



Great Peninsula Conservancy

Protecting our lands and waters for generations to come.

Fall 2020



Protecting forever the natural habitats, rural landscapes, and open spaces of the Great Peninsula.

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Cover: As part of his final Eagle Scout project, Bryce Jenson constructed ten western screech owl houses for GPC Land Lab sites. Three of the houses will be part of an ongoing monitoring project at the Curley Creek Tyner Preserve.



A Resilient Year

Letter from the Executive Director



As I take stock of a tumultuous year, the word resilience comes to mind... in our community, the work of GPC, and the land itself.

While staff have primarily been working from home during the pandemic, the conservation team hasn't skipped a beat. Our recent Rocky Creek Preserve expansion now protects 184 acres and includes two important salmon-bearing

streams. By year's end, we expect to acquire five additional parcels comprising over 250 acres of ecologically valuable lands spread widely throughout our working area. This represents over \$3.75 million in acquisitions this year with funding coming from state and federal grants as well as generous member contributions.

As for the stewardship team, we started the year with big plans to provide community members with fun and unique ways to learn about the fascinating ecology of our region. Unfortunately, COVID-19 scuttled most of these volunteer events. Our stewardship team used this newly freed up time to develop new preserve management protocols that incorporate climate resiliency best practices. Taking the time to plan and adapt to a changing climate now will help ensure that the forests we plant today will be healthy well into the future.

Most importantly, our members have shown incredible resilience in the face of the pandemic. Even though restrictions on face-to-face meetings have limited our ability to plan and execute many community-based events, my virtual conversations with folks reinforce what I already know; that our members' enthusiasm for the mission has not flagged and that our work remains essential, even and especially during these difficult times. I thank each of you for your commitment to protecting the natural areas so vital to our way of life here in west Puget Sound.

Our community's collective grit has yielded big wins during a challenging year. That stands as a testament to our hard working staff, board directors, and members. Such resiliency should stand as inspiration to us all.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Nathan Daniel".

Nathan Daniel
Executive Director

Over 250 Acres Saved in 2020!

Update from Conservation Director Erik Steffens



Aerial photo of Misery Point by Anthony Gibbons.

Great Peninsula Conservancy is ending 2020 on a high note with the purchase of six properties totaling over 255 acres of high-value wildlife habitat. Leveraging the support of GPC members has allowed us to raise nearly \$4 million in public funds for these incredible projects, which truly protect some of the best remaining habitat on the peninsula. These preserves protect hundreds of acres of mature forest, well over a mile of shoreline, and two miles of stream frontage, critical for salmon and the health of Puget Sound.

Rocky Creek

GPC is expanding our protected lands on Rocky Creek by 150 acres to create a signature preserve. The purchase protects almost a mile and a half of lower mainstem of the creek and several acres of estuary. The project was identified as the highest priority this year because of its critical spawning and rearing habitat for chinook and other salmon. Several other acquisitions are planned for next year to further enhance the Rocky Creek Preserve.

Curley Creek

We're also excited to announce the conservation of 4,500 feet of Curley Creek and tributaries. This expands our Tyner Preserve by 18 acres and protects some of the best salmon spawning and rearing habitat on Curley Creek. GPC has worked to protect the estuary and lower mainstem of the creek since 2002.

Filucy Bay

In addition to these great stream projects, we're on track for a banner year for shoreline preservation. We are set to close on an additional 40 acres and ¼ mile of shoreline on Filucy Bay on the Key Peninsula, expanding this protected shoreline to over a mile. With this acquisition, and several others planned for 2021, GPC will have conserved almost the entire North Cove, creating a near-pristine—and incredibly rare—protected bay in Puget Sound.

Burke Bay

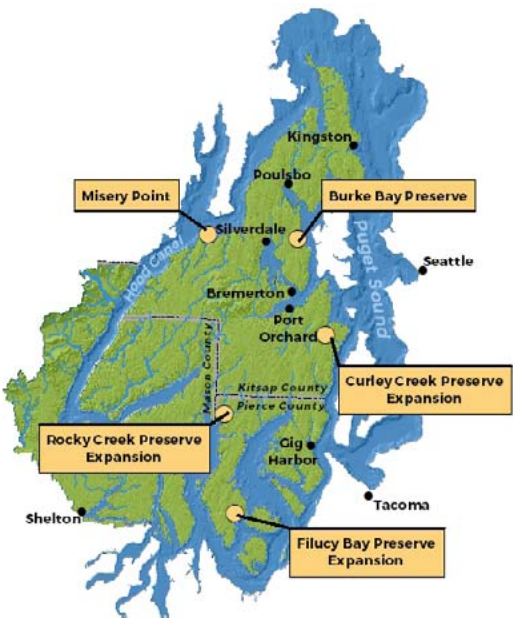
Thanks to incredible community support, we'll soon close on two properties on Burke Bay, creating a

30-acre preserve with over 1,600 feet of estuarine shoreline. This project has been a labor of love for many people and we're thankful for all the support for this project.

Misery Point

On the Hood Canal side, we're excited to close on the Misery Point property near Seabeck. This gorgeous 20-acre property is complete with ¾ mile of shoreline, a lagoon, feeder bluffs, and stunning views of the Olympic Mountains. At one time slated for seven waterfront houses, we're pleased we could work with the owners to create a nature preserve instead. Stay tuned for directions to visit this special place!

Thanks to members like you, it's been a great year to protect land. And 2021 is shaping up to be another excellent year as well with not only forest, stream, and shoreline projects, but protecting a working farm and forestlands as well.



Map of 2020 projects by Brenna Thompson.



GPC Land Labs

Population biologist Tom Doty nets Curley Creek for signs of amphibian residents.

A Place to Gather

If you’ve ever monitored one of GPC’s preserves with staff, the trip might have required the use of a machete, a pair of long-handled loppers, or at the very least some thick-soled boots. While swatting mosquitos, pushing gingerly past stinging nettle, and cursing the thinness of your jeans as they snagged devil’s club, you might have wondered what came over you when you volunteered to trace that long-lost property line. You may even have been tempted to head back to the car, but of course, you didn’t, because you reminded yourself that you were tough as nails, a hard-core GPC member, and also, where was the car?

In some cases, the inaccessibility of GPC lands is the very thing that has kept them safe. Not all protected lands are cut out to host trails, kiosks, trash cans, and port-o-pots. For more sensitive habitats, sometimes the best way to love them is to leave them alone, ensuring they remain havens for fish, birds, and wildlife. Those stinging nettles might

be doing us all a favor in the long run!

And yet, during the time of a global pandemic, we have seen in our community the incredible importance of having nature available to us as we rest, restore, and sometimes just get through a day. For many, the only way to connect with friends and family in the last few months has been at local parks and trails. When GPC staff looked closely at the resources at our disposal, and at the needs of our community in crisis, a vision for the future took shape. Someday soon we will need to get people back out on wild land. And, when that is once again possible, GPC will need a place for all of us to gather.

Though many of GPC’s preserves serve best as untrammled natural habitats, there are some landscapes that naturally lend themselves to visitors. This summer, GPC investigated possible locations for the development of a GPC Land Lab. Part ambassador landscape and part outdoor classroom, the Land

Lab site will showcase the best of GPC’s conservation, stewardship, and community engagement work. The site will serve as a home base for stewardship volunteers, as a starting point for interpretive walks, and as a place for youth to collaborate in community science and service-learning opportunities through the science classrooms of their local schools.

GPC’s Curley Creek Tyner Preserve will serve as the first focus site for the GPC Land Labs program. The 28 acres of forest safeguard nearly one-half mile of Curley Creek, an important fish-bearing stream supporting endangered steelhead and chinook salmon. The preserve’s high quality habitat will support meaningful community engagement and educational opportunities when it is safe to gather in the future. New this summer, the site features an improved driveway and parking area (thank you, Kitsap Quarry), a loop trail, and a native plant nursery. In addition, a wide variety of GPC

volunteers have contributed their expertise to develop community science activities that have the potential to be adopted by classrooms with both in-person and virtual modules.

Projects include: the development of a birding field guide currently documenting 32 species; monitoring nesting boxes for birds, owls, and bats; monitoring game cameras that will provide long-term information about the presence of river otter, coyote, bear, and deer in the area; analysis of amphibian habitat; acoustic ecology studies of the salmon run in Curley Creek; performance of water quality assessments; and stewardship opportunities focused on invasive weed removal and trail building.

Building on the momentum of this summer, GPC hopes to add additional

preserves to the Land Labs program in strategic areas of our working region. Some of these locations will be publicly accessible year-round. By 2021, a 20-acre forested headland featuring exceptional feeder bluffs, wetlands, and a rare saltwater lagoon will become GPC’s Misery Point Preserve. Kitsap Audubon Society has generously contributed to improve the site’s accessibility and to support the development of interpretive signage highlighting the site’s cultural and ecological values. It is GPC’s hope that the site will one day serve as a publicly accessible stop along the Kitsap Peninsula National Water Trails system.

Funding from The Russell Family Foundation has supported the planning and execution of the new Land Labs program. In addition,

GPC has received a capacity building AmeriCorps VISTA grant providing three to five years of funding for four AmeriCorps VISTA members including an Education Coordinator, Development Coordinator, Site Coordinator, and Volunteer and Outreach Coordinator. The primary goal of this team will be to develop the depth and breadth of the Lands Lab program. If you know anyone interested in learning more about GPC’s AmeriCorps VISTA positions, please have them contact us (claire@greatpeninsula.org).

We are excited that when the time is right, GPC will be prepared to host you out on a GPC Land Lab site. Until then, know that across the peninsula, tens of thousands of acres remain thorny, uninviting, and very much protected for generations to come.

Right: This bald eagle dropped in to pose for GPC’s game camera.

Far right: An improved driveway will allow GPC to host stewardship events rain or shine.

Bottom left: Land donor Steven Tyner meets with GPC volunteers, Patricia and Steve Weagant, to talk about the history of the property.

Bottom right: GPC staffer Claire Voris poses with the interpretative sign contributed to the site by Jeremy Orsborn of Bat Revival Projekt.





Stewardship Spotlight

Aerial photo of piling removal by Ali Erskine.

Restoring the Hahobas Shoreline Preserve

In 2019, GPC members played a vital role in protecting 162 acres of shoreline and forest along Hood Canal by creating what is now the Hahobas Shoreline Preserve. This former Boy Scout camp conserves more than half a mile of shoreline, four streams, forested bluffs, and mature upland forest that together provide habitat for our native fish, birds, and mammals. In 2020, as part of GPC’s commitment to ensuring quality wildlife habitat into the future, GPC staff have been working to restore the shoreline of the preserve to a natural setting.

The first step of this restoration was to remove the old, deteriorating creosote pilings that once supported the Camp Hahobas dock. Creosote, a wood preservative that has been used on the pilings of docks and piers in Puget Sound waters for more than a century, has been found to leach toxic chemicals into the marine environment and cause major damage to populations of forage fish that serve as a vital food

source for birds, marine mammals, and juvenile salmon. With funding through the Mason Conservation District (MCD), the Salmon Recovery Funding Board, and the Washington State Conservation Commission, GPC and MCD were able to partner with Blackwater Marine, LLC in September to remove eleven creosote pilings from the Hahobas shoreline using a barge and large vibratory hammer. The removal of these pilings will safeguard the eelgrass beds along the shoreline, which act as a nursery for forage fish eggs and provide feeding grounds for Endangered Species Act listed Hood Canal Summer Chum—one of the only populations of threatened salmon close to reaching recovery goals.

The next step of the Hahobas shoreline restoration will be the removal of the old camp cabin and vault toilet located just off the beach. Removing these structures—along with their associated septic tanks, foundations, and road—and

replanting their footprints with native shoreline vegetation will ensure quality habitat for terrestrial wildlife as well as improved water quality for aquatic species. Native vegetation will filter run-off from the uplands and from North Shore Road before it flows into Hood Canal, as well as create space for encroaching tides as sea levels continue to rise as a result of climate change. By removing materials from the shoreline that would be harmful to water quality as the waters of Hood Canal rise, we can continue to protect this valuable habitat, even in the face of the changing climate.

Want to see what shoreline restoration looks like in action? You can watch footage of the Hahobas piling removal (as well as an interview with GPC Stewardship Manager Erik Pedersen) as part of the public television special “Picking Up the Past,” airing on KBTC Public Television on December 18th at 7:30pm.

Continuing a Legacy of Excellence



For half a century, Gary Cunningham led the way for conservation in the Puget Sound region. As one of the founding fathers of Great Peninsula Conservancy, Gary’s recent passing has been keenly felt by our board, staff, and members. It is hard to envision GPC without Gary, but we know that every acre protected is a testament to his vision, and that the natural habitats, rural landscapes, and open spaces of the Great Peninsula are his legacy.

This year GPC unanimously voted to rename the annual conservation award in Gary’s honor. The Gary Allen Cunningham Conservation Award will continue to recognize a partner or volunteer who has made a significant contribution to GPC’s mission. Although his experience, passion, and tireless commitment to our work will be greatly missed, we know that the best way to honor Gary’s legacy is to continue the work that he started. Thank you to the many members who made a gift in Gary’s memory and to Gary and his wife Marilyn for including GPC in their estate planning as members of the Legacy Society.

The renewal of GPC’s land trust accreditation this year is one example of upholding this legacy. As part of a network of over 400 accredited land trusts across the nation, we are committed to professional excellence and to maintaining the public’s trust in its conservation work. This recognition is all of ours to share, and the reward is the promise of a future for our region’s wild places.

Great Peninsula Conservancy provided extensive documentation and was subject to a comprehensive third-party evaluation by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission prior to achieving this distinction.



You Raised \$100,000 for Conservation at the Virtual Celebration!

GPC staff are grateful for the many ways our community stepped up and pulled together to make this year’s transition to a virtual event successful. Special recognition goes to the following sponsors, auction donors, speakers, and award winners without whom this event could not have happened:

Auction Donors:

Mike and Becky Hall, Ikilil Gregg Photography, Far Away Entertainment, Patricia and Steve Weagant, Taylor Shellfish Farms, Braided River Publishing, Dalton Art Studio, Rod Weagant Studio, Foreman’s Forest Works, Alan Newberg, Harv Kolln’s Spirit Bird Studio, Rachel Tacke, Michelle Amicucci’s Muddy Paw Studio, Bat Revival Projekt, and Tamara Bogue Voris

Keynote Speaker:

Mindy Roberts of Washington Environmental Council

Gary Allen Cunningham Conservation Award Winners:

Nancy and Dick D’Archangel





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Look who's been
posing for the GPC
game cameras!

Flip inside to read
more about this
new Land Lab on
Curley Creek.

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