The *“FOSS Floats!”* Project.

**Introduction** The South Slough is an inlet of the Coos Estuary, a magical place that forms where a river meets the sea. The focal point of an estuary is water. The South Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve was established in 1974 as a protected area on the South Slough inlet of the Coos Estuary to improve the understanding and management of estuaries. In 1988 the Friends of South Slough was formed to help support the mission of the Reserve.

In 2005 the Friends of South Slough (FOSS) embarked on a special initiative called *“FOSS Floats!”* The goal of the program is to support and cultivate a more intimate understanding of estuaries by creating new opportunities to experience the water of the estuary first hand.

*“FOSS Floats!” has accomplished two exciting projects since the initiative began. The first project involved designing, constructing and installing a 75’long foot bridge across a tidal inlet at the base of the estuary study trail system at the Reserve. The most recent project of the “FOSS Floats!”* initiative involved the purchase and donation of a 24’ long, 8 passenger canoe that we christened “Chmoosh” after a Native American term meaning *“floats with the tide”.*

The current *“FOSS Floats!”* includes an exciting blend of elements from the two previous *“FOSS Floats!”* projects and builds on the Experience gained by the Friends from the bridge and canoe projects… The boat house project involves creating a floating platform that can serve as an educational waypoint along the South Slough Trail system, reflecting the longstanding relationships between people and estuaries; the richest places on earth.

**The Vision:**

The Friends of South Slough are working to create a floating mobile structure that mirrors the design of the simple, log supported floating structures that served as dwellings and boat houses for people living on the shore of estuaries in the Pacific Northwest. The newly built mobile boat house structure will be moored alongside a floating dock/platform (see illustration at left) at the base of the sloughside pilings on the Reserve’s estuary study trail system. Log flotation under the mobile boat house structure will enable it to rise and fall alongside the floating dock/platform with the coming and going of the tides. The wooden decked exterior of the floating dock/platform will be accessible to South Slough Visitors via a pier and gangway that span the tideflats between the shore and the floating structure and will provide visitors without boats with the first ever on-water access to the estuary in the Reserve.

A wood framed enclosed shell, sufficiently large to accommodate the 24”long canoe *“Chmoosh”*, other paddle craft, and associated paddle equipment will sit atop the mobile floating boat house structure. The architecture of the mobile floating boat house will reflect the simple, utilitarian designs and construction methods of former South Slough float houses. (See Photo on page one)

On special occasions, the *“FOSS Floats!”* boat house will be detached from the mooring at the dock and gangway in the South Slough and towed to other locations in the estuary; serving as a mobile interpretive center and iconic “flagship” of the South Slough Reserve. We envision moving the *“FOSS Floats!”* boat house to downtown waterfront locations in Empire, Coos Bay, and North Bend for special events and festivals offering interpretive experiences for participants in those events to learn about their estuary.

**Realizing the Vision**

The Friends of South Slough believe the process of creating the *“FOSS Floats!”* float house is an important element of the project. Designs for the floating dock/platform and gangway are complete. We are currently applying for permits for the dock and gangway structures. We are working to enlist the participation of community members, businesses and regional foundations to design and build the floating mobile boathouse structure. Our goal is to complete the project in the summer of 2014 to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the designation of the South Slough as the First Estuarine Research Sanctuary in the United States. We are welcoming students businesses, and other non-profit organizations to join us. We plan to host a variety of “friend raising” events to build support for the project. FOSS Board members will participate in all aspects of the project including the construction of the structure itself.