



Lily Point Bluffs Sustain Marine Life

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New acquisition will help restore Puget Sound By Robin Stanton

Point Roberts is a geographical anomaly, a peninsula that juts from British Columbia into Boundary Bay, crossing the 49th Parallel into the United States. To reach the point from Washington state, you must cross the border into Canada, then cross the border again to arrive at this tiny community.

Or you could go by boat, the way the Lummi people have done for thousands of years.

“This place has been a refuge of abundance for the Coast Salish people,” Lummi Nation council member Sherilynn Williams told a gathering at Lily Point, on the southeast tip of Point Roberts, last summer. From her elders, she heard stories of drying clams on the beach and making salmon nets of woven nettles.

As part of ongoing efforts to restore Puget Sound, The Nature Conservancy acquired 146 acres at Lily Point, including uplands, beach and tidelands, last December. That land will ultimately be transferred to Whatcom County Parks & Recreation for ongoing preservation and public access, as grant funds become available.

The Conservancy’s December purchase was the second phase of the acquisition effort. Whatcom Land

Trust acquired 130 acres in April 2008 and has already transferred that property to Whatcom County Parks. The Conservancy plans to work with the parks department and other partners to restore the site, including removal of pilings, slag, debris and relics of a cannery operation from the tidelands so they’ll no longer impede the sediment from reaching the beaches of Lily Point and western Boundary Bay. Ultimately, Whatcom County Parks will manage the site for recreation and conservation.

Situated between the vast Fraser River Delta and the extensive tideflats of Boundary Bay, Lily Point is a vital link in Puget Sound’s web of life. The forested bluffs overlooking the beach nurture the vibrant life of both Boundary Bay and the Fraser River Delta. As these feeder bluffs erode, they deposit debris from the uplands, including plant and forest nutrients as well as sand and gravel that nourish both shoreline and sea.

This sediment replenishes the beaches at Lily Point, which are rich in mollusks, crabs and shrimp. It also helps maintain extensive eelgrass beds that provide habitat and refuge for many species. Small forage fish like surf smelt and Pacific sand lance spawn on the beaches



Purple ochre sea stars are abundant at Lily Point. They feed on shellfish and crustaceans by wrapping their arms around their prey and prying them open.

© Melisa Holman/TNC

and hide in the gravel and eelgrass beds until they're large enough to school up. Those fish are the base of the ocean's food web, feeding salmon, shorebirds and migrating waterfowl. The shallow tideflats of the Fraser River Delta and Boundary Bay support more than 5 million migratory shorebirds and waterfowl each year. Orcas feed on the salmon, and bald eagles and other raptors feed on the salmon and congregating water birds.

Archeological records show evidence of humans at Lily Point for 9,000 years. For centuries, it was the site of a large Lummi village and the center of salmon culture in the region. An 1881 newspaper reported that 10,000 salmon were taken in three Indian reef nets during a six-hour period. In the late 19th century, non-Indian fish traps displaced traditional reef nets. Alaska Packers purchased a year-old cannery at Lily Point in 1884. The cannery was demolished in 1917, leaving pilings and debris still visible today.

The people of Point Roberts continue to use Lily Point today, hiking informal trails and wading far out into the bay. This natural area was threatened by development—a planned and permitted 74-unit residential development with a golf course. The acquisitions by Whatcom Land Trust and the Conservancy assures that Lily Point will continue to nurture the life of Puget Sound and the people who live there.

The Lummi have been deeply involved in conservation efforts around Boundary Bay and in the Fraser River Delta and have supported this project.



In celebration of the new park, members of the Lummi Nation gathered with representatives from Whatcom Land Trust, Whatcom County and other partners to celebrate last summer. Many people spoke of the meaning this land has for them. Lummi traditional Chief William James (Tsillixw) summed up for his people:

“Thank you for all the work you have done protecting the land, protecting our ancestors, protecting the grandparents, the great-grandparents and all of the elders that have gone before us. It is hard to explain how we feel because we know the history of the land. We know what’s here. We know who is here. It’s really hard to express how much we appreciate them being protected now... People never go wrong protecting the land.” (William James)

Alliance for Puget Sound Shorelines

The Nature Conservancy, The Trust for Public Land and People For Puget Sound are working together to protect and restore Puget Sound's ecologically rich shorelines.

The Alliance has made significant progress toward its three goals of protecting 1,000 miles of shoreline, restoring 100 miles of shoreline, and acquiring 10 new parks and natural areas.

1,127 miles of Puget Sound shoreline has been protected through enhanced policies, primarily updates to Critical Areas Ordinances, exceeding the Alliance goal of 1,000 miles of enhanced protection.

With the Conservancy's acquisition at Lily Point, the Alliance has completed acquisitions at seven sites. (The Conservancy's acquisition last year at Tarboo-Dabob Bay was also part of this effort.)

The Alliance has restored more than 45 miles of shoreline so far and have another 60 miles of work underway. Projects ranged from 5 acres of native oyster habitat restored and derelict gear removed in Liberty Bay to a major creosote log removal at Spencer Spit State Park.

SCIENCE

Point Roberts and Boundary Bay have been recognized for their rich ecological value by numerous organizations, including the Conservancy, Birdlife International and British Columbia/Washington Environmental Cooperation Council.

RESTORATION

The Conservancy plans to work with the Whatcom County parks department and other partners to restore the site, including removal of pilings, slag and debris from the tidelands.

ADVOCACY

The Nature Conservancy has sought grant funding so that there will be no cost to Whatcom County Parks and Recreation for acquiring Lily Point.