

Saturday, Nov 1

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LANDMARK DECISION

Dyes Inlet shellfish get clean bill of health

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 Sun Staff

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For the first time in more than 30 years, people will soon be able to eat shellfish from portions of Dyes Inlet without much worry of getting sick.

Washington Department of Health has issued an initial order giving a clean bill of health to clams and oysters on about 3 miles of beach on the west side of Dyes Inlet, a mile on the east side, plus more than a mile on Erlands Point near Bremerton.

At the moment, Dyes Inlet is closed to all shellfish harvesting because of toxic levels of paralytic shellfish harvesting, or red tide. Such closures can occur at any time, so people are advised to check with local health authorities before taking clams or oysters from any beach.

The official opening of Dyes Inlet shellfish beds to commercial harvesters -- tribal and nontribal -- will come in a final order about the beginning of December, said Frank Meriwether of the agency.

The final order will designate an area of Dyes Inlet as "conditionally approved" instead of "prohibited," which has outlawed commercial harvesting since the 1960s. Conditional approval means that harvesting must stop for at least a week after a sewage spill in the area.

The final order also will allow harvesting at two public beaches, Anna Smith Children's Park and a shoal known as Clam Island.

State approval will mean that the Suquamish Tribe can harvest half the naturally produced shellfish in the area. The tribe must notify property owners and conduct a shellfish population survey before it harvests. Harvesters would arrive by boat.

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The new designation came about because the city of Bremerton has nearly eliminated sewage discharges and the Navy has applied a computer model to show that pollution mostly dissipates before reaching shellfish subject to the new classification.

A map showing the designations in Dyes Inlet can be found at www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/sf/pubs/dyesinlet.doc. For information about local conditions, go to www.kitsapcountyhealth.com and click on "Shellfish beach closures."

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