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FILE PHOTO

Wyman's Marina, shown here being demolished in 2013, is one of the sites the Port of Anacortes cleaned up.

Port, Ecology partnership led to \$64 million in site cleanups



BY RICHARD WALKER
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Kathy Pittis remembers what the central waterfront area was like before the cleanups.

Industries that had long provided jobs that fed local families and paid mortgages had left a mark on the environment. Bulk fuel had leaked from underground fuel storage tanks and supply lines. Log storage, lumber milling and pulp milling had left behind metals, petroleum hydrocarbons, PCBs and dioxins in upland and in-water soils.

Now, when Pittis and her family walk the esplanade at Cap Sante Marina or visit Seafarers Memorial Park, "it makes my heart sing."



CONTRIBUTED / PORT OF ANACORTES

Eelgrass is returning to the nearshore at the former Scott Paper Mill site, which is now the home of Seafarers Memorial Park.

Cap Sante is a vibrant place, with restaurants and maritime-related businesses. The marina participates in the Clean Marina program, a voluntary program run by many states in coordination with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association

that encourages environmentally sound operating and maintenance procedures. At Seafarers Memorial Park, eelgrass is thriving and provides habitat for surf smelt and other critters.

Pittis witnessed the change as a port staff

member and, later, as a port commissioner — not only the environmental transformation, but a change in the relationship between the environment and how business is done along the waterfront.

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District aims for more time in class

BY BRIANA ALZOLA
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Gov. Jay Inslee announced March 25 that Washington schools can follow new, less restrictive Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines about students in schools.

The CDC guidelines say that schools only need to put 3 feet of distance between desks in classrooms, a reduction from the previous guideline of 6 feet.

That would mean students in schools for more in-person hours during the week.

"We are really excited that our state is moving in this direction," Anacortes School District Superintendent Justin Irish said. "Not only are we working on a plan this year, but we will have plenty of opportunity this summer to figure out what school will look like in the fall."

Hopefully, restrictions continue to ease, Irish said.

The 6-foot buffers are still required during meals, activities and in common areas.

According to the Anacortes School District, staff is working to implement changes as soon as possible.

Right now, the district is looking at all grade levels and is working on figuring out when changes may be put into effect, Irish said. A lot depends on staffing challenges and having enough support staff and bus drivers to be able to have more students in schools at a time.

"We are working as fast as we can," Irish said.

Changes in the school day could mean changes in when school starts and ends to accommodate bus routes.

The district has a major challenge right

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New director of state parks comes from Anacortes

BY QUESTEN INGHAM
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Anacortes-raised Peter Mayer took over this month as director of Washington State Parks.

As head of the agency, he'll oversee about 1,000 employees and 124 state parks that saw an increase of 1.5 million visitors from 2019 to 2020.

Even more people might go to parks to re-engage with family and friends as the pandemic subsides, Mayer told the American. He hopes to be ready for them.

"We have seen the incredible popularity and increased attendance to our state parks. We feel they play a big role in improving us physically and emotionally," Mayer said.

He also wants to get more youth into the parks through employment opportunities and outdoor education programs.

Mayer had an early start in parks work. In the second grade, he would help set up before

his soccer games at Storvik Park and eventually was given keys to open and clean the restrooms.

"It was my first experience being entrusted with responsibility," he said.

As Mayer completed his education, he worked his way up through the ranks at Anacortes Parks and Recreation, from working on maintenance crews to managing Washington Park. He graduated from Anacortes High School in 1987.

Mayer and his wife still have family and friends who live in Anacortes.

"I give a lot of credit to Anacortes Parks and Recreation for getting me exposed and enabling me to having some growing responsibilities maintaining Storvik Park. It really grew into something that's led to where I am today," he said.

Mayer has a master's degree in parks and recreation administration from Washington State University, where he also completed his undergraduate studies.

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Inslee, other leaders talk climate change during visit

BY QUESTEN INGHAM
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Gov. Jay Inslee visited Anacortes on Tuesday to speak in support of two climate bills currently in the state Legislature.

Joining him at Seafarers Memorial Park to speak in support of the bills were Swinomish Indian Tribal Community Chairman Steve Edwards, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Executive Director Matthew Hepner and Michelle Simmons of Silfab Solar, a solar panel company in Bellingham.

"As we are defeating COVID-19 with science, confidence and action, we have to take similar action against the climate crisis, and we know that we can do this," Inslee said.



QUESTEN INGHAM / ANACORTES AMERICAN

Gov. Jay Inslee holds up an orca ornament given to him by Port of Anacortes Commissioner Kathy Pittis as he speaks on addressing the threat to orcas from climate change.

pollution to a virus, and said it is contributing to the demise of salmon and

orcas, as well as increasing wildfires throughout the country.

Inslee then called on

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Port

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“For a long time, the thinking was you provided jobs or you did what was good for the environment,” she recalled March 22. “It felt like the two were never married. Now, it’s not one or the other. You can provide jobs and be good environmental stewards.”

All told, the Port of Anacortes has overseen \$64 million in environmental cleanups over the past 12 years. Port officials credit the cleanups to partnership building between the port, the Department of Ecology, the parties responsible for the contamination and sometimes some sleuthing.

Part of the cost of environmental cleanups in the state are paid by the responsible party’s insurance carrier, according to Port of Anacortes Executive Director Dan Worra. Even if the party responsible for the contamination no longer exists, the party’s insurance carrier is still liable.

“You can go back and find these historical policies and get them paid for,” he said.

Part of the cleanup cost is covered by the Model Toxics Control Act (MTCA), which is fueled by a tax on hazardous materials brought into the state and directs the investigation and cleanup of contaminated sites.

“The state taxes the import of hazardous material into the state, like petroleum — which we need — and that tax funds all these environmental cleanups through the MTCA,” Worra said. “All of these potentially hazardous materials

coming into the state pay the tax, and that tax is used to fund cleanups throughout the state. The Port of Anacortes has been a large beneficiary of that.”

So have the responsible parties. Cleanup of the former Scott Paper Mill site cost \$33 million, Worra said. The Port of Anacortes contacted the historical insurance carrier. The Department of Ecology funded half of the cleanup through the MTCA; the insurer paid \$16.5 million.

“All of that money from Ecology through MTCA, and the liable parties through their insurance, is coming to town, is being spent in town, is creating jobs and creating places that can have wonderful uses,” Worra said.

“At Dakota Creek, the in-water cleanup 10 years ago that’s been completed, they operate and have ships in that little bay there. And at Cap Sante, there’s Anthony’s — that’s 70 jobs because we did that cleanup. And there’s that great waterfront that’s perfect for walks and attracts visiting boaters and people spending money in the community,” he said. “All that money to clean it up, and then great business and jobs come to town. It’s just a wonderful program.”

Port Commissioner Joe Verdoes said the involvement of a public entity like the port has been critical to the program’s success.

“The first stage is attorneys and finding the original people of responsibility,” Verdoes said March 22. “Obviously, it takes a fair bit of negotiation, and it takes a bit of trust. The original parties recognize their responsibility, but they don’t want to get caught in a boondoggle where they’re

Want to learn more?

— Visit PortofAnacortes.com and ecology.wa.gov/Spills-Cleanup/Contamination-cleanup/Cleanup-sites/Puget-Sound/Fidalgo-Padilla-baywide

writing a blank check to somebody. They want it solved, and the Port of Anacortes has a really good rapport with the Department of Ecology on handling these things and doing it efficiently and in a timely manner.”

Ecosystem recovery

The partnership between the port and Ecology has created “tremendous opportunity” for the area’s economy and the environment, Verdoes said.

“Just look at the leveraging of dollars that have been used to return lands to productive use here for jobs — in addition to the fact that it’s the right thing to do for the environment,” he said. “The most dramatic example is the Seafarers Memorial Park area.”

Verdoes, a commercial fisherman since 1993, recalled being out on the water while cleanup of the former Scott Paper Mill site was underway.

“I would go out fishing during the day while they had that dredge out there, and it stank,” he said. “You held your nose because what they were picking up and putting in those barges was not good stuff. Now, it’s just a model recreational area. It’s become a place that people love in Anacortes.”

The ecosystem has rebounded in the in-water area at Seafarers Memorial Park as well,

Waterfront cleanup sites

• **The Anacortes Port Log Yard site** at 718 4th St. is owned by the Port of Anacortes. It was leased until 2004 for log rafting and the transfer of logs from water to upland sorting and handling areas on Pier 2. Soil and sediment samples collected by the Port found contamination from benzene derivatives and other chemicals. The Port is working with Ecology on a cleanup action plan.

• **The Dakota Creek Shipyard site** has been used for industrial and shipyard activities since about 1879. The Port of Anacortes acquired the property in the mid-1940s and since 1977 has leased it to Dakota Creek. Some 38,000 tons of contaminated sediment were removed by dredging over a 4.65-acre area. An additional groundwater monitoring well is proposed to be installed.

• **Quiet Cove**, on O Avenue between Second and Third streets, is owned by the Port of Anacortes. It was historically the site of a bulk fuel terminal and storage facility. Arsenic and petroleum hydrocarbons were detected in groundwater; hydrocarbons and heavy metals were detected in soils. The Port of Anacortes removed buildings and pavement at its expense because the port was liable for those but not for contamination related to bulk fuel and storage. The port is now identifying the location of harmful chemicals and will conduct a study of cleanup options. A timeline for a cleanup action plan will follow.

• **The Cap Sante Marine site**, between 11th and 13th streets east of Q Avenue, was acquired by the Port of Anacortes in 1956; it operated as a boatyard, marina support area and offshore fueling facility. In 2007, underground storage tanks, supply lines and 9,888 cubic yards of contaminated soil were removed. Groundwa-

ter is being monitored.

• **The former Shell Oil Tank Farm site** was acquired by the Port of Anacortes in 1929 and leased to Shell Oil Co. from 1930-1987 for use as a bulk fuel storage and distribution facility. Tanks, pipes and structures were removed when the facility was decommissioned, and contaminated soil was removed to a depth of 15 feet below ground surface. The site is now a vehicle and boat trailer parking lot. Groundwater is being monitored.

• **The Scott Paper Mill site** was home to a lumber mill and later a pulp mill from 1925 to 1978. Detected in soils, groundwater and nearby marine sediments: metals; petroleum hydrocarbons; polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, or PAHs; polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs; and dioxins/furans. The cleanup covered approximately 25 acres and included excavation and removal of 93,000 cubic yards of contaminated upland soils; dredging and removal of 54,000 cubic yards of contaminated aquatic soils; and planting of eelgrass.

• **The Wyman’s Marina and Wholesale Supply site**, owned by the Port of Anacortes, was historically used for lumber milling and shipbuilding operations, then as an 80-berth marina with fueling, dry dock plus maintenance and storage facilities. Operations ceased in 1998, and underground storage tanks associated with marine fueling were decommissioned and removed. Petroleum hydrocarbons, heavy metals and pesticides were detected in soil samples. About 7,600 square feet of overwater structures and more than 400 tons of contaminated soil were removed from 1998 to 2014. Then 17,800 square feet of intertidal habitat and 8,500 square feet of riparian/salt marsh habitat were created.

and is now macroalgae, riparian and surf smelt spawning habitat.

“We replanted a whole bunch of eelgrass (shoots) and had benchmarks on how many plants were supposed to multiply and grow. We passed the 10-year benchmark before year five,”

he said. “It just goes to show you that we have such a viable ecosystem out in the water that if you remove these contaminants, things just take off.”

Several sites in Anacortes are targeted for cleanup and/or monitoring by the state Depart-

ment of Ecology as part of the Puget Sound Initiative, authorized in 2005 by the Legislature and then-Gov. Christine Gregoire to improve the health of Washington’s inland marine waters and shoreline habitat. Work is completed or underway at some of them.



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