First, Do No Harm—a Personal Perspective

text and photos by Connie Gallant, unless otherwise credited

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The decision to proceed with three Dosewallips Engineered Log Jams (ELJs) has been made, and it is not to my personal liking. As full disclosure, I am not a biologist, engineer, or scientist. I am simply a concerned citizen who has witnessed enough interference with Mother Nature from humans that I cannot help but wonder about the arrogance of our species. Keep in mind that this is a personal perspective from my own "boots on the ground" research.

The Dosewallips River is a beautiful river that stretches from the Olympic National Park to the Olympic National Forest. Along its way can be seen some of the most magnificent vistas our area offers. The river itself is as pristine as any river can be in today's world. Its frothy "white water runs" delight the eye and camera of many photographers and exhilarate paddlers visiting worldwide.

–Jim Scarborough

The "Dose," as we locals call it, used to be a salmon-run river. The number of salmon here, as in many other rivers and bays, has dwindled over the years.

When we moved to Quilcene in 1982, JD and I would gawk at the Quilcene River, sure that we could "walk" across on top of all the salmon. And that's hardly an exaggeration. JD looked forward to retiring so he could put to use the many fishing poles and dandy lures he'd acquired from swap meets, garage sales, and auctions, and visit many of the nearby rivers, especially the Dose.

Why the demise of the salmon runs? First and foremost, excessive logging too close to river banks, so the silt and sediment runoff damages creeks, streams, estuaries and rivers. Clearing conifers from the rivers' banks has created openings for alders, and alders produce nutrients that feed algae in estuaries, the natural nursery for salmon. Too much algae blocks sunlight, causing a decline in eelgrass. When the eelgrass is lost, the young salmon lack hiding places and feeding grounds to help them on their way to the ocean. The removal of large woody debris several years ago also contributed to that demise.

The reasons for the removal of this large woody debris were because, at the time, the thought was that they impaired the stabilization of the river. So, years ago those same biologists (with money available for projects) convinced everyone that removing large woody debris from the river was good for the river and for salmon.

Large woody debris is a significant ecological and structural component of streams and rivers, and forms essential habitat for aquatic and terrestrial organisms. Natural large woody debris provides:

- Habitat for plants, salmon, and microorganisms; and
- Spawning places and shelter for fish during warmer weather.

Natural log jams come apart over time. This is good for rivers and fish, as it allows a river to change over time at its own speed. A river will naturally adjust to its wood load, and so do its fish. But ELJs built to be permanent with tons of rock, gravel, and river bottom, secured with vertical pilings, are like nothing a river could ever make on its own. They exert tremendous force against the river, and the changes they cause to nearby existing habitat are severe and usually destructive.

The Dose ELJs are of this larger design and have indeed been proposed where they will cause outright harm to existing steelhead habitat. This is why this larger design style is usually reserved for areas with little or no existing habitat—highly modified, degraded, and even polluted rivers. (The Dose does not qualify under these three classifications, and it has existing habitat for steelhead).

The following list includes the type of activities the river will be subjected to:

- Construction of three engineered log jams, including about 40 logs per structure
- Placement of approximately 125 logs (trees) on the floodplain to act as roughness elements during higher-flow events
- Tracked excavators will be used to construct logjams and large wood complexes within stream channels, gravel bars, and floodplains.
- Removal of a 370-foot-long (approximately 650 cubic yards) earth berm from the floodplain. Most construction sites will be accessed along gravel bars, but some forested riparian areas will be disturbed during logjam construction.
- Minimal stream crossings with equipment will also be required to construct some of the log jams.

This Engineered Log Jam is located at the Dosewallips State Park, at the river's entrance to Hood Canal. It is readily visible from the campground and picnic area of the beach side of the park.

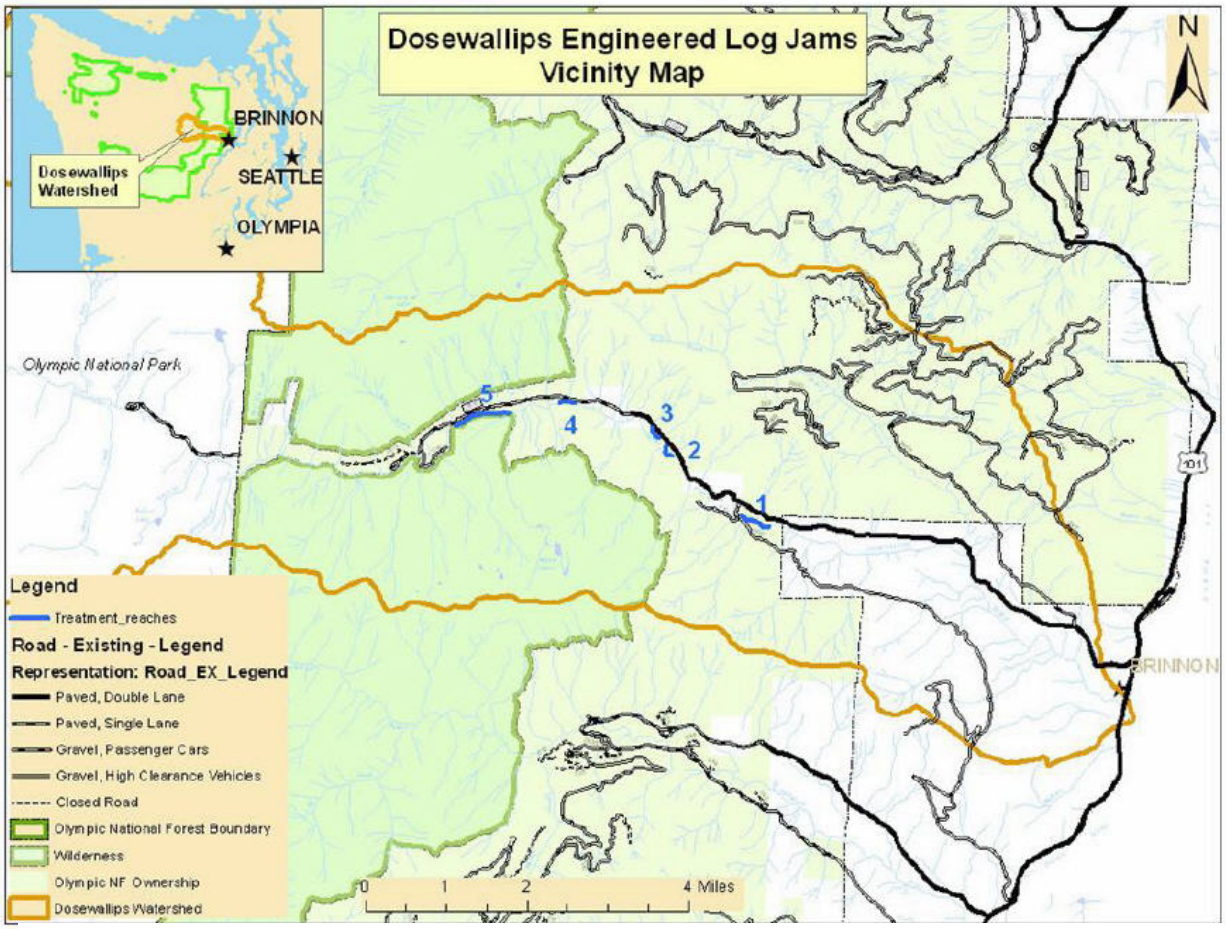
Tons of gravel were used to form this island.

A close-up of the stumps mounds

This ELJ is in the middle of the river. Since I took this photo in March, I can't figure how the salmon can make redds when the water level is much lower later in the year.

Each phase of the plan has worksites set in five different areas (or "reaches") of the middle Dose, from River Mile (RM) 6 to 10. Plans are set for 16 log jams.

Figure 1. Project vicinity map, numbers denote proposed treatment reaches



–U.S. Forest Service

Simply forcing a river to move and rearrange its features is not a guaranteed way to help fish. We do not know what features will shake out after this much alteration, and if the fish will even like and use the features that result. It is a big, expensive gamble, and an inappropriate one for the Dose River at these chosen locations.

The engineered log jams are supposed to provide shade and debris at the edge of the river, but this can be more easily, less expensively, and less invasively accomplished by planting conifers within 50 to 100 feet of the river's edge, thus rebuilding Nature's riparian forest that provides shade and debris naturally. It is argued that this is too slow a process that will take many years to have a good effect; true enough, but it is a more natural process in helping Nature recover what we have destroyed.

With the influx of funding for many salmon restoration projects, however, not many proponents seem to be listening to reason, or willing to try more natural solutions first without risking more damage to our rivers.

Designs for engineering for fish in rivers for fish have continue. Not all ELJs are the same, nor do all exert the same action on their settings within the watercourse.

The ELJs planned for the Dose will be an aesthetic eyesore to that beautiful and relatively pristine river. Bulldozers, big trucks, and plenty of dirt and gravel will attack the Dose with fury. This invasive process will undoubtedly do more harm than good; it reminds me of the ancient admonition by Hippocrates' "First, do no harm," and I believe this admonition applies just as well in wilderness conservation.

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), in a long document, made recommendations to the U.S Forest Service (USFS). The first two recommendations follow:

1. We recommend that the USFS remove other anthropogenic structures from the floodplain, including segments of FS Road 2610 and any riprap, that are also preventing the river from accessing its channel migration zone and floodplain.

2. We recommend that the USFS construct future ELJ projects in a Dosewallips reach that has more degraded habitat and less potential for affecting existing spawning habitat than in the proposed reach.

The Forest Service has chosen to ignore those recommendations. In their response to NMFS' first recommendation, the USFS stated that, " **... Because we intend to maintain FSR 2610 for vehicle access, it would not be prudent to remove the existing riprap erosion protection along the portions of road within the floodplain unless another suitable erosion control method was put in place first ...** "

For NMFS' second recommendation, the USFS responded, " **... We also select projects that align with the current principles of conservation biology, including protecting the best habitat first rather than trying to fix the most degraded habitat.**"

Forest Service Road 2610 is the road that washed out during 2002. The USFS admits there is no funding to repair or reconstruct it, but still apparently is not willing to give up hope of constructing a bypass at a higher altitude and cutting the old growth grove we call The Polly Dyer Grove.

On March 8, the Hood Canal District Ranger published the decision to proceed with the project. Unless you submitted a comment during the Environmental Assessment period last year, you cannot appeal this decision.

Still, it is your river. What do <u>you</u> think?