



Puget Sound Partnership
Workshop on Levee/Vegetation Issues
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Public Safety

- The Skagit River System Cooperative member tribes understand the vital importance of the Skagit River levee system to public safety and infrastructure
- The tribes do not want to see the system fall into disrepair

Trust Responsibility

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- The levees have been in place many years but are actively maintained and repaired in a series of new federal actions that individual and cumulatively impact tribal resources
- The PL 84-99 program actively maintains the Skagit River in a degraded state for fish habitat which is a vital tribal resource

Impact of the PL 84-99 Program on Tribal Resources

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 - reduces the quality of edge habitat in the Skagit River, natural banks are far more productive for juvenile salmonids than rip-rap banks



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 - Precludes development of riparian forest that create undercut banks, instream bank roots, and LWD recruitment that provide high quality fish habitat
 - Isolates the Skagit River from its floodplain eliminating formation of off channel habitats and side channels that provide high quality juvenile fish habitat
 - The impact of the PL 84-99 program on tribal resources goes well beyond the current PGL on vegetation variance

Vegetation Management and Variance

It is a positive development that the current draft of the PGL allows for USACE Districts to sponsor a variance we are hopeful the Seattle District will take a leadership role in developing variances in the Skagit Basin

Northwest Variance Compliant Vegetation

- Most recent levee repairs include willow lifts as part of the repair

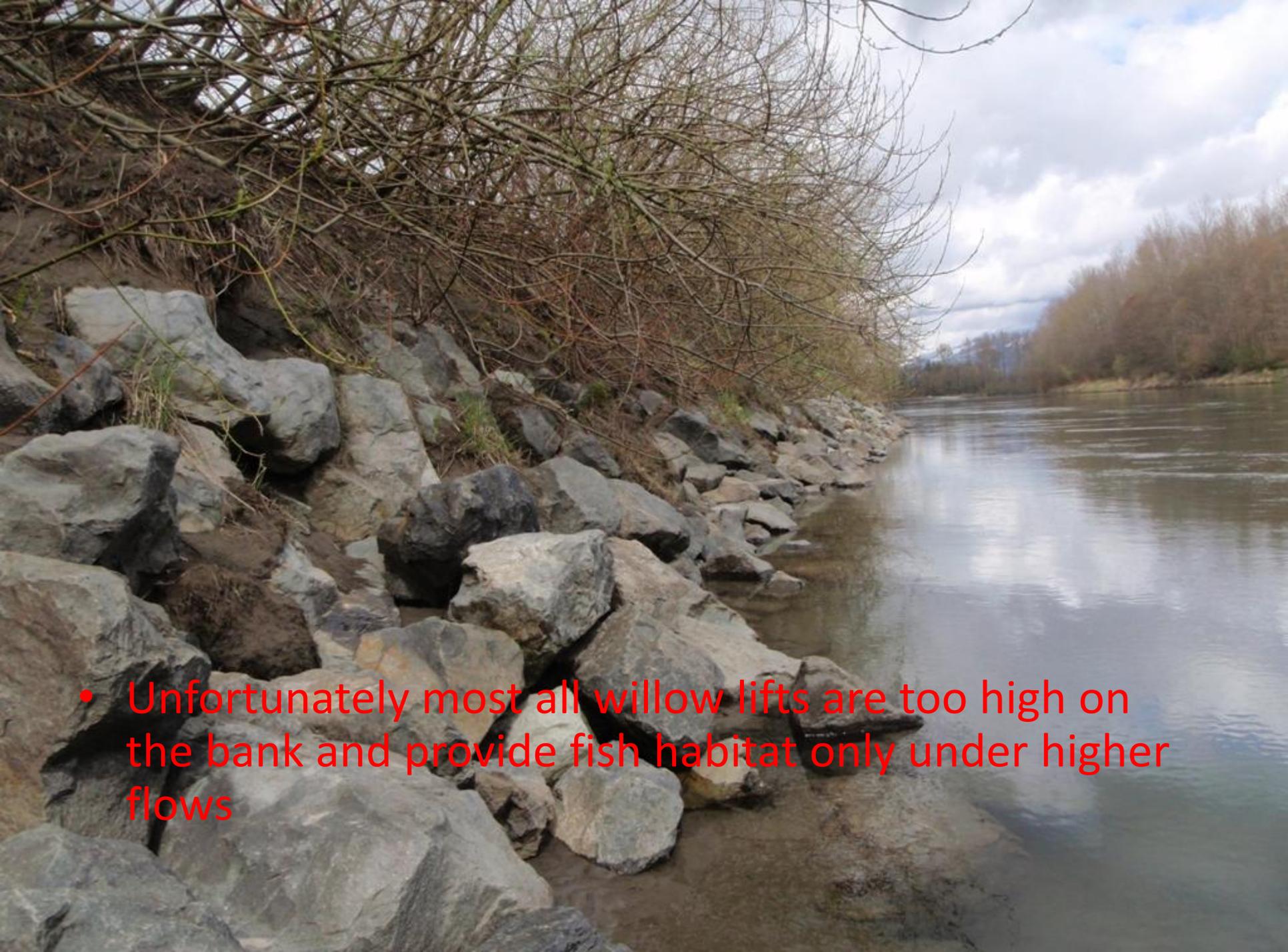




- Under the right flow circumstances willow lifts can provide instream and overwater cover for juvenile fish



- willow lifts are topped to train them out over the water

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- Unfortunately most all willow lifts are too high on the bank and provide fish habitat only under higher flows



- Willow lifts also take a number of years to develop



A Levee Vegetation Management Action with Adverse Impacts on Tribal Resources

- Nearly all of the vegetation was removed from 175 yards of levee



A Levee Vegetation Management Action with Adverse Impacts on Tribal Resources

- Including many areas of two inch diameter willows without adjacent larger material

A Levee Vegetation Management Action with Adverse Impacts on Tribal Resources

- This willow complex was left



A Levee Vegetation Management Action with Adverse Impacts on Tribal Resources

- And it is providing good habitat



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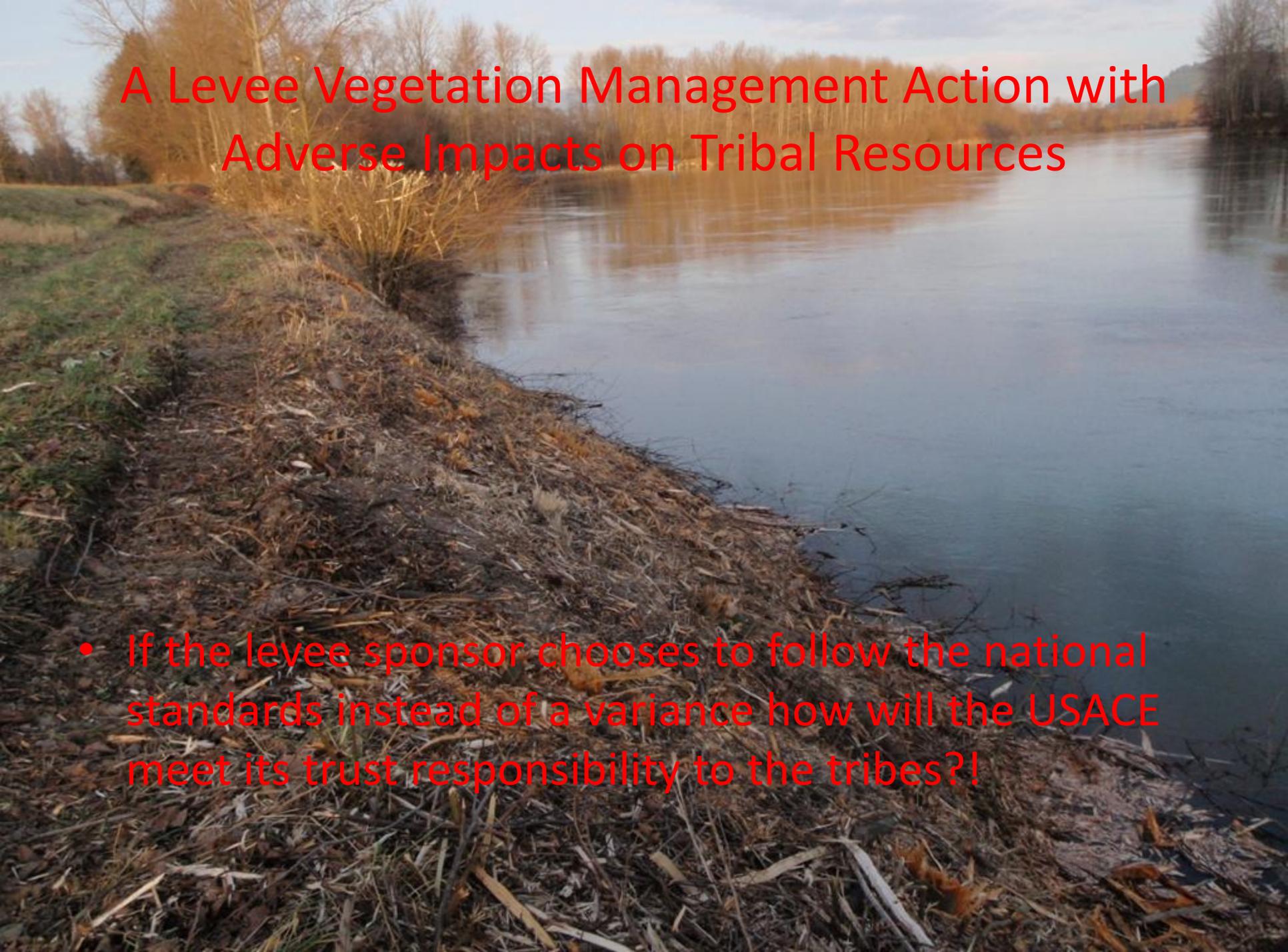


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Along this 175 yard section of levee the total number of trees removed was

- 148 four inches diameter or greater
- 102 two to four inches in diameter
- 421 less than two inches in diameter



A photograph of a riverbank. In the foreground, there is a large, messy pile of dry sticks, twigs, and debris. The river flows from the right towards the center. In the background, there is a line of trees with some autumn-colored foliage. The sky is overcast.

A Levee Vegetation Management Action with Adverse Impacts on Tribal Resources

- If the levee sponsor chooses to follow the national standards instead of a variance how will the USACE meet its trust responsibility to the tribes?!

How Could This Have Been Avoided?

- Greater direction from the USACE to the Dike District on important environmental elements that need to be retained during levee management activity
- A better collaborative relationship between the USACE, Dike Districts, Resource Agencies, and Tribes with respect to levee vegetation management

Where Do We Go From Here?

- We would like to see the USACE form a collaborative process with the Dike Districts, Resource Agencies, and Tribes to develop vegetation variances in the Skagit Basin that provides for public safety and environmental resources

