiful city and Jefferson County, the clean-up crew invites you to volunteer for 1 to 2 hours this Sunday, February 11 from 10am to 12pm. There are

two locations this year, with sign-in stations located at the Northwest Maritime Center in downtown Port Townsend as well as the Chimacum Corner Farmstand. Those loveable cleanup crews will be beautifying along the beaches and streets of downtown Port Townsend and Center Valley Road in Chimacum. And, to celebrate their hard work, there will be a gathering afterwards at the Port Townsend Vineyards Winery.

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