**Historical Events Accelerating the Unrecognizability of Commencement Bay Wetlands**

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**Formation**

Historically Commencement Bay was composed of wetlands and tideflats that were shaped by the Puyallup River watershed through glacial impact, erosion, and nonglacial deposits. The erosion of troughs by subglacial rivers and deglaciation resulted in the incision of rivers, as well as alterations caused by lahars formed the Puget Sound. The formation of the northwest was also an outcome of tectonic and volcanic activities. Melting snow from the Cascades produced marshlands, which became home to various flora and fauna, and falling timber dammed and altered river waterways.

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**Historic Perception of Wetlands**

Traditionally, wetlands have been perceived as sources of illness and other problems – and the only way to deal with their lack of usefulness was to reclaim them. Wetlands are a major life source for many plants and animals – and their demise has lead to the increase of endangered species. The transformation and depletion of wetlands was a combination of “ideology, economics, law, perception as well as ecological processes” (Vileisis 1997). The Swamp Land Act of 1849 guided the demise of the wetlands and swamps. This fight was “not between two landscapes, one with and one without a human influence; it (was) between two human ways of living, two ways of belonging to an ecosystem” (Cronon 2003). Many ecological alterations in the Puget Sound were consequences of “wood cleared from rivers, floodplain forests (being) logged, river deltas and floodplains diked and drained” (Collins 2009).

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**Changes to Commencement Bay**

- Expansion of the Northern Pacific Railway
- Industrialization of Tacoma
- Channeling of the Puyallup River
- Dredging and filling transformed the bay into a complex urban port

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**Resulted in**

- Tidal marsh being completely decimated – only 1% of the original habitat is left
- Mudflats were also demolished – less than 12% remains today

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**Conclusion**

The transformation of Commencement Bay was result of perceived economic gain and in the reduction of the Native American population.

- The actions of the European settlers in terms of the environment have not been sustainable—leading to the depletion of viable wetlands, flora and fauna as well as food sources that the Native populations depended upon.
- Therefore, humans should only be able to transform the environment if their changes are able to sustain and reproduce the species found in that environment.
- Currently research is ongoing to date the Kasten core from Commencement Bay and to relate it to the history of the Puyallup Watershed.

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**References**

Brittain KR. 2006. An Environmental History of Commencement Bay from Geologic Formation Through the 1921 Opening of the Public Port of Tacoma. [Tacoma (WA)]; University of Washington.

