

204 Sea Pines Rd
Bellingham, WA 98229

RE: Mud Bay and Bellingham Waterfront Futures

6-1-2004

Esteemed members of the Bellingham Waterfront Futures Group:

We have watched with great interest the activities of your group as it seeks to preserve and enhance the waterfront for the future and the citizens of Bellingham. Thank you for your efforts.

While your major focus has been on the downtown area & particularly the GP site, the scope of this project includes "*natural systems and the environment*." I wish to call the Waterfront Futures Groups attention to a beautiful, secluded area known as Mud Bay.

Mud Bay is bordered by Chuckanut Village & Chuckanut drive on the East, the Briza area on the North, and the Burlington Northern Railroad causeway and tracks on the South. Mud Bay has a public parking lot and canoe/kayak access at the end of Fairhaven St. Chuckanut Creek, a salmon-spawning stream, terminates in Mud Bay. Except for the railroad and three homes at the shoreline, the immediate surrounding area is lightly developed and much of the tide and shore lands are owned by the City of Bellingham.

Mud Bay is a rare gem of a semi-natural bay / estuary ecosystem within Bellingham's city limits: It is home to a wide variety of wildlife, including several endanger species:

- It serves as a spawning staging area and nursery for several species of salmon (Chum and Coho) plus Steelhead and Sea Run Cutthroat. Due to the sedimentation problems, Mud Bay is actually waterless during many low tides, making it difficult for anadromous fish to reach their spawning areas. We are very concerned about the preservation of this spawning habitat.
- Mud Bay contains significant populations of various clam species, oysters, and both Dungeness and Rock Crab. Unfortunately, due to poor tidal flushing of Mud Bay, the shellfish often harbor "ride tide" or paralytic shellfish organisms, endangering both the shellfish and people.
- It is home to a variety of birds. The area is frequented by Bald Eagles. There are two Osprey nests along the western hillside. It is also a popular heron feeding area, a nesting area of for a variety of waterfowl, and numerous other birds make their home along the shoreline.
- The western edge of Mud Bay has large deposits of Chuckanut Sandstone that have been intricately carved and shaped by wind / wave activity.

In fact, Mud Bay is so rare and unique that recently the City of Bellingham purchased a large piece of property on this bay. The following is from an article in the Bellingham Herald May 18, 2004:

"The Bellingham City Council on Monday unanimously approved the purchase of a 15-acre farm on the northeast end of Chuckanut Bay. The property - known both as Inspiration Point and Woodstock Farm - features water views, trails, the site of a former American Indian village, several homes and other buildings, and 3.5 acres of tidelands, said Greenways Coordinator Tim Wahl. The property will connect to city and county tidelands and other park land to the north, south and east, he said. Bellingham officials have been discussing the purchase with the children of former owners Gladys and Ray Lee for about a year. The city has an option to buy it for \$2.95 million, and expects to close on the sale in early July. City Council members who have visited the property said there is

no place else like it in Bellingham. "I would say those who do not want to get involved with Inspiration Point should probably never go there because it tends to capture your heart," said council member Grant Deger. "I just can't imagine a more beautiful site." Wahl said he envisions "quiet, contemplative" uses of the site, with limited parking, creating access mostly with trails and shuttles."

Because of its beauty, uniqueness, and its *natural systems and the environment* Mud Bay deserves the attention of the Waterfront Futures Group. Those of us familiar with Mud Bay have been concerned that it is steadily filling in with sediment and rapidly becoming very shallow. The sedimentary infill is, to a degree, a natural, very gradual process that commonly occurs where a stream enters a bay. Those who have lived in south Bellingham for 50 years or more, state that the rate of sedimentation has been increasingly rapid over the past few decades. Over the next several decades, Mud Bay could transition from a tidal bay to marshland.

There are at least two, obvious, major, man-made factors contributing to the infilling and deterioration of this beautiful, environmental area:

1. Development along the watershed of Chuckanut Creek. Those familiar with the area state that the construction of I-5 along Chuckanut Creek and recent logging in its watershed a dramatic impact on the sedimentation of the Bay.
2. The existence of the Burlington Northern Railroad tracks causeway which almost completely landlocks Mud Bay except for a narrow opening in the causeway. This causeway and its lack of openings prevents tidal currents which normally would provide a flushing action of the bay. Normally tidal flushing action may remove significant amounts of silt and red tide organisms.

In light of the rapid infilling and deterioration of this bay, we urge the Waterfront Futures Group, the City of Bellingham, and the Bellingham Port Authority to do everything within their power to halt further sedimentation. Further we would like to see Mud Bay restored to its pre 1960s depth. Toward those ends we suggest considering some of the following actions:

1. Significantly opening up the railroad causeway to provide better tidal flushing.
2. Dredging existing sediment from the bay and creek terminus.
3. Taking various measures to reduce the sediment coming down Chuckanut Creek.
4. Keeping the area open to public use, but limiting development of public access.

It is clear that these concerns regarding Mud Bay are within the scope of the Waterfront Futures Group. We urge the Waterfront Futures Group and the City of Bellingham to do all it can to preserve and enhance this unique, beautiful community asset. Anything that can be done to preserve and enhance this unique geographical and wildlife treasure would clearly be a benefit to our fair city and its citizens!

We hope that preserving and enhancing this unique, wonderful, scenic bay and natural coastal habitat will be a significant part of the final plan for the Waterfront Future of Bellingham.

Sincerely,

Daniel A Hall DVM
Lisa J Hall
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