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Marine Park in Fairhaven: One of America's Best Restored Beaches

The American Shore and Beach Preservation Association (ASBPA) announced that Marine Park in the Fairhaven district of Bellingham is a winner of its 2009 Best Restored Beach Award. This award comes just before the annual Ski-to-Sea seven-leg relay race finish at the beach at Marine Park.

“ASBPA created the Best Restored Beach award in 2001 as a way of highlighting the value of America’s restored beaches,” said Harry Simmons, mayor of Caswell Beach, N.C., and ASBPA president. “As Americans flock to our coastline during the upcoming beach season, most don’t even realize they may be enjoying a restored beach.”

Marine Park is a very popular shoreline park in the Fairhaven district of Bellingham, Washington. The Marine Park beach restoration project was completed as part of larger Bellingham Bay-wide habitat restoration and beach access planning efforts, which have been underway since 1999.

Bellingham Bay is well known for having almost no beach access as the shore is dominated by either industrial sites or a rail line with rock revetment. Whatcom County Marine Resources Committee recognized the need for restoration at Marine Park, and provided much citizen support of the project.

Owned and operated by the Port of Bellingham, Marine Park was one of the first restored beaches in the Bellingham area, and now provides year round public access to one of the most scenic and well used beaches within the city limits.

The older rubble and debris “revetment” was failing and habitat issues have come into the forefront in recent years. This led to development of a soft shore protection/beach enhancement approach for much of the park shoreline, chosen by the Port of Bellingham over more traditional hard armor (bulkhead) structures.

Jim Johannessen of the Bellingham based Coastal Geologic Services created the beach design and oversaw project construction along with the Port of Bellingham. Reid Middleton of Everett provided engineering services and was the project manager.

The project was completed in 2004 with major funding from the Port of Bellingham and contributions from the Department of Natural Resources' Project Funds.

The restored beach has met pre-project expectations for public access area, habitat creation and durability. The restored beach has been greatly used, drawing a much greater number of visitors than the pre-restoration beach.

Restoration of the Marine Park shoreline is an outstanding example of a community-oriented restoration project with a valuable habitat enhancement component: it connects the community with nature. The Port of Bellingham has pleased visitors greatly with the new approach.

For the last 40 years, beach restoration has been the preferred method of shore protection in coastal communities on the east, west and Gulf coasts. Beach restoration is the process of placing beach-quality sand on eroding beaches to reverse or offset the effects of erosion.

At Marine Park, large riprap boulders were removed and replaced with a gently sloping sand and gravel beach.

The three main reasons for restoration are:

- Storm protection — a wide sand and gravel beach helps buffer or attenuate storm waves from upland structures and infrastructure.
- Habitat restoration — numerous species rely on wide, healthy beaches as a place to live, feed and nest.
- Recreation enhancement — America's beaches have twice as many visitors annually as all of America's national parks combined. Every year, there are more than 2 billion visitors to America's beaches. In 2007, beaches contributed \$322 billion to the America's economy. More importantly, for every dollar the federal government spends on beach nourishment, it gets \$320 back in tax revenues. The restored beach at Marine Park creates a "softer landing" for the finish line of the Ski to Sea race.

Coastal communities, along with various planning and funding partners, have restored more than 370 beaches in the United States, including such iconic coastlines as Miami Beach, Coney Island and Southern California's Venice Beach.

At a time of economic recession, the beach is an even more desirable destination than other domestic and foreign alternatives.

To enter the competition, coastal communities nominated their

restoration projects for consideration, and an independent panel of coastal managers and scientists selected the winners.

Judging was based on three criteria: the economic and ecological benefits the beach brings to its community; the short- and long-term success of the restoration project; and the challenges each community overcame during the course of the project.

Other beaches honored this year include: South Padre Island, Texas; St Joseph Peninsula, Fla.; Encinitas (Pacific Station), Calif.; Lido Key, Fla.; Duval County, Fla.

Past award winners include: Panama City Beach, Fla., in 2002; San Diego Beach in 2003; Ocean City, Md., in 2004; Indian River County, Fla., in 2005; Rehoboth and Dewey Beaches in Delaware in 2006; the Chaland Headland Restoration Project in Louisiana in 2007; and Olympic Sculpture Park, Seattle, Wash., in 2008.

About Marine Park

Marine Park occupies a beautiful stretch of waterfront on the south side of Bellingham, and links to a nationally acclaimed trail system. Marine Park is located in Fairhaven near the Bellingham Cruise Terminal.

It features a gentle sloping beach ideal for beachcombing and building sandcastles or kayaking. A newly renovated picnic shelter is perfect for any type of outdoor gathering. Marine Park is owned and operated by the Port of Bellingham.

About the American Shore and Beach Preservation Association

Founded in 1926, the American Shore and Beach Preservation Association (ASBPA) represents the scientific, technical and political interests along the coast in an effort to shape national research and policy concerning shore and beach management and restoration.

ASBPA strives to engage in a factual debate on coastal issues and economics that will foster sound, far-sighted and economical development and preservation of our beaches, thereby aiding in placing their beliefs within the reach of the largest possible number of people in accordance with the ideals of a democratic nation. For additional information about ASBPA, please visit <http://www.asbpa.org>. §

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