

Interpretive Map

WELCOME!

Washington Department of Natural Resources established Maury Island Aquatic Reserve in 2000 as part of a state-wide system of seven marine aquatic reserves designated to protect important native ecosystems. Maury Island Aquatic Reserve includes 5,530 acres of state-owned aquatic lands surrounding Maury Island and Quartermaster Harbor.

A series of shoreline protected areas managed by King County, Vashon Maury Island Land Trust, and Vashon Parks District adjoin the reserve in many locations. These neighboring preserves provide recreational opportunities and important additional ecological protections that support the health of wildlife, habitats, and life processes in the aquatic reserve.

This map highlights recreational, ecological, and cultural/historical places of interest in this network of preserves. We hope this guide helps you explore and enjoy what this special area has to offer.

WILDLIFE & HABITATS

Within the reserve, eelgrass beds, kelp beds, sand and mudflats, estuaries (where fresh and saltwater mix), and natural shoreline stretches provide a supporting habitat structure that hosts many forms of life. The reserve fully contains one of Puget Sound's 18 distinct Pacific herring spawning areas. Pacific herring along with surf smelt, and sand lance (all present in the reserve) are important prey for salmon and birds. Salmon-rearing and migratory corridors are present within the reserve, and orca whales, harbor seals, humans, and sea lions visit these shores to take advantage of the food sources. The reserve contains Central Puget Sound's most important western grebe wintering area. More than 78 other species of birds use the reserve as well. Often overlooked, but just as magnificent to behold, are the plethora of marine invertebrates that call these shores home.

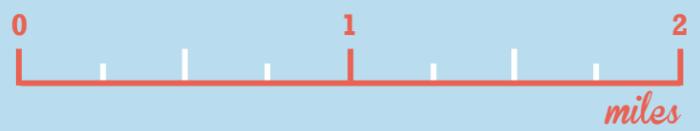
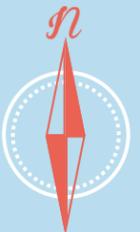
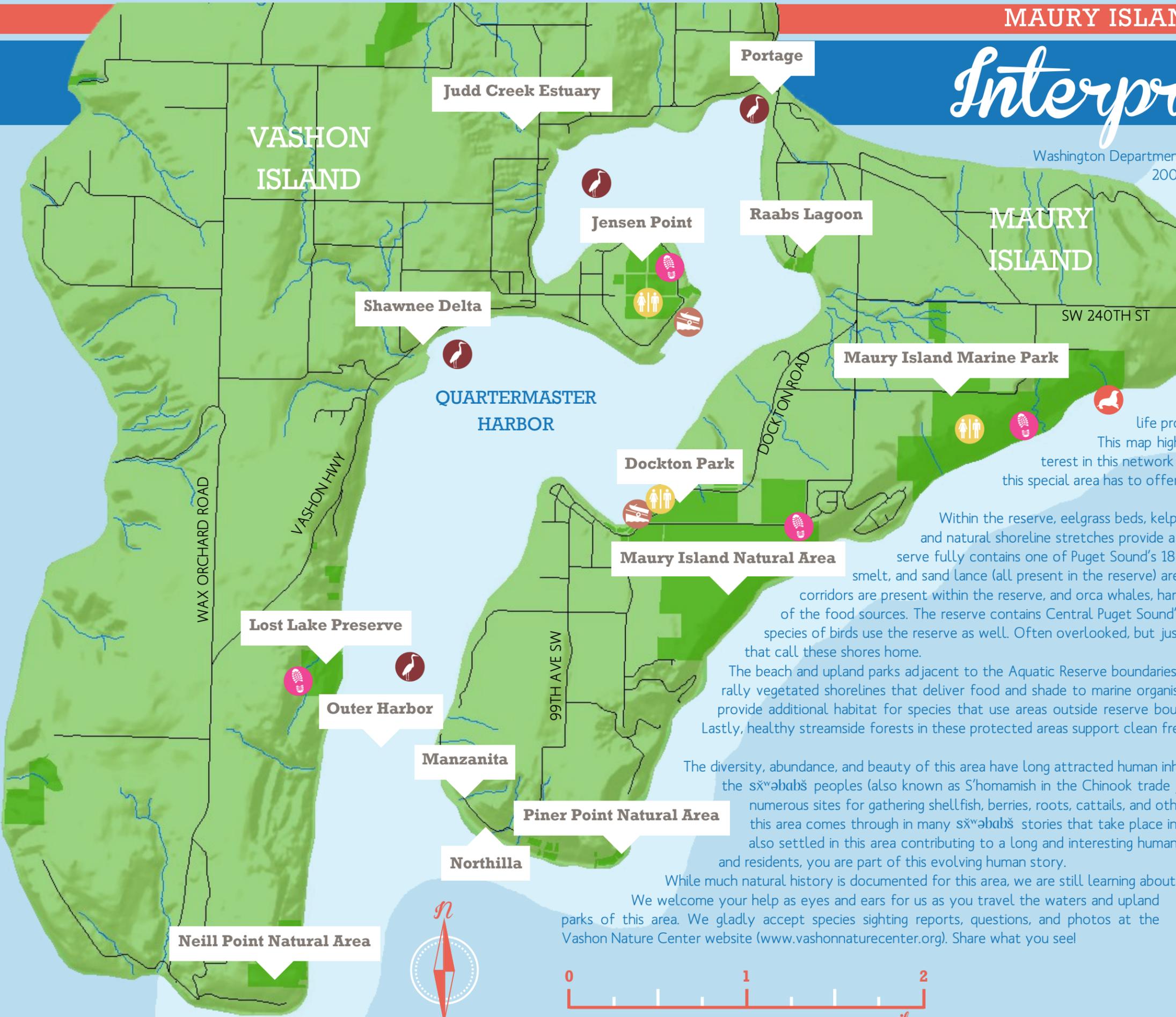
The beach and upland parks adjacent to the Aquatic Reserve boundaries support the ecological health of the aquatic reserve through naturally vegetated shorelines that deliver food and shade to marine organisms and enhance beaches through natural erosion. These parks also provide additional habitat for species that use areas outside reserve boundaries to nest, breed, or forage (such as osprey and river otters). Lastly, healthy streamside forests in these protected areas support clean freshwater inputs into estuary environments.

HUMANS & CITIZEN SCIENCE

The diversity, abundance, and beauty of this area have long attracted human inhabitants. Traditionally, Quartermaster Harbor was home to some of the s̓x̓wəbəb̓ peoples (also known as S'homamish in the Chinook trade jargon), including eight permanent villages, over 20 longhouses, and numerous sites for gathering shellfish, berries, roots, cattails, and other resources throughout the islands. The rich cultural importance of this area comes through in many s̓x̓wəbəb̓ stories that take place in specific places within the reserve. Early pioneers and homesteaders also settled in this area contributing to a long and interesting human history. From the early s̓x̓wəbəb̓ presence to modern day visitors and residents, you are part of this evolving human story.

While much natural history is documented for this area, we are still learning about what lives here and how life is changing in the reserve through time.

We welcome your help as eyes and ears for us as you travel the waters and upland parks of this area. We gladly accept species sighting reports, questions, and photos at the Vashon Nature Center website (www.vashonnaturecenter.org). Share what you see!



Map Legend					
	Seal Haul Out Area		Restrooms		Roads
	Birding Hot Spot		Hiking trails		Streams
	Boat Launch		Parks		Aquatic Reserve

Point Robinson Park

This Vashon Park District/U.S. Coast Guard site is one of the best places in Puget Sound to watch orca whales. Migratory birds are attracted here, and many rare species have been recorded during spring and fall migrations. The steep sandy cliffs host pigeon guillemots, northern rough-winged swallows, and kingfishers. Pt. Robinson once contained a salt marsh (now rare habitat in Puget Sound). This marsh was partially filled to build the Coast Guard infrastructure, but a few patches of pickleweed remain. Many shoreline species use the diversity of cobbles, large rocks, clay, and sand. Please do not approach seals or seal pups that regularly haul out on the beach here and to the southwest. At low tide you may see piddock clams, opalescent nudibranch, moonsnail, brittle star, and aggregating anemone. The Coast Guard residences can be rented through the Vashon Park District and the Annual Low Tide Celebration is held here each summer.

Dockton Park & Dockton Town

Stroll the historic trail (starting at the playground) to learn about the dry dock days (1892-1909) when the town was a Puget Sound industrial hub. The pilings and docks offer great sea-life viewing. In 2008, islander Karlista Rickerson spotted the invasive Japanese sea squirt *Didemnum* while scuba diving here. These sea squirts rapidly squelch out all other life. In response, the Department of Fish and Wildlife closed the dock for two weeks to scrub pilings with acetic acid to rid them of the sea squirt before it could take hold. Just southwest of the boat launch, King County has removed more than 100 creosote pilings, 300 feet of shoreline armoring, and associated fill to create a new tidal inlet. New sand and gravel replaces material lost by shoreline armoring. Standing dead trees were installed to provide bird perches. Forested trails above Dockton Park eventually lead to the beaches of Maury Island Natural Area. Look for the shy yew trees in the forest just above the docks.

Judd Creek Estuary

This estuary is formed by Judd Creek – the island's largest watershed, which supports coho and chum salmon and cutthroat trout. Long-time islanders also claim steelhead and chinook used this creek, but there are no current confirmed records. Old-timers also tell of large quantities of salmon spawning here until the late 1960s – numbers so vast that sea lions parked themselves in the estuary to gorge and locals filled wheelbarrows of fish for farm fertilizer. Today fewer fish spawn here and their numbers swing widely from dozens to hundreds from year to year. The original Judd Creek bridge was built from timber harvested on Vashon in the early 1890s. It was replaced in 1929, and then again in 1953 with the current concrete bridge. Rarely, green heron and ruddy duck are seen here, and more commonly you can see blue herons, mallards, mergansers, scoters, golden eyes, and grebes. At high tide you can travel up the creek under the bridge by kayak or canoe.

Shawnee Delta

July through April, this delta is an important roosting area for gulls at low tide. Sometimes during March and April, 3,000 to 5,000 Bonaparte's gulls can be seen along low-tide shores from here north to Burton. In winter, this becomes an important foraging area for shorebirds, including sanderling. In the open water of the delta, large mixed flocks of scoters, goldeneyes, and grebes can be seen. From September to February, salmon and cutthroat trout migrate up Fisher Creek, which empties into the delta. Many freshwater springs are located in this area and to the south. Some were particularly significant to the s̓x̓wəbəl̓s̓. The historic town of Burton lies to the north including Burton Store in operation since 1908. Burton was home to the first Vashon College, which burned to the ground in 1910. South of here, Quartermaster Harbor becomes deeper and choppy.

Raabs Lagoon

Raabs lagoon is a King County Natural Area. The entrance, called Vashon Rapids by local kayakers, can be navigated through a series of small rapids at a 6+ tide (8+ required for no rapids). A small picnic area under a large madrona is located on the west shore of the lagoon. In 2007, Puget Sound Restoration Fund and Sea Grant introduced native Olympia oysters (*Ostreola conchaphilia*) here with apparently little success. Please report any sightings. The lagoon hosts juvenile coho salmon. A beaver dam existed here in 1995, but has since vanished. Native plant restoration of the weed-covered shoreline started in 2012. Mileta Creek forms the cove south of Raabs Lagoon named for the first name initials of the homesteading Hatch family: Miles, Lewis and Tamara. Maury Island's largest creek, it was home to a heron rookery until eagle harassment resulted in abandonment in the mid-1990s. During warm weather, agitating the water at night awakens bioluminescent plankton – a lightshow to be remembered! During daylight, look for the silver flashes of herring schools.

Lost Lake Preserve

Active geologic rotation along fault lines forms a series of north-south running staircases of alternating cliffs and benches from Lost Lake to Neill Point Natural Area. One of these early rotation events is recorded in a s̓x̓wəbəl̓s̓ story of the area. These events created chains of ponds in the slumped areas; an example is Lost Lake, a Vashon-Maury Island Land Trust preserve. Once called Lizard Lake (a misnomer used for the lake's rich amphibian life), it is now a slowly filling bog wetland hosting mats of sphagnum moss and other acid-loving plants like Labrador tea. It still teems with rough-skinned newts and native salamanders, especially in spring. The beach has an incredible view of Mt. Rainier. This site is home to the best forage fish spawning area on the islands, likely because east-facing beaches and overhanging vegetation protect eggs from drying out. From the beach, a trail rises steeply to a junction. The trail heading to the south leads to Vashon Highway where it meets Spring Beach Road. The trail leading to the north goes to Lost Lake.

Jensen Point

Archeologists excavated a shell midden here in 1996. Quantities of herring bones were found alongside shells suggesting that harbor herring populations were once quite large. Lucy Gerand, a Vashon born s̓x̓wəbəl̓s̓ woman who provided much of our knowledge of Vashon based s̓x̓wəbəl̓s̓, was born in a longhouse here in about 1843. After being removed to the Puyallup Reservation in Tacoma, she returned to Vashon to live in a house boat in the area of the boat ramp until her death in 1929. Inner Quartermaster Harbor is naturally shallow, calm, and fairly stagnant. Historically, this created a productive marine nursery for fish, invertebrate, and bird species. Today, largely due to high human nutrient inputs in polluted run-off and accumulated bottom sediments, toxic algal blooms called red tide occur frequently in the harbor (most beaches are closed to shellfish harvest). In addition, this waterway is increasingly experiencing periods of critically low oxygen. Across the street from Jensen, explore Burton Forest trails and look for large, old trees.

Maury Island Marine Park & Natural Area

Together these former gravel mine areas (now King County Parks) form the longest stretch of protected shoreline on the islands. Maury Island Marine Park was created in 1995. Maury Island Natural Area was created in 2010 after a dramatic 15-year David-and-Goliath battle between local environmental groups and a multi-national mining company intent on mining this area. Sand here enters an offshore drift area that feeds beaches all the way to Point Robinson. The unique Pacific madrona forests are the largest in Puget Sound and host species rare in other island habitats including rubber boa, western fence lizards, and a higher diversity of neotropical migrant birds, and fall sparrows than more common island Douglas fir forests. Madronas have dominated the park since the 1940s, when out-of-control campfires burned these south-facing slopes. Restoration of native plants started at the Maury Island Marine Park in 2012. There are spectacular views of Mt. Rainier and the Cascades from both parks. Trails here cross Maury Island and connect to Dockton Park.

Outer Harbor

All three regular loon species can be seen here. Sometimes red-throated loons and Pacific loons can be seen in large flocks of more than 20. Classified as an Important Bird Area by the National Audubon Society, the harbor once supported 8 to 10% of the state's wintering western grebe population. In recent years however, Quartermaster western grebe Christmas Bird counts show a decline from around 1,600 birds in 1998 to 100 or less in the last three years – a loss of approximately 94%. This is also a popular salmon fishing spot in the fall months. The deep outer harbor is less prone to critically low oxygen levels than shallower areas.

Portage

Prior to being filled by the Army Corps of Engineers in 1916, Vashon and Maury Islands were connected at Portage by a natural sand and gravel bench that was covered by tides in some places. s̓x̓wəbəl̓s̓ people strung nets between poles across this shallow isthmus to catch birds. In the wetland to the west, Virginia rails have been heard (rare on these islands). The north side of the marsh supports dwindling populations of pickleweed, saltgrass, and Pacific silverweed – salt marsh species found only in a few other places locally. The Portage Store (still standing) was opened in 1903, remodeled in 1910, and home to the first free rural delivery mail service on Vashon. A county car ferry ran from Tramp Harbor to Des Moines from 1916 until 1921 helped establish the precedent of ferry routes as marine highways in Washington State.

Neill Point Natural Area

Neill Point was purchased by King County through the Maury Island Conservation Initiative – a fund originally marked for the purchase of Maury Natural Area. When the first purchase offer for Maury Natural Area was refused, funds were redirected to other important shorelines, many of which are on this map today. Several landslide events resulted in two condemned houses being torn down here after the land was purchased by the county. From the air, one can see a plume of eroding sand reaching far out into the water from the point. This sand travels to other island beaches, nourishing them with sediments essential to eel grass beds, clams, and other species. Vashon Nature Center conducted the first island Bioblitz (24-hour species inventory) here in 2012 and documented 354 species.

Manzanita, Northilla, & Piner Point Natural Areas

This string of King County owned Natural Areas wrapping the west end of Maury contain some of the best beachcombing areas on the island. Bald eagles are regulars, as are harbor seals, sea lions, sand dollars, piddock clams (in exposed clay layers), and kelp crabs. Locals claim there are huge sharks in the deep water hole off Piner Point! In the winter, listen for the kazoo call of black scoters. A Chinese immigrant community called little Hong Kong occurred along this stretch of beach in the late 1800s. The community disappeared seemingly overnight in 1885. Beachcombers can occasionally find pieces of porcelain left from this time. Across the water to the south is Tacoma's Point Ruston, the former site of the Asarco copper smelter. Now a superfund site, its plumes blew arsenic, lead, and cadmium onto Vashon and Maury from 1880-1985. Islanders celebrated when the stack was blown up in 1993.



For wildlife questions & reports contact
Vashon Nature Center
info@vashonnaturecenter.org