

SEPA 24016 Theler Wetlands and Union River Estuary Restoration Open comment period 4/2/24 through 5/2/24		
Date and Source	Comment	WDFW Response
4/4/2024 2:13:00 PM PublicInput	<p>It was so good to see actual data on a SEPA checklist. Thank you!. We often enjoy the WNPS plant walks at Theler Wetlands. Nice to see some WDFW \$ directed toward wetland restoration that allows for continuing education and boardwalks. I went on this WNPS walk and hope to send the plant list we generated in next comment. https://www.wnps.org/content/documents/south-sound/2023-12-ss-monthly-update.pdf. That being said, I understand over 200 species of birds have been reported at Theler Wetlands. Its not entirely clear how much freshwater wetland will change to saltwater wetlands. Please consider that adequate freshwater marsh also supports the base of the food chain and invertebrate production for juvenile salmon, songbirds that also support great blue herons, waterfowl, hawks, owls, eagles. Marc Hayes discussion of the changes as saltwater marsh changes to freshwater could be considered: https://des.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2023-05/implications-capitol-lake-management-Fish%20and%20Wildlife.pdf. Thank you for all you do. Bonnie Blessing.</p>	<p>Thank you for the comments. The freshwater wetlands previously contained within the diked footprint have mostly since changed back to natural estuarine wetlands with the breach of the dike in 2012 or so. Freshwater wetlands adjacent to the estuary will remain and are crucial overwintering habitats for fish and migratory birds as you mention. This restoration will allow natural processes to maintain fish passage and habitat for all.</p>
4/10/24 0952 PublicInput	<p>Thank you for contacting the Squaxin Island Tribe Cultural Resources Department regarding the above listed project for our review and comment. This project is outside the Squaxin Island Tribe's traditional area and we do not need any further consultation for this project.</p>	<p>Thanks for affirming that.</p>

<p>4/5/24 07:09 PublicInput</p>	<p>I have a long history with the Theler trail system. In December of 2012 I discovered a minor Theler trail breach- I immediately informed Executive director Whitman who tried to get emergency trail repair with WDFW with no success . (WDFW and school emails) I have a long history with the Theler trail system. In December of 2012 I discovered a minor Theler trail breach- I immediately informed Executive director Whitman who tried to get emergency trail repair with WDFW with no success . (WDFW and school emails) 2013- October -three members of School board cut ribbon on new trails, less than 1/4 mile from same unrepaired breach (North Mason Life article) When the new trails were built they could have easily have fixed the breach with the same one way culverts. 2014- April school board meeting- three supposed bidders to design fix for breach of trail. No action to repair to date. In my opinion the freshwater/stormwater pond and trail needs to be restored to its original state as required by the 1980 EIS and long term obligations of grants obtained to build the original trails and honor legal perpetual easements agreements with adjoining land owners and WDFW.</p>	<p>Thank you for the comment. The 2012-2013 Union river estuary restoration project that is referenced in your comment occurred on WDFW lands and were permitted as such. Taking project actions outside of parcels owned by WDFW were not part of the project scope in 2012. The current project restores critical estuarine habitat as well as fully reconnects the trail system lost to the dike breach.</p>
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<p>4/5/24 1751 Sent to SEPA Desk2</p>	<p>Lisa, I have a long history with the Theler trail system having served on both the Theler board and the NM school board and volunteering to fix the trails, plant trees and fall hazard trees on the property. . In December of 2012 I discovered a minor Theler trail breach- I immediately informed Theler Executive director Whitman who tried to get emergency trail repair with WDFW with no success . (WDFW and school emails obtained through Public records request) 2013- October -Three members of North Mason School board cut ribbon on new trails, less than 1/4 mile from the unrepaired breach (North Mason Life article). When the new trails were built they could have easily fixed the breach with the same one way culverts they used in the new trail system.. 2014-May- School paid an engineer \$20000+ to design and construct Theler trail repair. (Invoice attached) 2014- School meeting to open bids from three supposed bidders to repair the trail. No action to select a bidder was taken. In my opinion the freshwater/stormwater pond and trail needs to be restored to its original state as required by the 1980 EIS and long term obligations of grants obtained to build the original trails. Also to honor legal perpetual easement agreements with NMSD, the Johnsons and WDFW contained in the 1991-Access Easement Agreement-#576535 Mason County court records . Thank you Ken VanBuskirk Belfair Wa 360-801-0550</p>	<p>Hi Ken, Thank you for the comment. Please see above response to address the first half of your comment. This project has been reviewed by the Department of Ecology, US Army COE, Mason County, and the EPA regarding water quality concerns. The 1980 EIS was produced in response to a proposed development of recreational ballfields and does not apply to our current project.</p>
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<p>Ducks Unlimited Kitsap County 4/6/24 Ron Flerx President – Bremerton Sportsmen’s Club</p>	<p>I found this on NewsBreak: Public Invited to Influence Restoration of Theler Wetlands in Mason County . Question – What will be the impact on duck hunting as a result? Bremerton Sportsmen’s Club is an advocate for public access and hunting sports and willing to support if there impacts to the rights of fishers and hunters. Follow the link for info: https://share.newsbreak.com/6kv5r4jr</p>	<p>Hi Ron, Thanks for the email. The restoration project proposed at Theler Wetlands will not negatively affect waterfowl hunting opportunities that are currently available at the Union River Wildlife Area Unit. A result of the proposed restoration would be the improvement of shallow estuary habitat that is critical to juvenile salmon, waterfowl and shorebirds within the project area. More information on the project can be found here: maps-20240117-pmtdrawings-cw-edits-2-2-24.pdf (wa.gov) Feel free to reach out if you have any other questions about the restoration project or waterfowl hunting opportunities on the Union River Wildlife Area Unit. Matt Blakenship-Wildlife Program</p>
<p>4/10/24 1634 PublicInput</p>	<p>I have been familiar with the Theler Trail System for over 40 years and was very disappointed when the dike pipe blew out many years ago. I have been waiting for someone to resolve this issue and fully support this proposal. I urge you to move ahead at full speed and make these improvements in order for the public to better utilize this trail system. This Theler Trail System is one of the Jewels of Belfair and gets lots of continuous use, therefore providing lots of education on wetlands to the public. Thanks, Herb Gerhardt 90 NE Rainbow PI N Belfair, WA 98528 360-551-3670</p>	<p>Thank you for your support.</p>
<p>4/15/24 PublicInput</p>	<p>I am in full support of this project. The trails are used by thousands of people each year for: environmental learning, relaxation, environmental immersion, fitness and well being. North Mason Schools and a pre-school are within a quarter mile of this facility and I often see students and children enjoying nature. There are obvious environmental benefits of the proposed work. Raising of the Roessel road will help with transportation and will help protect the environment Phil Wolff Allyn WA</p>	<p>Thank you for your support.</p>

<p>4/15/24 1543 Submitted to WDFW Directors Office</p>	<p>The Hood Canal Environmental Council (HCEC) strongly supports the restoration of estuarine habitat in the Mary E. Theler Wetlands Nature Preserve in Belfair through a partnership between the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and the Hood Canal Salmon Enhancement Group (HCSEG). This proposed project will provide numerous benefits to the Belfair community and the wider Hood Canal watershed. It will result in the restoration of 7 acres of intertidal habitat for salmon, reduction of flooding and road closures and removal of a tidal barrier to fish passage. The project is designed to help ongoing recovery efforts for ESA listed salmon and other wildlife species which depend on salt marsh habitats. In addition, trail condition improvements will benefit the local community and visitors by promoting access to the Nature Preserve. One of HCEC's primary approaches to preserving the environmental health of the Hood Canal watershed is to provide educational opportunities and information about the environmental issues impacting water quality and related natural resources. The educational opportunities provided by this project will help to promote public awareness and understanding of the importance of protecting wetland environments. The HCEC appreciates the opportunity to comment on the planned restoration project in the Theler Wetlands Nature Preserve. We also appreciate the fact that WDFW is issuing and distributing a threshold determination even though a SEPA determination is not required. Respectfully submitted by: Donna M. Simmons, Board Member, Hood Canal Environmental Council P.O. Box 126 Hoodspport, Washington 98548 (360) 877-5747 donnamick@hcc.net</p>	<p>Thank you for your support.</p>
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<p>4/5/24 1653 Submitted to SEPA DESK2</p>	<p>Hello Lisa, I have been a resident of Belfair for 70 years. My father (along with Mr. Tom Kralicek) worked with Sam (Theler) back in the late 50's to construct a portion of these same dikes. They used the pond for duck hunting. I am an avid supporter of all things "Theler" and have been monitoring the "restoration" of the Theler wetlands over the past 15-20 years by the HCSEG and WDFW. While I think the end result of this project would be "nice" for the North Mason community, I don't believe it would have much, if any, impact on Summer Chum salmon, relative to the cost and net gain of habitat. This project looks like public funds looking for a place to be spent. Would it not be MUCH cheaper to simply build a bridge over the current "breach", reconnecting the current 1200' of existing trail, as recommended by the Director of the Theler wetlands shortly after the dike was breached? I, and my fellow Theler supporters, would be happy to have engineered, fund, and install a 25' bridge over the current breach...AT OUR OWN EXPENSE, thus allowing 100% of these public funds go to another, perhaps more pressing and productive, project. We would also restore the current 1,200' of dike walking trails to their original, crushed rock condition. Thus, restoring the 1,200' trail at no cost to the public. Lastly, would you please provide me with access to, or a copy of, the award, to include: 1) What will be the total cost of this project to the taxpayers, and 2) What percentage of this award is being paid directly to the HCSEG? Thank you for your response, and I am available to discuss this project via phone or in person at any time. Best regards, Bruce Bruce M Landram Belfair, Wa. 360 286 7008</p>	<p>Thank you for the comments and reviewing the SEPA check list and project. Glad you enjoy the Theler trails, they are an amazing place. The restoration of shallow estuarine juvenile salmon habitat has been identified as a priority in The Hood Canal/Eastern Strait of Juan de Fuca Summer Chum Salmon Recovery Plan. The prioritized order for the summer chum salmon recovery strategies is: 1) Protect 2) Restore 3) Rehabilitate 4) Substitute 5) Status Quo Simply building a bridge over the existing trail breach will not allow full tidal access to the areas inside the dike, it will restrict juvenile fish passage, and will not protect Roessel Rd from flooding. The elevated boardwalk in the footprint of the removed dike will allow full tidal connectivity and public use of the trails without public walking on Roessel Rd. The raising of Roessel Rd., will eliminate flooding and closures of the county road and allow infrastructure at the Golden Bell Community to work as designed. The information you requested regarding the award, total cost, and percentage to HCSEG is not yet available. That information will be available later and you'll need to check back with me or submit a Public Disclosure Request (PDR) for that information. Here is the link for the PDR form https://wdfw.wa.gov/about/administration/public-records.</p>
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<p>4/5/24 905 hrs</p>	<p>My wife and I have walked the trails at Theler thousands of times since 2011. The raised dike you want to remove has a large apple tree growing on it, and a hundred plum trees also growing on it. These trees are a major food source for birds and wildlife that visit the area. What are you going to do to replace that food source? Before tidal action was allowed to go into the area protected by that dike, there was a year round fresh water pond there that had hundreds of cat tail plants growing in it. Red Wing Black Birds were numerous there...such a joy to listen to their song. Since that fresh water pond was drained and salt water was allowed to take its place, the cat tails are gone, and so are the Red Wing Black Birds. Nothing has replaced them. We have never seen any salmon in that area...it seems to go unused. The paved road to the Salmon Fork that you are planning to raise has never flooded. If you raise it, a pedestrian walkway would be a nice addition. As it is now, there is no safe place to walk on that stretch of road. By the way, the public toilet there is NOT properly maintained. Could you hire a different company to maintain it? Also, the work that was done in 2013 did not lower the salt water channels low enough. Fish can enter the flood plane at high tide, but get stranded once the tide goes out. It seems to be a death trap for young salmon. Thank you for your time and attention. Bryan and Shelly Anderson</p>	<p>Thank you for the comments. The freshwater wetlands previously contained within the diked footprint have mostly since changed back to natural estuarine wetlands with the breach of the dike in 2012 or so. Our focus with this project is to restore the estuarine habitat that existed there before the dikes. Intertidal habitats across the flyway such as salt marshes create nutrient rich environments that are important for invertebrates, fish and waterbirds. Freshwater wetlands adjacent to the estuary will remain and are crucial overwintering habitats for fish and migratory birds as you mention. Roessel Road floods every year in December/January during periods of high tide and low pressure. This road provides trailhead access to the greater network of trails in the area, private residential access, and access to many community resources provided by the Salmon Center (dog park, U-pick garden, education center, etc.) Our project will restore estuarine habitat and function, address the flooding on this road, and reconnect the trail system in the estuary, keeping pedestrians off the road and away from vehicle traffic.</p>
<p>4/4/24 2229 hrs PublicInput</p>	<p>have been visiting Theler wetlands for many years. Sad to see the changes. I support any work that would benefit salmon, birds and other wildlife. Wendy Evans Port Orchard</p>	<p>Thank you for your support.</p>

<p>4/4/24 2100 hrs PublicInput</p>	<p>From the observation viewpoint of an outsider here in Yakima, I'm impressed with the infrastructure of the community access. This place is designed well for visitors. As more funds are invested, think about the regional awareness of your program and how your "small" van become much more of the "larger" picture. I wouldn't have known a thing about this facility except from the email asking for comments. Now I want to visit there. I'm involved in the salmon education and tribal forestry program in the general Yakima area. Our future is looking better as we continue to engage community involvement is building the infrastructure that empowers the aquatic species migration, sets up environmental enhancements for diverse habitats. Sometime in the later 5 years, I hope we can have a small hatchery and education center for public visiting. Bruce Whitmore mrbruce70@hotmail.com 509-949-4737</p>	<p>Thank you for your support.</p>
<p>4/23/24 0731</p>	<p>This project will be crucial in the restoration of our states natural spaces, and for bettering the health of river species. As a Washington voter I am in full support of this proposal, and see only long term benefits to this restoration. Unknown submitter</p>	<p>Thank you for your support.</p>
<p>5/2/24 1512</p>	<p>Mason County PUD submitted a comment letter for increased coordination with WDFW and HCSEG.</p>	<p>WDFW is coordinating a meeting to update Mason County PUD on project changes since they last reviewed.</p>