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Construction Industry Spotlight

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Local projects hooked on Salmon-Safe standards

- ***Salmon-Safe conducts independent assessments and awards both peer-reviewed project certification and practice-based firm accreditation.***

By SAM BENNETT
Special to the Journal

As LEED and other green certification programs grow in popularity among Northwest projects, developers and designers are also improving methods to reduce toxins from buildings that can harm salmon.

Images courtesy of Navix Engineering [enlarge]

The Liza design has pervious pavement, bioretention planters, an extensive green roof and a rainwater cistern. It recently applied for Salmon-Safe certification.

According to the state Department of Ecology, contaminated stormwater is the No. 1 source of pollution harming Puget Sound.

Ondrej Sklenar, a civil engineer with Navix Engineering and a Salmon-Safe assessor, said rainfall from buildings creates pollutants that can make it into streams, lakes and marine waters. The Salmon-Safe accreditation program recognizes developers, designers and construction management firms for significantly reducing those pollutants.

[enlarge]

The Jack in Seattle incorporates a green roof, oversized planters and street trees. It was designed to Salmon-Safe standards.

"In an effort to mitigate detrimental impacts on wildlife and fisheries, sustainability-minded project teams are turning to voluntary standards above and beyond code requirements to address watershed health and one such standard is Salmon-Safe," Sklenar said.

Salmon-Safe, which was founded in Portland in 1996, conducts independent third-party assessments and awards both peer-reviewed project certification and practice-based firm accreditation.

Sklenar said seven different project types can seek Salmon-Safe certification, including urban development, infrastructure, large-site campuses, vineyards, farms, parks and golf courses.

For Salmon-Safe certification, urban development projects must exceed code minimums for stormwater management, water quality protection and water conservation and incorporate long-

term maintenance practices to help restore native habitat and urban ecological function.

To date, more than 80 urban development projects have been certified as Salmon-Safe in Washington, Oregon and British Columbia.

“In reviewing projects for certification, the Salmon-Safe team looks for stormwater management strategies such as incorporating green infrastructure to provide water quality treatment and limit stormwater runoff; reducing building water use and irrigation water use; incorporating water reuse strategies; selecting building materials that do not leach harmful chemicals; and developing integrated pest management plans that omit pesticide controls,” he said.

The Liza at 2517 Eastlake Ave., a seven-story apartment building under construction, recently applied for Salmon-Safe certification. The project incorporates pervious pavement, bioretention planters, an extensive green roof and a rainwater cistern. The Liza is a Living Building project, with certification components that, Sklenar said, overlapped Salmon-Safe considerations.

“Developers and design teams may notice that while pursuing other ecolabels like LEED certification or green building incentives, that many Salmon-Safe standards are naturally met,” Sklenar said.

The design of another Salmon-Safe project in Seattle, The Jack at 74 S. Jackson St., incorporates a green roof, oversized planters and street trees, and provided water quality treatment with a proprietary system for off-site areas. The Jack was designed by Olson Kundig and is being built by JTM Construction. Its developer is Urban Visions.

Scott Rosenstock, senior development manager at Salmon Safe-accredited Urban Visions, said Salmon-Safe sets standards specific to this region, which can be achieved for minimal cost.

“In terms of development, this is no different than ‘One Percent for the Arts,’” Rosenstock said, citing the popular program that started in Seattle in the '70s. “It's like One Percent for the salmon.”

For urban development projects, Sklenar said Salmon-Safe practices improve the regional watershed and the quality of life for building tenants. Sklenar said bioretention, increased tree cover and green roofs increase the greenery of the buildings and the tenant experience.

Developers, according to Sklenar, have said that knowing a building is positively affecting the local watershed is a benefit in attracting environmentally conscious tenants.

That translates into helping the bottom line, while also saving salmon.

Anna Huttel, certification director at Salmon-Safe, said, “For projects that achieve certification, Salmon-Safe provides compelling marketing messaging that can help elevate a project's sustainability message in the community and marketplace.”

Sklenar said the latest Salmon-Safe Urban Development Standards 3.0 include updated stormwater design guidelines.

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