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June 2, 2021

MEMORANDUM

TO: Council Members

FROM: Karl Weist

SUBJECT: Briefing on recent activities of the Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership

BACKGROUND:

Presenter: Elaine Placido, Executive Director of the Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership

Summary: Elaine Placido became Executive Director of LCEP at a propitious moment in July 2020, shortly after the time the world went virtual. Directing a staff during COVID-19 restrictions became a special challenge, but she had faced those before. Elaine is a veteran of the US Coast Guard and has over 20 years' experience in local government and non-profits. Most recently she served as Director of Community Services for Cowlitz County (WA). Elaine will brief the Committee on some recent accomplishments of the Estuary Partnership and update us on the floodplain restoration taking place at Steigerwald Lake near Washougal, WA.

The Columbia River Estuary Partnership is one of 28 nationally recognized Estuary Programs, administered by the US Environmental Protection Agency.

Relevance: As an aspect of our Ecosystem Function Strategy, the 2014 Fish and Wildlife Program includes an Estuary sub-strategy to "Restore ecosystem function to protect and enhance critical habitat and spawning and rearing grounds in the estuary and lower Columbia." The Council Program also

notes in Estuary Principles that “Habitat restoration supports and enhances ecosystem functions and species survival.” The 2020 Program Addendum contains an Estuary Strategy Indicator of acres of estuary floodplain protected or restored per hydrogeomorphic reach to get to recovery of 40 percent of historic extent for priority habitats.

Background: Steigerwald Lake is a 1,049-acre US Fish and Wildlife Service refuge near the Port of Camas-Washougal along the Columbia River. The project, now entering its third year of construction, will reconnect 965 acres of Columbia River floodplain by removing a US Army Corps of Engineers levy (and dealing with the bureaucratic process of levy removal). The Estuary Partnership has received funding from seven different sources, including Bonneville, and has 11 project partners to help accomplish this monumental feat of floodplain restoration in the lower Columbia. Once completed, Steigerwald Lake restoration will make a significant contribution to the Council’s indicators of Estuary Strategy success and toward the Partnership’s goals for its own National Estuary Program.

More Info: <https://www.estuarypartnership.org/who-we-are/our-staff-board>
<https://www.estuarypartnership.org/our-work/habitat-restoration/steigerwald-floodplain-restoration-project>
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