



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF  
**Natural Resources**

Doug Sutherland - Commissioner of Public Lands

## Geoduck Wildstock Fishery Habitat Conservation Plan

The marine waters and subtidal lands where wildstock geoducks are harvested are home to several species that are listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is developing a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) specifically to address the agency's management of the wildstock geoduck fishery and ensure that geoduck harvest activities are in compliance with the ESA.

Washington DNR manages state-owned submerged lands and many of the tidelands and shorelands associated with navigable marine and fresh waters. This management includes administering the harvest of the State's half of harvestable wildstock geoduck from marine bedlands (The other half is harvested by the sixteen Puget Sound Treaty Tribes). It is DNR's responsibility to ensure environmental protection while allowing this harvest.

### The Endangered Species Act and Habitat Conservation Planning

The purpose of the Endangered Species Act is to protect, conserve and recover imperiled species and their habitats. An HCP is a way that landowners can contribute to this purpose, while still continuing their other activities. It is an agreement between a landowner (in this case DNR representing Washington state) and the federal agencies that administer the ESA. In this agreement the landowner avoids, minimizes and mitigates for harm to federally listed species or habitats. In return, the landowner is not penalized for infrequent incidental harm to a listed species or its habitat.

DNR has previously developed HCPs for the state's forest lands and for lands covered by the state's Forest Practice Rules. DNR is also presently developing an HCP for a group of other activities that occur on state-owned aquatic land, separate from the geoduck wildstock fishery HCP.



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## Geoduck Fishery Management

The geoduck fishery is jointly managed by DNR, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and the sixteen Puget Sound Treaty Tribes. DNR is responsible for the sales and harvest management of the state's portion of the wildstock geoduck fishery. Harvest quotas from specific management regions are auctioned for harvest about four times per year.

Commercial harvest activities that are managed by DNR, including harvest for research, survey, and health sampling, will be considered in the HCP.

## Threatened and Endangered Species

Many species of birds, mammals, fish, and invertebrates use the waters and substrate where geoduck harvest occurs. Some of these species are listed as threatened or endangered by the Federal government under the ESA. The HCP will evaluate the possible effects geoduck harvest activities have on several species that are listed as threatened or endangered, or are of concern at the State or Federal level. The species being considered: bald eagle, California brown pelican, marbled murrelet, tufted puffin, common loon, black tern, bull trout, coastal cutthroat trout, steelhead, several salmon species (Chinook, coho, chum, pink), Pacific herring, orca, pinto abalone, and Olympia oyster.

## Conservation Strategy

The cornerstone of an HCP is a set of goals and objectives along with a conservation strategy to reduce possible impacts to ESA-listed and other species and their habitats and improve conditions for these species. Current management practices for the geoduck fishery include measures that address these potential impacts, and could be worked into the HCP's conservation strategy. For example eelgrass identified in or adjacent to harvest tracts is protected, and restrictions on the time of year harvest can occur are established to avoid impacts to herring and other spawning areas.

## Timeline

DNR is currently in the process of drafting the HCP document. It will be reviewed by both U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service. Negotiations on the conservation strategy will begin in winter, 2006 and continue for 6 to 8 months.