

Squalicum Creek Estuary Restoration Project

Fact Sheet

The Squalicum Creek Estuary Restoration Project proposes to build on prior planning work to address three fish passage barriers and restore the estuary at the mouth of Squalicum Creek in Bellingham, Washington. Squalicum Creek is the largest independent coastal stream in the Nooksack River. This multi-benefit project restores access to more than 40 miles of upstream salmon habitat and helps fulfill local and state priorities for species recovery, flood risk, water quality, and climate resilience.

Project Partners:

- City of Bellingham
- Port of Bellingham and tenants
- BNSF Railway

Multi-Benefit Project

- Restores full fish passage at 3 transportation crossings
- Restores lost estuarine habitat
- Benefits ESA-listed Puget Sound Chinook salmon, other salmon and trout species, nearshore fish populations, and Southern Resident Killer Whales
- Reduces localized flooding to improve water quality and reduce disruptions to economic activity and the transportation network
- Removes contaminations from the project area
- Improves climate resilience



Funders

- Culvert AOP Program administered by FHWA/WSDOT
- Washington State Department of Ecology
- City of Bellingham
- Port of Bellingham

Key Milestones

- \$2.3 million in funding secured for 60% design
- Alternatives analysis anticipated 2025
- 30% design anticipated 2026
- 60% design anticipated 2027

Squalicum Creek Estuary is a Regional and Local Priority Project

- “Highest” priority project identified in a 2019 Puget Sound-wide assessment and prioritization of 196 shoreline creek mouths impacted by 73 miles of BNSF railroad. Funded by the Habitat Strategic Initiative Lead using U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) funding through the National Estuary Program. Technical Advisory Group included BNSF, Tulalip Tribes, WDFW, ESRP, and the Snohomish County MRC.
- #1 priority fish passage barrier identified in a 2024 local prioritization of City-owned fish passage barriers completed by City of Bellingham, Nooksack Indian Tribe, Lummi Nation, and WDFW using NOAA Fisheries funding through the Restoring Tribal Priority Fish Passage through the Barrier Removal Program.

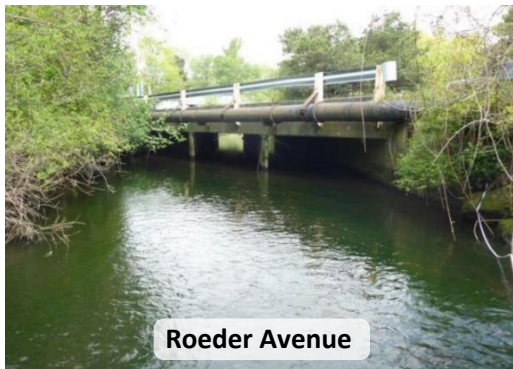


Builds on Prior Investments

- 2014: Phase 1 completed by the Port of Bellingham to improve shallow salmon habitat and remove derelict bulkheads, pilings, debris in the outer estuary and nearshore. Funded by Washington Department of Ecology.
- 2014: Preliminary design by Port of Bellingham in collaboration with the City of Bellingham, funded by the Washington Department of Ecology.
- 2019 – 2022: Regional Conceptual Design for the BNSF crossing led by Environmental Science Associates and Tulalip Tribes, funded by the Habitat Strategic Initiative Lead grants using U.S. EPA funding through the National Estuary Program.
- 2024 – 2025: City of Bellingham Roeder Avenue Lift Station; \$20-million project will allow for relocation of a sewer line in preparation for Squalicum Creek Estuary restoration.

Project Design Considerations

- Close proximity of three crossing structures will require landowner coordination and design integration
- Reduced flooding will need to meet fixed elevations and slopes upstream to prevent headcutting
- Railroad bridge will require specialized engineering for weight-bearing and slope requirements
- Additional flood clearance will require track adjustments on the spur track
- Roeder Avenue crossing will require consideration of safety, traffic flow, and intersection needs



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