

Published October 24, 2007

See salmon and more at McLane Creek Nature Trail

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- **What:** Fall wildlife and spawning chum salmon at McLane Creek Nature Trail.

- **To do:** McLane Creek — a tiny stream that flows just off Delphi Road — welcomes a big run of chum salmon every fall, and the fish are just now arriving. Most South Sound streams — even the tiny ones — have at least some chum salmon spawners, and McLane Creek is a great spot to see these fish.

For the best view, don't walk right up to the bank and spook the fish. Stay back — or use brush and trees for cover. If you do this, the fish continue fighting, swimming and spawning — instead of racing around in fear.

Pick out one group of salmon and see whether you can identify the males swarming around the females. The males bite each other with their big teeth, and they brush against the female during their wooing. Salmon dig deep nests in the gravel with their tails. Look for bright clean gravel, which is the sign of a fresh nest, which is called a redd.

Look for salmon that are on their sides and thrashing. They are spawning or getting ready to spawn. Look for dead salmon — they are food for baby salmon, cutthroat trout, birds and other creatures.

The McLane Creek Nature Trail offers more than chum salmon. Visitors can see beavers, a beaver dam, a beaver lodge and recently chewed logs and branches at the large pond. Visitors that sit quietly and patiently have a great chance of seeing a beaver in the pond.

The pond also has a good population of roughskin newts. The rusty-colored immature newts slowly paddle through the beaver pond, while the adults ease through the damp fallen leaves on shore. Don't pick up these animals, as their skin has toxins that can be deadly if they make their way into your mouth. It's easy to just watch these slow-moving critters.

A great, 1.1-mile trail takes visitors past McLane Creek — and the spawning salmon — through dense stands of cedar and maple trees, past swamps and the beaver pond. The trail took a lot of damage early last winter, but state Department of Natural Resources crews did a great job of repairing the boardwalks earlier this year.

The trail takes about 40 minutes at a brisk walk, but there is no reason to walk briskly, or you'll miss too much. It pays to walk slowly or even sit down on a bench if you want to see beavers, deer or other wildlife. Early morning is the best time to see beavers swim around the pond or visit their lodge, which looks like a giant pile of driftwood. If the beaver sees you, it will whack the water with its tail and hide.

Look for ferns sprouting out of trees — and young cedar trees sprouting out of old cedar stumps. Look for the old springboard cuts that loggers chopped into the stumps when the area was logged decades ago. The cuts held boards that the loggers stood on as they sawed through the tree trunks.

The trails have terrific signs that explain the ecology of the area and the life stories of plants and animals.

- **Equipment:** Rain gear, cameras, binoculars, boots, warm clothes, water and snacks.

- **Safety:** Don't hike this trail on windy days, as trees rooted in the shallow, muddy soil can uproot and fall. Don't hike off the trail or boardwalk. Be careful on the boardwalks, as some of them don't have railings and can get slippery. This trail is not passable for people who use wheelchairs and walkers. Don't let kids wander off to fall into the pond or into the black muck.

- **Hours:** The McLane Creek Nature Trail is open daily until dusk.

- **Directions:** To get to McLane Nature Trail, drive west on Mud Bay Road until the intersection with Delphi Road. Turn left onto Delphi Road. Follow Delphi Road to the McLane Nature Trail sign and turn right. Be careful driving at McLane Nature Trail, as the access road is one lane for much of the way. Park in the second parking lot.

- **Comforts:** There is a restroom at the trailhead.

- **More information:** Go to www.dnr.wa.gov.

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