Harry Branch

Capitol Lake should be turned into an intertidal estuary. That can mean a lot of different things. The last plan was to create little islands. That idea was shot down and the plan now is to use dredge spoils around the edge and create an engineered "living shoreline".

Why not just get rid of the obstruction and let nature sort out the rest? Blow up the dam. Sediments held in the dam would go where they were originally headed, into the bay where they would form tide flats, a long shallow runout with a gradient of maybe 1 to 500, largely exposed at low tide. Persistent mixing patterns bring things from land into the marine environment in the presence of abundant sunlight. Soft sediment buildup provides habitat for primary and secondary producers, species like ghost shrimp, food for gray whales. Natural marine ecosystems are productive, resilient and maintenance free. Tide flats are one of nature's perfect designs.

The problem is some of these sediments would end up in the shipping berths. If this is the primary concern the Port should cover the lion's share of the costs, which are looking substantial.

Salmon didn't spawn in the river above the falls. Lots of salmon once spawned in Percival, Schneider and Indian Creeks. Proposals for protection or restoration in these watersheds are often diverted to the river. Don't look here look over there. It's a classic red herring.

If there ever was a native run in Moxlie Creek it was small. Salmon seen spawning there today are likely strays from hatcheries in the river. Fish learn to read tiny concentrations of stuff over thousands of generations. Hatcheries largely take natural selection out of the picture.

Not only is establishing a local population in the river a long shot, hatcheries produce lots of strays, interbreed with nearby stocks, compete for food and space and spread disease. Are hatchery fish from the river placing native populations at risk?

Maybe we can establish a new order here in local watersheds. Time will tell. But let's not call it a restoration.