

Port of Willapa Harbor dedicates dock and warehouse on October 8, 1930

Written by Administrator

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On October 8, 1930, the Port of Willapa Harbor dedicates its new dock and warehouse on the Willapa River in Raymond. The Port will provide freight-handling facilities for the smaller logging and sawmill companies that do not have their own wharves and moorage facilities for fishing and oyster boats that operate out of Bay Center and Tokeland on Willapa Bay. After logging and commercial fishing decline in the 1980s and 1990s, the Port will shift to encouraging industrial and manufacturing growth through developing its onshore land and supporting tourism development through partnering with local government and organizations to develop amenities that attract visitors.

Business at Shoalwater Bay

Logging and sawmill companies dominated the early economic development of Willapa Harbor, which is located at the confluence of the Willapa River and Willapa Bay in Pacific County. Forested land covered more than 90 percent of the county's land area. Before the arrival of rail lines in the 1890s, logs and lumber, as well as fish and oysters that were harvested from the bay, could only reach markets via ships.

The River and Harbor Act of 1892 authorized the Army Corps of Engineers to dredge a channel from deep water in the bay to Willapa City on the South Fork of the Willapa River, just east of where Raymond is today. The Corps of Engineers also maintained a channel over the bar at the mouth of the harbor.

Willapa Bay (then known as Shoalwater Bay), was one of just a handful of sheltered bays on the Pacific Coast north of California. Companies hoping to exploit the timber resources of Southwest Washington could only find sheltered water inside the mouth of the Columbia River

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or at Grays Harbor or Willapa Bay on the Washington coast.

Logging companies operating in the Willapa Hills or the local river valleys floated their logs to South Bend, and, after its founding in 1903, to Raymond for milling.

Ocean-going ships loaded logs or milled lumber at company-owned docks on the Willapa River. Smaller logging companies, sawmills, shingle mills, and other factories without access to the riverfront sent their products via the railroad to Grays Harbor or Puget Sound for shipment, greatly increasing their costs and transit time.

Willapa Bay fishermen and oystermen docked at Tokeland, Bay Center, Raymond, and South Bend to unload and processed salmon, crabs, and oysters. These were then sent via ships to market, usually San Francisco.

As with the forest products industries, a lack of public dock facilities hampered the seafood industry. Siltation and a lack of floating moorages also limited boats' access to onshore facilities.

The Port District Act of 1911, passed by the Washington state legislature, provided a means for developing public port facilities. The act authorized the formation of port districts that could develop port facilities and fund the projects with property taxes, bond issues, operating income, and other prescribed means.

The Public Ports of Pacific County

In 1928 three ports formed in Pacific County. The first, the Port of Ilwaco, primarily served the fishing vessels on the Columbia River. The Port of Willapa Harbor, formed next, developed port facilities for shipping lumber and other forest products and for fishing and oystering vessels. The Port of Peninsula on the Long Beach Peninsula, formed last, and served the oyster operations in the southern arm of Willapa Bay.

The Port of Willapa Harbor district covered the majority of the county's area. Its 787 square miles included the northern two-thirds of the county, save for the Long Beach Peninsula south

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of Leadbetter State Park. The Port of Willapa Harbor district included Leadbetter Point even though it was adjacent to the county's other port districts so that any dealings with the Army Corps of Engineers regarding dredging of the harbor mouth would only involve one port.

Port of Willapa Harbor



Voters approved the Port's formation on April 24, 1928, with a vote of 1,124 to 73. Of the large landowners in the proposed district, only Weyerhaeuser Timber Company opposed the Port. Possibly this was due to the fact that the company owned its own docks so would not benefit directly from property-tax-supported Port activities to which it would be the largest contributor.

At the same election, voters elected the first board of commissioners. Each represented a portion of the district and served six-year terms. J. William Mason (b. 1891), owner of the Ford automobile dealership and a repair shop in Raymond; N. Roy Whitcomb (b. 1877), manager of an iron works in South Bend; and Howard Jensen (b. ca. 1882), a Raymond furniture store owner and active member of the Raymond Chamber of Commerce formed the first commission.

The commissioners immediately set to work on developing the Port. The Port District Act required that voters approve a comprehensive plan before any work commenced. The Port hired Ed P. Kendall (b. ca. 1866), a civil engineer and Pacific County commissioner, to develop a plan.

Kendall submitted his plan the following October. It called for purchasing riverfront property, building warehouses, storehouses, elevators, grain bins, sheds, wharves, a new dock at Tokeland, and improving the South Bend city dock.

A faction of South Bend citizens opposed the plan. They placed an advertisement in the *Willapa Harbor Pilot*

denouncing the commissioners' choice of the old Case Cedar and Shingle Company mill site at the western edge of Redmond for the location of the new public dock. They advocated for the Kleeb mill site in South Bend because it was bigger and had more waterfront access. It does not appear to have been considered by the commissioners, possibly because the larger lot

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brought a much steeper price tag that was not feasible for the Port.

In December district voters approved the plan with a vote of 1,013 for the measure and 362 against. Because voters would have to approve any projects not included in the comprehensive plan it was extensive and included anything the Port might want to do. In reality, the commissioners planned to build a dock, warehouse, and small boat moorage at Raymond, dredge the river channel adjacent to the Port dock, and improve the docks at Tokeland and Bay Center. The Port hired civil engineer Louis D. Williams Jr. (ca. 1886-1954) as port manager, a position he would hold until 1954.

Celebrating a Dock and a Road

On October 8, 1930, Pacific County residents celebrated two openings -- the Port dock and the Willapa-Grays Harbor Highway (now part of U.S. Highway 101) between Aberdeen and Pacific County. The new road replaced a circuitous route along the coast that required a ferry crossing.

The celebration featured caravans from South Bend and Redmond and from Grays Harbor. They toured each others' towns and met at a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the county line. Washington governor Roland H. Hartley (1864-1952) and state road supervisor Samuel J. Humes (1883-1941) spoke at the ceremony.

The caravans then proceeded to the Port dock at Raymond for a banquet in the new warehouse on the 46,000 square foot dock. Dignitaries from Seattle, Tacoma, and Portland, including port managers from Seattle, Tacoma, Olympia, and Grays Harbor, Governor Hartley, and Corps of Engineers Major J. S. Butler gave speeches.

The *Annie Christensen*, a Sudden and Christiansen lumber ship, docked that day at the Port dock to receive a load of cargo. For the next four and a half decades logs and lumber passed through the Port dock for markets in California, Hawaii, Australia, and the eastern United States.

Industry and Commerce



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The Port leased land at the Port dock for a sawmill, beginning in 1940. Ralph Tozier built the first mill there. His operation only lasted five years, but the mill would last for 37 years, sometimes as a dimensional lumber mill, sometimes as a shake mill. The last company to use the land for a mill, Raymond Shake, closed in 1976.

In the 1930s the Port worked with the Army Corps of Engineers to develop the harbor for shipping. The Corps straightened the river above the Narrows, creating an island in the river that was named Jensen Island in honor of port commissioner Howard Jensen.

In 1936 voters approved a change to the comprehensive plan authorizing the development of an airport. Pacific County transferred its airport to the Port in 1939. The Port worked on improvements in conjunction with the Civil Aeronautics Administration and opened an expanded airport in September 1949.

Also in 1949, the Corps of Engineers dredged a channel from the Palix River to the Port's dock at Bay Center. This enabled oyster boats to access the dock more easily. Shallow water due to shoaling limited movement around the oyster beds and the channel needed regular dredging.

In the 1940s and 1950s Pacific County experienced a significant increase in its lumber exports. While the surrounding counties saw declines, Pacific County's output doubled over its pre-Depression volume.

The Port of Willapa Harbor worked with the Army Corps of Engineers to improve the harbor further and develop the Port's facilities. The River and Harbor Act of 1954 authorized the Corps of Engineers to maintain a 24-foot-deep channel from deep water in the bay to the South Fork of the Willapa River at Raymond, construct a dike at the mouth of Mailboat Slough, dredge a channel to the North Fork of the Willapa River and a turning basin at the head of navigable waters, dredge a moorage basin at Tokeland, and improve the Bay Center channel.

For its part of the project, the Port agreed to maintain moorage facilities at Tokeland, Raymond, and Bay Center, maintain access roads, and build bulkheads to retain dredge spoils at Tokeland. The dredge spoils built up the shore at Tokeland.

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In the 1940s and 1950s, the Port also added a 30-ton crane, a 25-ton loading boom, and log booms at the Raymond dock. The Port dock remained the only publicly owned dock at Willapa Harbor able to handle ocean-going ships.

Changes and Improvements



In the 1950s and 1960s sport fishing and recreational boating grew in importance. The marina at Tokeland saw increased boat traffic and moorages. Oyster growers, after struggling with declining native harvests in the early years of the century, landed large harvests of oysters at the Port's docks. Local processors canned the oysters and oyster stew.

The Port replaced the trestle to the Tokeland dock in 1965 with rock fill, creating an extension of Dock Street (now Kindred Avenue). The Port also added rip rap (a loosely stacked pile of rocks) to the bay side of the bulkhead to reinforce it. In 1974, the Port built a jetty at Tokeland, added a boat ramp, floating moorages, a second fish buying station, and built a timber seawall.

The 1970s brought tremendous changes to Pacific County's economy. Commercial fishing declined in part due to past overfishing and partly as a result of the Boldt decision in 1974. In *U.S. v. Washington*, federal judge George Boldt (1903-1984) ruled that Washington's Indian tribes had retained their rights to one half of the annual catch in treaties they signed with the federal government in the 1850s. This translated into reduced fishing seasons for non-treaty fishermen and women. The changes reduced commercial and sports fisheries, thereby reducing the number of boats using the Port's marinas and reducing income received by local fishermen and their suppliers.

Difficulties and Further Changes



In 1975, the Army Corps of Engineers ceased dredging the channel between deep water in the bay and the Willapa River and Bay Center. The federal government no longer included funding for maintaining smaller harbors in its budget. The end to dredging meant that the Port of Willapa Harbor could no longer accommodate ocean-going ships. Local sawmills shifted their freight to railroads and trucks, and the Port dock was no longer needed for cargo.

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In response to the changing economic circumstances, the Port amended its comprehensive plan in 1976 to allow for the establishment of industrial facilities on Port land. Instead of supporting economic development through freight-handling facilities, the Port would provide space and facilities to promote industrial development.

The Port's moorage facilities remained important for smaller boats. Fishing, crabbing, and oystering vessels moored at the Port's floats, as did recreational boaters. In 1980 the federal Economic Development Administration provided grant funds to replace decking on the Port dock and add 700 feet of new floats at Raymond.

The 1980s brought more economic hardship to Pacific County. In addition to the decreased fishing revenue, logging operations also declined. Historical overharvest and increased environmental regulations reduced the acreage of public forestland open to logging. The Endangered Species Act (ESA) listing of the Northern Spotted Owl in 1989 drew tremendous opposition in Pacific County. The Port of Willapa Harbor wrote a formal letter formally opposing the owl's ESA listing. They stated, "The Port of Willapa Harbor urges you to rescind this action immediately. The spotted owl is not endangered and irresponsible actions such as this cannot be condoned" (Resolution No. 673-89).

With the owl's listing, communities in Pacific County had to adjust to reduced logging and fewer jobs at the area's sawmills. The effects of the environmental regulations were compounded by plant modernization, which also led to fewer jobs in the mills. Many smaller mills could not compete with the larger companies' more efficient mills and a number went out of business.

Encouraging Industry

In 1986 the Port of Willapa Harbor bought the old Mayr Bros. 55-acre sawmill site. With the parcel they also gained the mills drying kilns, boiler, cooling building, shipping shed, machine shop, and office space. They leased the sites and buildings to Pacific Hardwoods. In 1992 the Port secured funding from the Community Economic Revitalization Board (CERB) to build new buildings to be used by Pacific Hardwoods. CERB funding was available because the Raymond/South Bend community has been listed as "seriously impacted" by recent laws limited the export of unmilled logs.

The Port assisted another tenant, National Biopolymers (now known as Vanson Halosource) with necessary infrastructure by building a manufacturing building and a industrial wastewater pretreatment plant. National Biopolymers derived chitosan, a natural polymer that is highly

absorbent and promotes healing, from shellfish. In order to meet Department of Ecology requirements, the plant's wastewater needed to be treated before it was released into the river. Building a pretreatment plant was not feasible for the small company, but the Port financed it and charged National Biopolymers for their use of it.

Strategies and New Moves

The Port joined the Raymond City Commission and the University of Washington's Sea Grant Program in studying the Raymond waterfront in 1994. According to Rebecca Chaffee, Port of Willapa Harbor's manager, "It was the first time we had looked at the waterfront as something other than industrial" (Chaffee interview).

In the 1990s resource-based employment stabilized at about 25 percent of the region's jobs. Retail sector jobs increased, but the community hoped to attract more industrial and manufacturing jobs because of the higher incomes they would bring.

The Port continued to support industrial development on its land. It operates two industrial parks. One at Raymond, the Stan Hatfield South Fork Industrial Park, is home to Willapa Bay Hardwoods, a locally owned successor to Pacific Hardwoods; a health club; a saw shop; a truck shop; a boatbuilding company; a machine shop; and offices.

The other, the Dick Taylor Industrial Park, on Highway 101 near South Bend, has a crab meal processing plant run by Dungeness Development Associates, the Pacific Edge Industries aerospace assembly fabrication plant, a food- and spice-processing plant, an airplane prototype design company, and an American Red Cross chapter office.

The Port's 2005 master plan outlines efforts the Port plans to make in support of existing businesses and to attract and aid new businesses. They plan to develop programs to assist with permit processing, improve small business management, improve workforce development, and form a wetlands mitigation bank to enable more waterfront development.

Tourism and Recreation

The Port also works with local organizations to promote tourism in Pacific County. It supported efforts to transform the abandoned rail line across the Willapa Hills into a trail connecting

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Raymond and South Bend with Chehalis. The Port also plans to develop the Willapa River Boat Park in conjunction with the City of Raymond.

The Port has added a public fishing pier, a second boat ramp, and an RV park at the Tokeland Marina. At the Bay Center Marina, the Port has very little onshore land, but has negotiated with a private landowner for space for public restrooms. In 2009 the Port purchased a hydraulic pipeline dredge. This will allow it to maintain navigable depths at each the marinas at a lower cost.

Although the economic foundations have changed in Pacific County, the Port of Willapa Harbor continues to utilize its assets to support economic development. By providing land and facilities to numerous small businesses and partnering with local government and community organizations, the Port continues to play a vital role in the region's economy.

By Jennifer Ott, August 02, 2010

Photo Credits:

Vessel loading raw logs headed for Asia, Port of Willapa Harbor dock, Raymond, n.d., *Courtesy Pacific County Historical Society (Ken Bale Collection)*;

Port of Willapa Harbor dock, offices, manufacturing buildings, Raymond, 2007, *Courtesy Port of Willapa Harbor*;

Port of Willapa Harbor marina, Tokeland, 2007, *Courtesy Port of Willapa Harbor*;

Port of Willapa Harbor marina, Tokeland, 2007, *Courtesy Port of Willapa Harbor*.

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