Paul Allen

Comments on the Deschutes Estuary Restoration Project
Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement — October 2026

My main points:

- Strongly support restoring the Deschutes Estuary and removing the 5th Avenue Dam.
- Make juvenile salmon, forage fish, and the estuarine food web the highest priorities.
- Maximize natural tidal channels, shallow-water habitat, salt marshes, and shoreline vegetation.
- Protect migrating salmon during construction, including wild fish.
- Reevaluate the need to retain and protect the existing railroad bridge.
- Fund long-term ecological monitoring and habitat management, with recreation a secondary priority.

I have followed and strongly supported restoration of the Deschutes Estuary for more than 20 years. I am pleased that this project is finally moving toward construction.

The Deschutes Estuary was a productive natural ecosystem long before the 5th Avenue Dam was constructed in 1951, creating the artificial reservoir now called Capitol Lake. The resulting loss of tidal exchange contributed to decades of sedimentation, poor water quality, invasive aquatic vegetation, and loss of important fish habitat.

I appreciate the longstanding efforts of the Squaxin Island Tribe and the many agencies and individuals who have worked to make restoration possible.

My primary interest is restoring a healthy, naturally functioning estuary that provides the greatest possible benefits for juvenile salmon, forage fish, and the marine food web.

I support the updated habitat design, particularly its emphasis on connected shallow-water habitat, tidal channels, mudflats, salt marshes, and natural shoreline vegetation. The Restoration Plan anticipates nearly 44,000 additional linear feet of vegetated habitat edge and up to 150 large-wood installations. These are encouraging features.

I would like to see particular attention given to habitat where juvenile salmon can feed, grow, and find refuge from predators. Forage fish and the small aquatic organisms that sustain them deserve equally careful consideration. These ecological functions should guide final design decisions.

During construction, I encourage Ecology and WDFW to protect migrating salmon based on actual migration patterns, including wild fish, rather than relying primarily on hatchery schedules. Water quality and fish passage must remain priorities throughout construction.

I also question the necessity of retaining the existing railroad bridge. The 2022 EIS estimated approximately three trains per week using this rail line. Has the State evaluated current railroad use and whether maintaining this crossing justifies the proposed scour protection and 30-pile debris barrier? I would appreciate an explanation of whether bridge removal or modification could improve tidal exchange, natural movement of large woody debris, and fish habitat. I do not want this question to delay the overall restoration.

Another concern is long-term management. The 2024 Interlocal Agreement establishes funding responsibilities for sediment management through 2050, but funding for implementing future habitat improvements appears less certain. I would like to see equally firm commitments to ecological monitoring and adaptive management, particularly for juvenile salmon, forage fish, native marsh vegetation, and water quality. Monitoring is useful only if there are resources and clear responsibilities to make improvements when needed.

Future dredging in West Bay should also be managed to minimize disturbance to fish and other marine life.

Finally, I support reasonable public access, trails, wildlife viewing, and educational opportunities. However, **recreation should complement restoration, not drive the design or compete with the funding needed for ecological recovery.**

After decades of study, discussion, and planning, I believe it is time to restore the Deschutes Estuary. I strongly support proceeding with the project and hope that its success will ultimately be measured by the health of the estuary and the fish and wildlife that depend on it.

I look forward to seeing this remarkable restoration completed.