

What Happens to Clean Water Act Settlement Funds?

The Clean Water Act, enacted by Congress and signed into law by a Republican President, is one of the nation's bedrock environmental protections. It protects our precious waters from all sorts of pollution; from industrial chemicals and heavy metals to more dispersed, non-point pollution like silt, oil, fertilizers and human and animal waste.

One of the most important provisions of the Act allows private citizens the ability to enforce the laws when the government is unwilling or unable to do so. Like many clean water advocates, RE Sources for Sustainable Communities uses this provision to take legal action to protect the waters of Whatcom and Skagit Counties and the Salish Sea from pollution that state and federal agencies fail to stop.

When these actions are successful, fines paid by the polluter go into a fund administered by the third party to restore important aquatic resources damaged by pollution. None of the funds go directly into RE Sources coffers.

Examples of projects completed with recent settlements include:



The **Fisherman Bay Coastal Wetland Reconnection and Beach Enhancement Project** reconnects an approximately three acre coastal wetland to the nearshore marine environment and restore intertidal habitat along the shoreline of Lopez Islands' Fisherman Bay. The project, led by Friends of the San Juan, removed an outdated and unnecessary dike, soldier pile walls, and debris from a wetland channel. The project will improve the exchange of tidal waters, allowing juvenile fish

and other species clear passage and access to nutrients.



The **Smokehouse Tidelands Restoration Project** restored ten acres of degraded riparian corridor that was formerly in agricultural production to native plant communities within the Smokehouse tidal floodplain. Led by the Skagit River System Cooperative, the floodplain was planted with communities appropriate to the site including salt marsh, shrub wetland, and pine-spruce forest — providing complexity, structure, and improving habitat.



The **Enhancing Habitat through Native Olympia Oyster Restoration in Fidalgo Bay project** restored one acre of Olympia oyster (*Ostrea lurida*) bed habitat in Fidalgo Bay. Led by the Puget Sound Restoration Fund in collaboration with tideland owners, tribes, and local groups, the



project provides refuge for small marine creatures that are prey for larger marine organisms, creates habitat for sessile organisms, and improves water quality through filter feeding supporting the marine ecosystem and contributing to habitat restoration and enhancement in the Salish Sea.

We all have a responsibility to prevent pollution from spoiling our precious waters. The Citizen Enforcement provision ensures we all have the ability to stop pollution, while providing much-needed funding for important restoration projects that benefit both people and the environment.