



STATE OF WASHINGTON
GOVERNOR'S EXECUTIVE POLICY OFFICE

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**Meeting on Connor Creek
(January 25, 2002)**

Purpose

Washington State agencies want to develop an approach to working with local governments and those living around Connor Creek so we can understand the impacts of the Creek's northerly migration on the community and help develop reasonable and effective ways to lessen those impacts. Our goal is to arrive at alternatives that can be permitted, are financially affordable, and will be viewed by coastal community residents and officials as economically and environmentally desirable and beneficial for public safety.

Current Situation

Connor Creek is continuing its migration north toward the mouth of the Copalis River. Prior to the 2001-2002 winter high tides, the creek was migrating north into Griffith-Priddy State Park, forming a huge hook at its mouth. In the past few months, the creek has broken through this hook and surged north more than 250 yards. It is now beginning to turn west away from the Park. Along its route, the creek has caused some property loss, made public access to the beach in front of private property nearly impossible, and heightened community concerns about safety.

Community and Agency Concerns

- **Potential Flooding** – The Copalis Beach community is concerned about flooding that could occur should the creek migrate in an easterly direction and join the Copalis River upstream from its mouth. Some flooding could be attributed to filled drainage ditches and culverts that need maintenance and/or replacement.
 - *How great is the likelihood that the Creek will move eastward as predicted in 1997? How much flooding has occurred from Connor Creek and where is it taking place? Since 1997, how much property has been damaged due to Connor Creek flooding and how has public safety been compromised? Does Connor Creek pose a threat to structures?*
- **Economic Vitality** – Connor Creek's migration north is causing increased economic concern in an area already in economic difficulty. However, steps are being taken to improve the general economic conditions on the coast. For example, in response to public input, the Department of Fish and Wildlife has successfully spread the razor clam season over the year, offering increased recreational opportunities to visitors. Local tourist organizations are promoting the area, especially to the Puget Sound weekend tourist.

➤ *How is Connor Creek's migration north affecting the North Beach economy? Are there data with which to measure such effects?*

- **Public Access** – Two county roads have been cut off and residences and resorts no longer have direct pedestrian access to the beach because the creek separates private property from the public beaches. This could be remedied by construction and placement of seasonal pedestrian bridges in the more stable areas along the creek. The public does have foot access to the beach through Griffith Priday State Park (which has had more than 100,000 visits per year since 1998) and north of the current mouth of Connor Creek, as well as vehicle access from the south in Ocean Shores and Ocean City.

➤ *What has been the impact on residents and visitors of the lack of direct vehicle access to the beach at Connor Creek? Has reduced vehicle access provided any benefits; what losses have resulted?*

- **Fish and Wildlife Habitat** – Connor Creek is home to wild salmon – mostly coho, although it also has populations of cutthroat trout and steelhead. Juvenile coho salmon have been found in high densities in the Creek. Broad open stretches of sand, devoid of vegetation, are perfect habitat for Snowy Plover. There have been Snowy Plover sightings at Copalis, but there is limited habitat available at this time for nesting. As the Creek gets longer, it is gaining habitat and increasing species diversity. As the unstable overwash area moves further downstream and to the north, the Creek is also creating highly productive habitat in its wake.

➤ *What types of projects can be accomplished to stabilize Connor Creek without damaging its fish and wildlife habitat? If impact would occur, how can it be successfully mitigated? Are there other factors causing downstream impact to Connor Creek?*

Next Steps

We would like to establish an effective process for ongoing communication and action to address the Connor Creek situation. Our goal is to achieve a resolution that is satisfactory to the community, elected officials and state agencies. We would also like to evaluate the possibilities for interim solutions – such as temporary footbridges or culvert replacements – while we work on a longer-term resolution.