

# Conservation Ownership in Puget Sound, WA

## A Private Sector Approach – Conservation Agreements in support of Marine Protection

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### LEASING AND OWNERSHIP WITHIN OCEAN AND COASTAL WATERS

A Conservation Practitioner's Toolkit

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#### Resources

## Ownership: Washington State Preserve

### Location

Port Susan Bay, Puget Sound, Washington, USA

### Description

This case study presents a project which acquired fee-title to a large tract of intertidal lands for preservation and restoration purposes.

In 2001, after 11 years of negotiations, The Nature Conservancy's (TNC's) **Washington Chapter** bought more than 4,000 acres of intertidal land (officially considered 2nd Class Tidelands in Washington State) at the mouth of the Stillaguamish River within Port Susan Bay. The land was originally sold by the state of Washington then partially diked for agriculture in the late 19th and the 20th centuries. The land, which is now TNC's **Port Susan Bay Preserve**, provides critical habitat for thousands of migrating birds, Coho, chum, Chinook salmon, steelhead and sea-run cutthroat trout and herring. Since the mid-1980s, much of the bay's shellfishing grounds have been closed because of water quality problems. TNC is in the process of creating a conservation management plan for the preserve, as well as a restoration strategy that intends to restore representative and functional estuarine habitats necessary to support endemic species such as shellfish, salmon, waterbirds, and other estuarine animals.

The Port Susan Bay property had long been identified by biologists and ornithologists as one of the region's privately-owned parcels most in need of conservation. In 1990, staff at TNC began talking to the landowner, Menno Groeneveld, about a possible sale. Menno, the son of a Dutch immigrant, was interested in selling the land but passed away before negotiations were completed. After his death, TNC began working with the bank appointed to oversee Menno's estate. In 2001, 11 years after discussions first began, the transaction was completed.

The large size of the Port Susan Bay property makes possible experimental approaches to ecosystem management. The Conservancy has worked to remove invasive *Spartina* (cord grass), *Phragmites* (common reed), and other non-native species from the marshes. In the summer of 2007 the Conservancy, together with others, completed a habitat restoration project that involved placing six complexes of large woody debris in two tidal channels. The project was designed as an experiment and is intended to improve understanding of the role large wood plays in forming and maintaining habitat in the estuary. In addition, the Conservancy has completed a feasibility study that evaluated restoration alternatives for the 160-acre diked portion of the property. Funding for final design and permitting has recently been secured to pursue an alternative that will restore up to 150 acres of the area to estuary.

The Port Susan Bay purchase played an important role in the eventual development of Washington State's Conservation Leasing Program for aquatic lands. The opportunity to purchase and manage this large tract of intertidal land inspired The Nature Conservancy's interest to play a larger role in managing and restoring submerged lands in the state. See the [Leasing Program Case Study: Washington State](#) for more information.

Encumbrances listed on the deed for the land include, but are not limited to:

- Public rights to use navigable waters for navigation, fishing, boating, bathing, swimming, water skiing and other related purposes;
- Oil, gas, and mineral rights reserved by the state;
- Tribal claims of rights, title, or interest in the property and use of the property for fishing and other related purposes; and
- State and public claims of rights, title, or interest in the property.

### Transaction Summary

Fee simple	1
Area	4,122 acres
Resource	Intertidal wetlands, flats, and channels, with 160 acres of diked uplands
Dates/duration	2001
Fee/price	Approximately \$2,000,000
Location	Port Susan Bay at mouth of Stillaguamish River
Use	Preservation; restoration of marsh, habitat, and water quality
Grantor(s)	Estate of Menno Groeneveld
Grantee(s)	The Nature Conservancy

### Lessons Learned

- Eleven years of negotiations paid off in preserving a large and uniquely valuable tract of intertidal land.
- Good boundary descriptions and surveys prior to the acquisition are essential to understand exactly what area is included in the purchase.

### Cost Summary

The original purchase price was approximately \$2,000,000. However, there were costs associated with negotiations that are not accounted for in the purchase price. Also, there are now long-term management and restoration costs associated with the ownership.

### Funding Sources

- The Rathmann Family Foundation
- WRQ, Inc.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services
- Salmon Recovery Funding Board (Washington)
- North American Wetland Conservation Act Grant Program

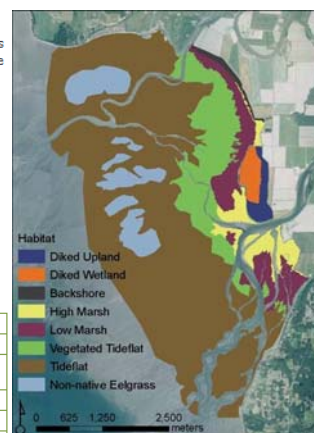
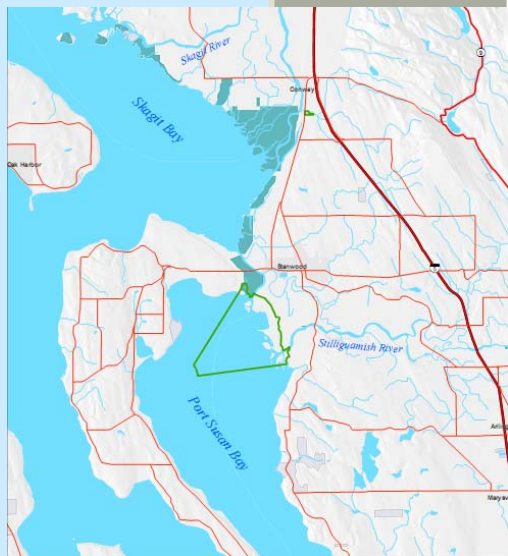
### Lead Organization

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Learn More

See the summary for ocean and coastal management in Washington State.



Flock of geese at Port Susan Bay. Photo provided by the Washington Field Office of The Nature Conservancy