

## **Final Environmental Impact Statement Completed: Capitol Lake Basin Best Managed as an Estuary**

*By Nathaniel Jones*

On Oct. 31, managers of the state capitol campus announced that the Capitol Lake basin will be best managed as an estuary. The announcement came after a final environmental analysis that considered approaches to managing the lake. Now, after decades of analysis and debate, the Thurston community has reached a conclusion, and we stand at the beginning of dramatic changes in the heart of Olympia.

To continue to follow this issue, go to: <https://capitollakedeschutesestuaryeis.org>. This site includes links to the Final EIS and an email list to receive updates on long-term management of the Capitol Lake.

Well before the 1951 construction of Deschutes Parkway and the 5th Avenue Dam, which created Capitol Lake, critics knew that river sediment would create ongoing problems with the artificial lake. More recently, the sediment has made the lake more shallow and the associated warming of the water has led to invasive species concerns and system imbalances that have upended the environment of southern Budd Inlet beyond the confines of the lake.

Dramatic changes are coming – changes that seek to restore some of the ecosystem benefits and natural networks that predate the river’s captivity. Yet none of this will be easy. State, local, and private entities are working together through a conceptual agreement to share costs and decision-making into the future, implementing a general plan of renewal through dredging, removal of the dam, and construction of roadways, habitat, and recreational amenities.

Current estimates for this work over the next 30 years top more than \$271 million, with the State carrying over 90 percent of the burden. After construction is complete, ongoing dredging and maintenance of the assets will be required, and the costs will continue. Therefore, it is a substantial accomplishment to arrive at a decision and an agreement on how to move forward.

Thurston governments have a long history of working together to solve intractable problems and achieve significant benefits. We can be proud of our history of collaboration and coordination. For many years, the Capitol Lake conundrum has been emblematic of local division, gridlock, and indecision. Last month’s announcement confirms our leaders can find workable solutions and allow our community to move forward together.

We can expect that the restoration of an estuary in Downtown Olympia will present challenges and consequences that are not yet fully understood. Never the less, having reached a consensus on this issue empowers us to tackle the next perplexing political hot potato with greater confidence that common ground can be found and we can address even the most-stubborn issues.