

# Jefferson PUD sticks with Beckett Point

By Jeff Chew

**T**he Jefferson County PUD recently completed a \$2.8 million community septic system for the residents of Beckett Point, a 70-year-old fishing and vacation community on Discovery Bay, addressing a growing concern about pollution from failing septic tanks that in many cases were nothing more than 55-gallon oil drums buried in the sandy soil.

But there was a time last spring when it looked like the PUD might be forced to walk away from the project, which involves pumping sewage away from the water's edge uphill to a community drain field.

When the contractor, Pape and Sons, unearthed some human bones and Native American artifacts, the state Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation shut down the project. An archaeological survey later uncovered more remains and signs of ancient cooking fires.

After years of planning, and with more than \$1 million already spent, it was possible that the project would have to be abandoned.

"We were looking at Port Angeles, and quite honestly, we don't have that kind of money," said Jefferson County PUD

General Manager Jim Parker, recalling what happened three years ago when the state Department of Transportation was forced to abandon plans for a dry dock after spending nearly \$90 million. In that case, the state eventually agreed to pay the Lower Elwha Klallam tribe \$2.5 million to rebury hundreds of remains and care for artifacts uncovered during excavation.

Shortly after the bones and bone fragments were discovered at Beckett Point, the PUD and Jefferson County commissioners held a joint meeting at the county courthouse in Port Townsend. They were joined by Allyson Brooks, director of the state Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, state Reps. Lynn Kessler and Kevin Van De Wege, tribal representatives

and a number of Beckett Point residents.

The county agreed to split any costs caused by the archaeological discovery with the PUD, and eventually secured a \$50,000 grant from the state Department of Ecology grant. Seattle-based archaeologist Gary Wessen, who was joined by observers from the Jamestown S'Klallam, Port Gamble S'Klallam and Skokomish tribes, was hired to further investigate the site.

In mid-July, Wessen reported a single partially intact human grave was found along with a concentration of other disturbed bones, stone tools and shell middens, indicating the remains of ancient beach campfires. Wessen said the remains were possibly a few thousand years.



*A study team processes material from the site at Beckett Point where human remains were discovered. Photo: The Seattle Times*

"This work has identified four areas of potentially intact shell midden deposits and five additional areas where clearly disturbed shell midden materials are present," said

Wessen, whose study allowed the state's top archaeologist, Brooks, to allow PUD to resume work in September.

With Wessen's report in hand, the PUD also agreed to re-engineer some of the septic system infrastructure to avoid disturbing the shell middens, and the state agreed to let the project continue, with an archaeologist on site during the digging.

"We were lucky," Parker said. "We were afraid of the worst, but it turned out okay. Beckett Point residents really needed this project." Parker estimated the delays and additional engineering incurred because of the artifacts added about \$90,000 to the project's cost.

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In recent years, the county had begun cracking down on issuing building permits for residents to improve or expand their homes because of inadequate septic systems, and seven years ago the Fisherman's Club approached the PUD about installing a community drain field.

The project included "grinder pumps" – like large garbage disposals – for each home, pumping stations and buried pipelines to carry sewage to the inland drain field.

"It really means the protection of our surroundings, the bay and the piece of land we have," said Patty Sahlinger, Beckett Point

Fisherman's Club secretary and a full-time resident for 10 years.

Although some residents were originally reluctant to pay their share of the project, Sahlinger said that changed in recent years, despite the fact that the cost per resident is about \$28,000. A notice posted to the Fisherman's Club website in March 2007 indicated the vote at a special meeting to determine whether to proceed with the project was almost unanimous.

Ed Edwards, a Fisherman's Club board member, called the Jefferson PUD "a class act" for sticking with the project.

After the Fisherman's Club approached PUD commissioners in 2000, the PUD helped the Fisherman's Club form a local utility district and arranged interim project financing through a public-private partnership. "It's a deal that had to happen," said Jefferson PUD Commissioner Wayne King. "It's fortunate we were able to assist the residents of Beckett Point and help clean up Discovery Bay." □

*Jeff Chew is a reporter for the Peninsula Daily News and supervises the newspaper's bureau in Port Townsend.*

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