

# My turn: Requiem for Auke Bay?

**Posted:** Wednesday, July 02, 2008 in the Juneau Empire  
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What is the cost of unchecked development? Answer - loss of natural resources, a loss no one wants but one that seems inevitable.

In the delicate balance between resource development and resource conservation, development is favored by the principle of "no cumulative effects." This principle, employed by permitting entities including the city of Juneau, involves recurring and cumulative impacts of additional developmental projects occurring in the same local area. It works something like this:

When a new development project is under consideration, negative impacts, such as filling in a relatively small area of intertidal zone, may seem like a worthwhile trade-off for a popular and perhaps badly needed project. The sad part begins unfolding when the next development is proposed for the same area, often adjacent to the first project. Any negative impacts of this new project are only considered for the new project alone, without taking into account cumulative impacts of the two projects together. And so it continues on with the third, fourth, fifth, etc., projects in the same area.

Local residents can see for themselves the long-term consequence of the "no cumulative effects" principle.

Drive along the north shoreline of Auke Bay near the ferry terminal as two new projects are nearing completion. With two new rock fills covering some of the last patches of open intertidal zone for bulkheads, over a half-mile stretch of this ecologically important shoreline is now covered with rock, or otherwise compromised.

It began almost 40 years ago when the new Alaska Marine Highway System started with an alternate ferry terminal located in Auke Bay. The main terminal was in downtown Juneau. Over time, officials realized it was more efficient and cost-effective to convert the alternate terminal in Auke Bay into the main terminal, which is now the only Juneau area ferry terminal. Eventually a series of terminal expansions at Auke Bay covered more and more of the intertidal and upper sub-tidal zone.

Now along the east end of the terminal, the latest expansion has recently filled in the last 250 feet of open intertidal zone along this part of the shoreline. Further to the east are two relatively recent maritime operations that have further extended adverse ecological impacts to this contiguous intertidal zone, thanks again to the no-cumulative-effects principle.

West of the ferry terminal is a new seafood plant which required additional rock filling in the intertidal zone. And now to the west of the seafood plant is the large new 480-foot rock-filled

zone for the city's new commercial launch ramp and staging area for commercial fisheries. This last expansion encroaches on the important eel grass bed in Auk Nu Cove.

Clearly, ecologically speaking, once an area like this is zoned commercial, you might as well write it off for what it historically represented. So what are the broader implications for this entire region? In addition to the developments along the north shore of Auke Bay, there is greatly increased boat traffic into and out of Auke Bay Harbor and other impacts along Auke Bay shorelines. Is there any wonder why herring no longer spawn in Auke Bay?

Many residents, and not just old timers, recall exciting spring events of herring spawning throughout much of Auke Bay as late as the 1980s. Local Natives at Indian Point and Auk Cape collected herring roe on hemlock branches suspended on those beaches. Who can forget the spectacle of thousands of stranded herring in the large intertidal pool as the tide receded in Auk Nu Cove? Buckets full of herring for bait, pickling, or other food uses were available and enjoyed by anyone willing to get a little mud on their extra tuffs. Will massive numbers of herring ever spawn again in Auke Bay? I certainly hope I'm wrong, but probably not.

Individually each of these developmental activities may have had general public support in meeting an important community need. Alone they perhaps did not represent a major threat or environmental disruption to the local ecosystem. Clearly, however, failure to consider cumulative effects becomes the bane of a healthy balance between development and natural systems. Community leaders need to recognize this fact before Juneau loses all semblance of the wonderful place where so many of us chose to live and work.

- Bill Heard is a resident of Auke Bay.