

Land and Sea Work Together for Marine Life

'The shore is an ancient world. As long as there has been an Earth and sea there has been this place of the meeting of land and water.'

Belted Kingfisher

Marshes, Estuaries, Rivers Bring Life to Our Shores

Oak Harbor Bay sits at the center of a rich marine system where fresh and saltwater mix. The nearby Skagit River pours into Skagit Bay, diluting its salinity and carrying thousands of newborn salmon toward our shores. These smolt find food and refuge in our island's pocket estuaries and coves. Creeks, outfalls and fresh water seeps provide places for young fish to adjust to the marine environment. The constant mixing creates a nutrient soup for plankton. They convert sunlight into food with photosynthesis, feeding everything that grows here from tiny shrimp to the migrating gray whales that feed on them.



Rachel Carson, *The Edge of the Sea*

Orcas

Caspian Tern

Watch for Visiting Orcas

If you are lucky you may see pods of orcas that visit Saratoga Passage from late fall through midwinter. They travel in groups of several individuals led by the elder female. Salmon are a favorite food of our resident orcas. Keep an eye out, too, for river otters, harbor seals and their pups. Harbor seals often sneak a curious look at you from a distance and then slip below the surface.

Bald Eagles



Forage Fish



Salmon, Forage Fish and Birds

Juvenile salmon from the Skagit and other rivers prowl our shore, finding food and refuge in the eelgrass beds of Oak Harbor Bay, Crescent Harbor and much of Saratoga Passage. Additional hatchling salmon are raised and released from floating pens at the city's marina. Salmon thrive on Pacific herring, sand lance and surf smelt, "forage fish" that lay their eggs on eelgrass or directly on our sandy shoreline. Healthy eelgrass beds and natural shorelines are critical to the food chain. Forage fish are also a staple for many birds such as loons, grebes, cormorants, terns, kingfishers and great blue herons.

Zooplankton



Phytoplankton

Seep

A typical seep, where fresh water oozes from saturated uplands and trickles down to the bay.

Killdeer and chick



Glaucous-winged Gull



Driftwood



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