RECOVERY

Public Art Proposal for the US Army Corps of Engineers HQ
Seattle, Washington

BUSTER SIMPSON | 2011

The sculpture *Recovery* is designed for the land just west of the Federal Center South Recovery Redevelopment. *Recovery* is a transformative approach to building an artwork that will have the potential to evolve from sculptural object to functional environmental mitigation. *Recovery* is, in essence, a “poetic utility.” In other words, a tool designed to perform a particular function that is, in itself, a work of art as exemplified in the approach that dates back to indigenous peoples’ integrating of art into life. The artwork elements communicate the potential to repurpose landscape elements to the riverside at a later date in order to continue the efforts of the US Army Corps of Engineers and community to enhance the Duwamish River estuarine reach habitat.

The sculptural installation consists of sixteen figurative sentinels of cast concrete, arranged within a 25-foot grid suggesting the position of parade rest with the anticipated redeployment as estuarine habitat enhancement. They are coupled with uniquely shaped tree forms, each one anchoring and cradling the woody mass, poised to aid marine habitat enhancement. The reconfigured tetrapod is cast reinforced concrete, containing recycled aggregate, and weighs approximately 1,900 pounds. A linear element of braided stainless steel cable will wrap and secure the cedar tree forms to the pods. The sculptural formations will rest on a compacted rock base. When redeployed along the estuarine reach, the figurative pods provide anchorage to hold biomass at river’s edge.

The formation of the installation is aligned to the east-west centerline of the building and the west boundary of the project site along the Duwamish River. This orientation provides occupants of the facility views from the west end of the building, including those of the central common space in the building and the outdoor gathering deck. The prime public viewpoint will be from the Duwamish River and Diagonal Street End Park. The sculptural figures face the river with their concrete back to the east. As the viewer meanders along the trail around the detention pond, the details of the figurative sentinels and wood forms is revealed. The pods rest at grade, some partially submerged at times within the seasonal waters of the detention pond and some on high ground. As a metaphor of healing past practices, the tree forms could evolve into nursing log habitats for meadow birds and later, perhaps, habitat for salmon restoration.

Recovery exemplifies a new paradigm for contemporary public art, by suggesting / inferring a new public practice to use conceptual ideas and apply them to actual environmental problems. This aesthetic identifies an active role for art in the environment.

Phase One: Parade Rest

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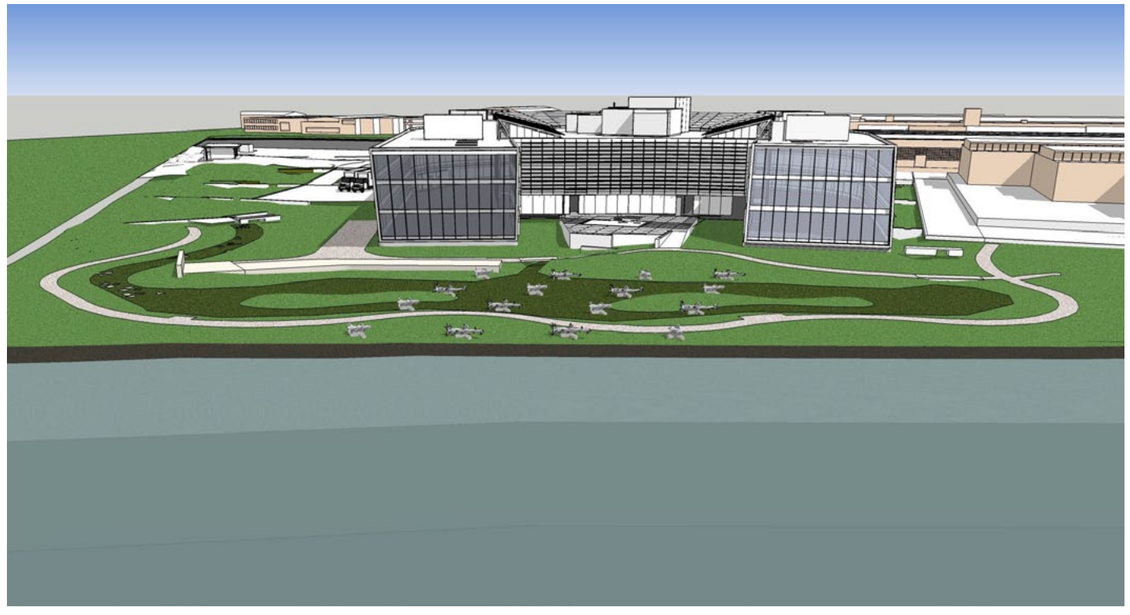
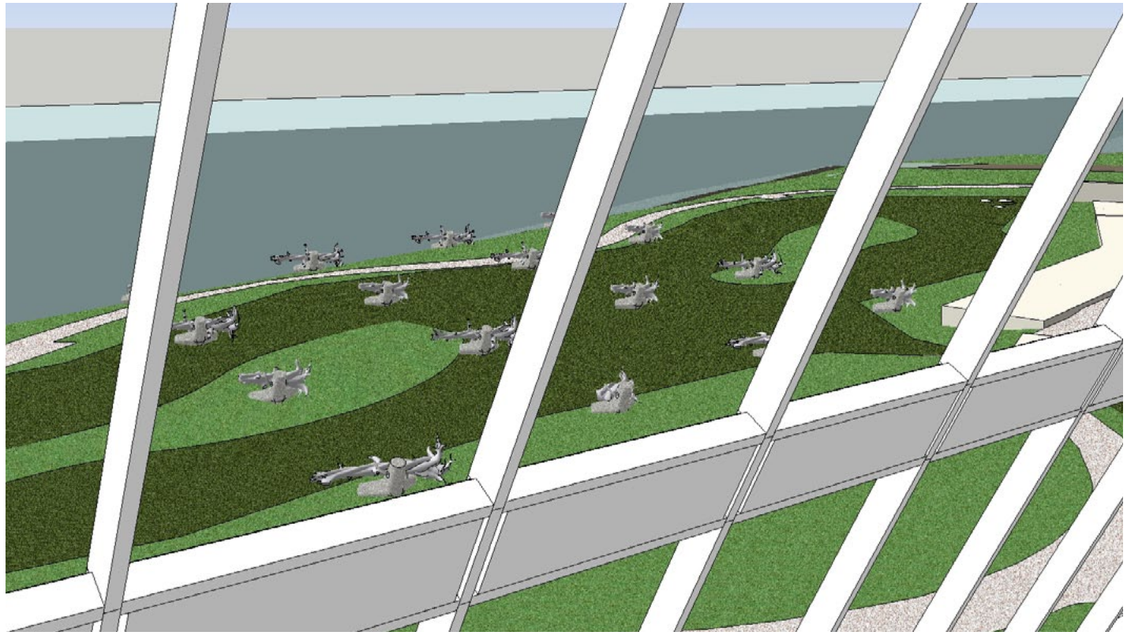
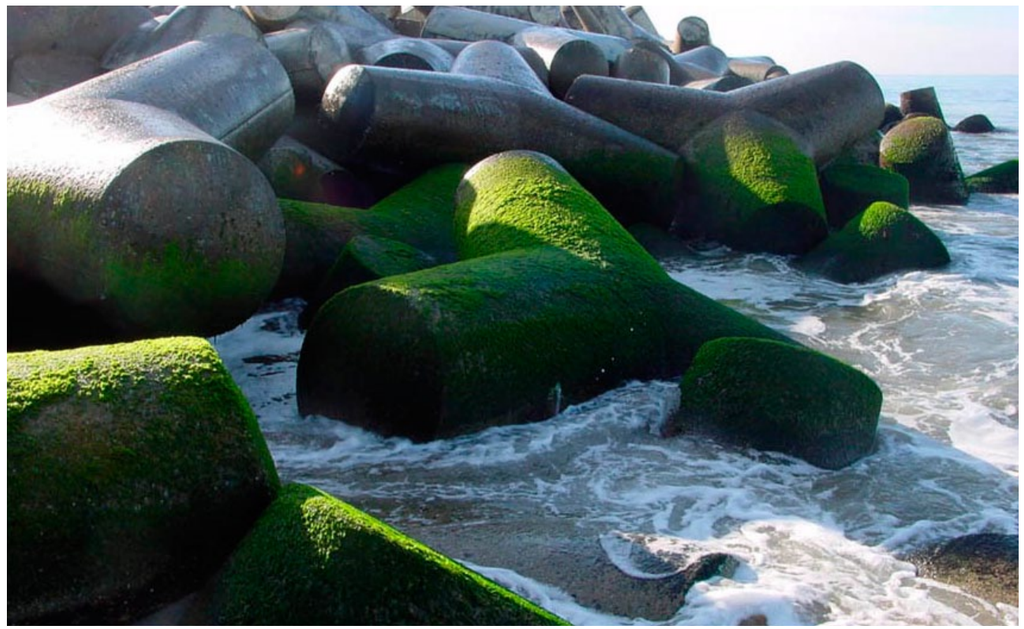


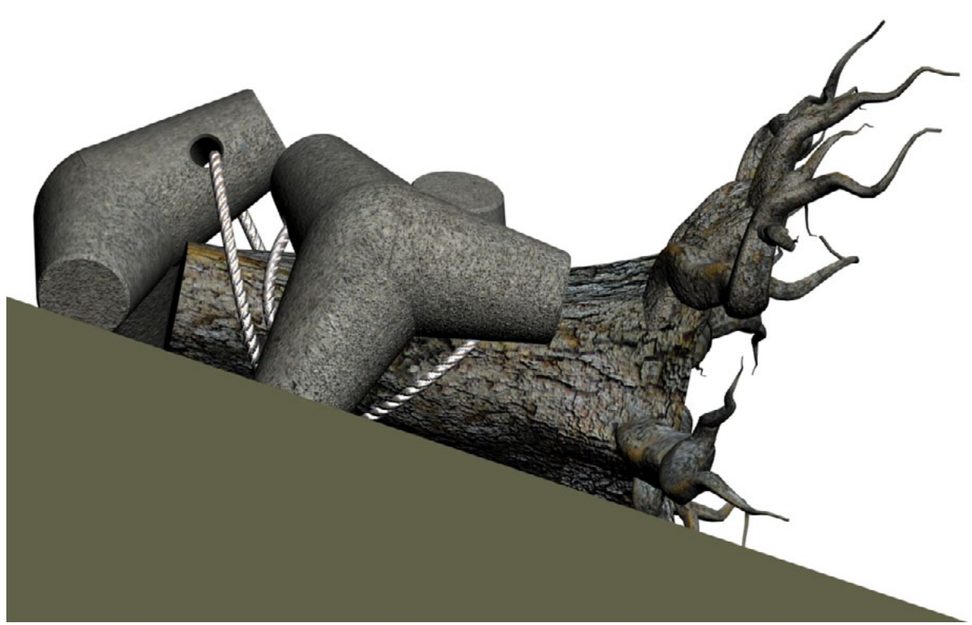




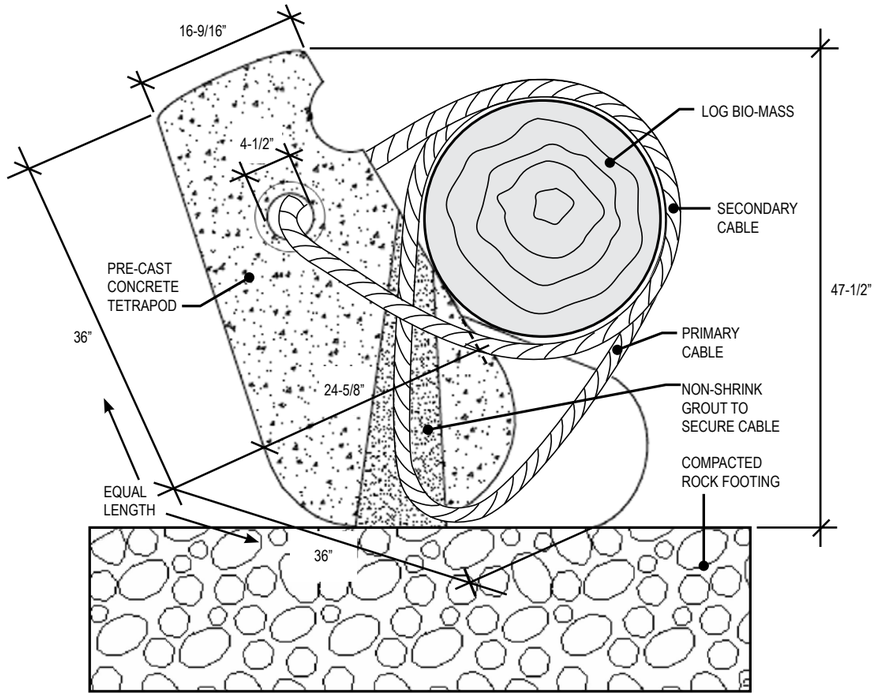
Santa Cruz Harbor, Army Corps of Engineers, ca.1990s

Unanchored root wad

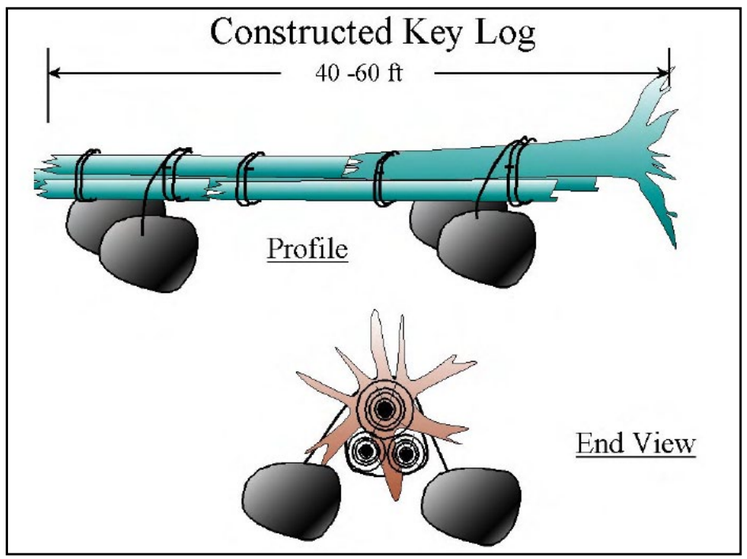
Steel form for casting concrete pods



Possible redeployment configurations for later habitat enhancement along Duwamish estuarine shore

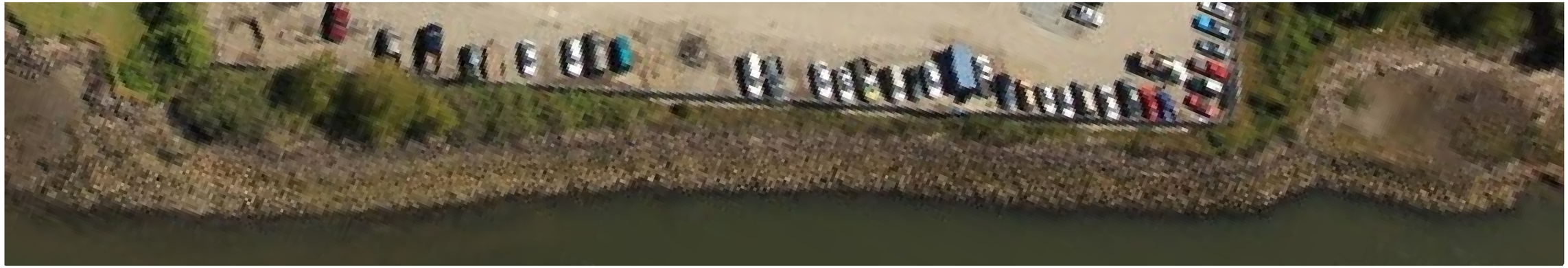


Dual cable connections and potential footing pinning option



Example of possible rootwad anchor system for use during later redeployment as habitat enhancement

Phase Two: Redeployment



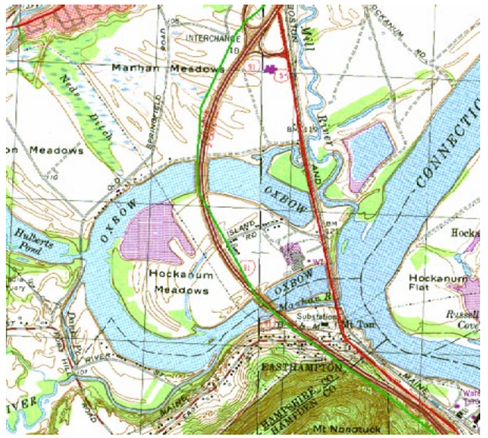
Existing shoreline in front of the Recovery facility along the Duwamish River

Schematic diagram showing the redeployment of pods with rootwads

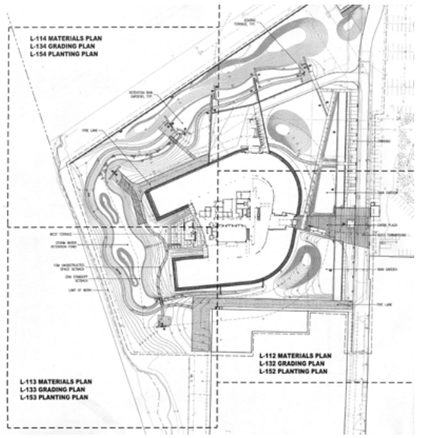
Final deployment of pods and rootwads as habitat enhancement along Estuarine Reach

The Oxbow, Thomas Cole (1836)

The Oxbow: After Church, After Cole, Flooded, Steve Hannock (1999)



Contemporary map of the same oxbow painted by Cole

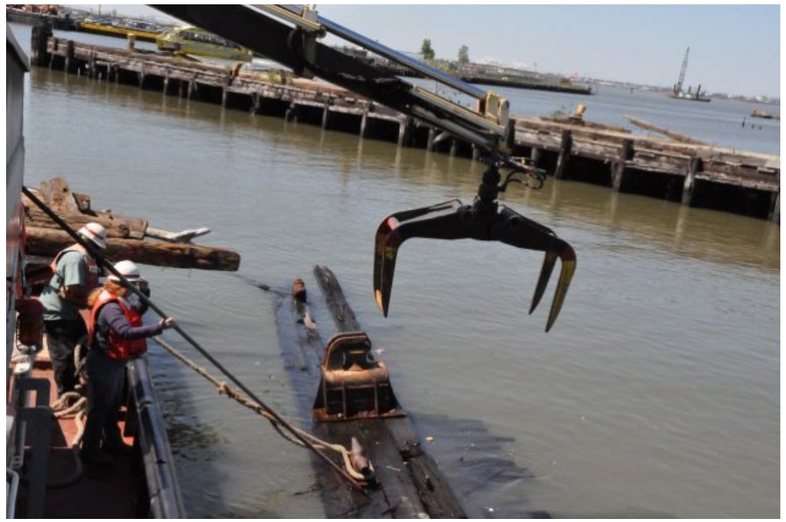


Recovery building mimicking Duwamish River Oxbow

Early painting of USACE operation clearing snags from a navigable river

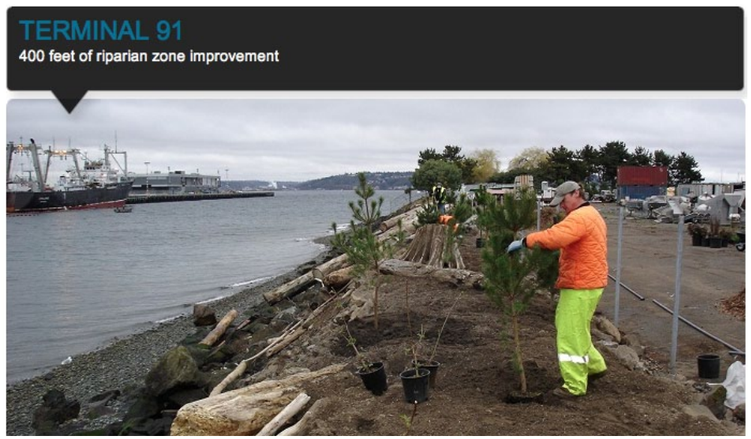
Duwamish River, early 1900s

Large wood clusters re-anchored and new trees planted. Crews installed anchors on several large wood clusters. The additional anchors will compensate for the loose soil that allowed a few of the clusters to float more than was intended. The following month, further re-anchoring occurred.



US Army Corps of Engineers drift collection crews work to clear potential hazards to navigation from the harbor after Irene. Personnel aboard Drift Collection Vessel Gelberman work to secure a large piece that broke off of an old pier in the busy Erie Basin in Brooklyn while working to clear potential hazards to navigation.

Duwamish shoreline awareness



Duwamish shoreline restoration.The port undertakes fish and wildlife habitat restoration projects for a variety of reasons. Sometimes it is to offset the impacts of development projects. Other restoration projects are undertaken as a part of the port's stewardship obligations. For example, the 113-acre Auburn wetlands project was completed as an offset to construction of the Sea-Tac Airport's newest runway. Voluntary actions of the port include the intertidal marsh restoration at Kellogg Island and fish habitat enhancement at Terminal 105.

Installation of rootwads and anchors along the Estuarine Reach of the Duwamish River