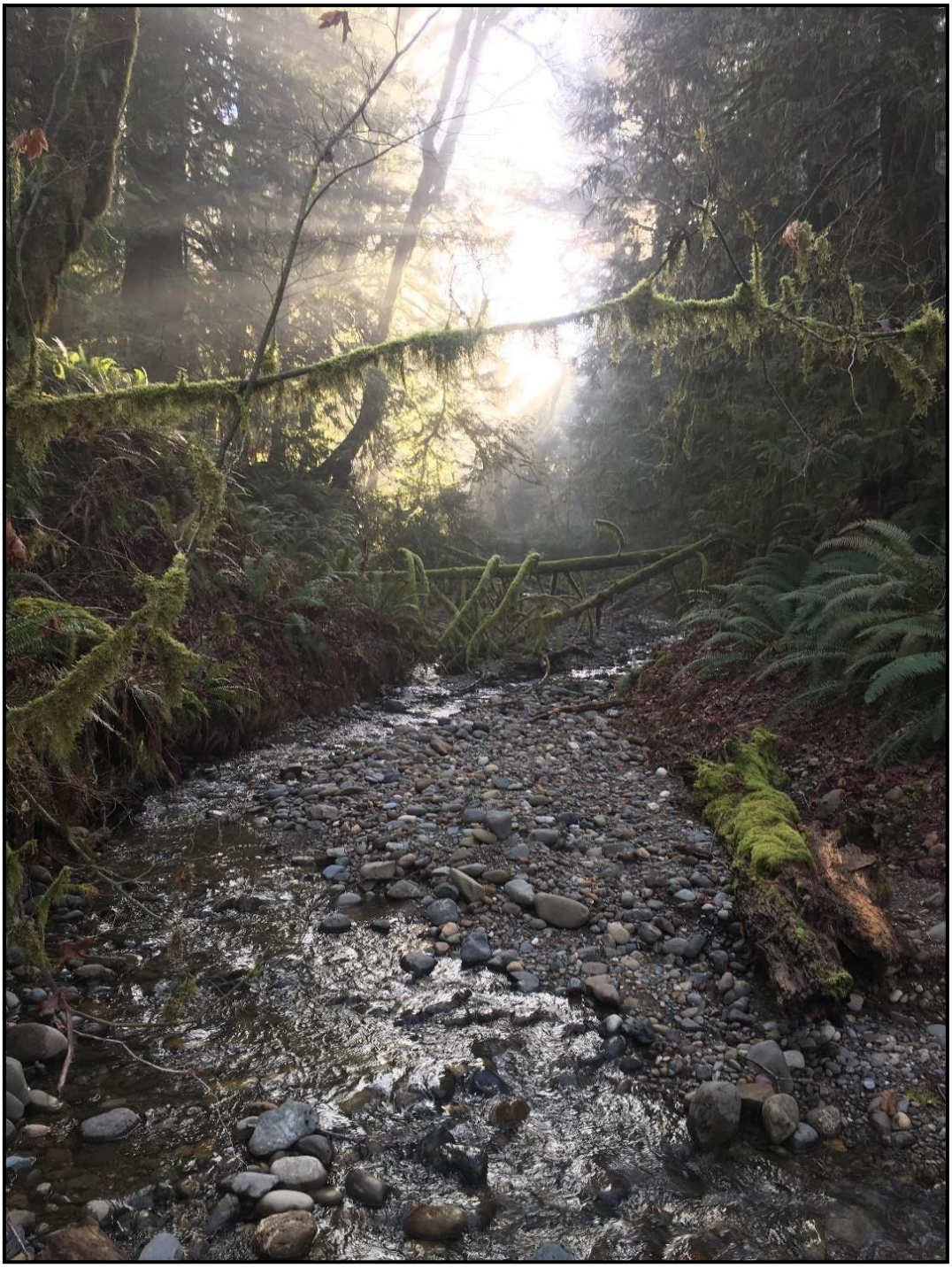
Great Peninsula Conservancy

Great Peninsula Conservancy
CONSERVATION PLAN
2021-2025



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The updated 2021-2025 Conservation Plan is the guiding document for Great Peninsula Conservancy's land conservation work. With the direction of the board-approved Strategic Plan, the Conservation Plan lays out in more detail the strategic direction and initiatives to be implemented by the organization's conservation department. As in the past, the focus conservation initiatives continue to be:

- Habitat including shorelines, estuaries, streams, wetlands and forests
- Working lands including farms and forestlands
- Community greenspaces and trails

In addition, the plan update is guided by our recent climate resiliency and connectivity analysis that emphasizes the need to work on landscape-level forest, wetland and estuary/shoreline migration projects. The Hood Canal watershed is identified in particular as both climate resilient, and critical to habitat connectivity throughout our geography. The plan also places more emphasis on working forestland through conservation easements as well as model community forest projects, while emphasis is placed on large projects, the conservancy is committed to work throughout our working geography in order to maintain critical habitat, wildlife corridors and recreational opportunities at the local and regional level.

INTRODUCTION

History of the Conservation Program

Great Peninsula Conservancy (GPC) is an accredited land trust working to protect forever the natural habitats, rural landscapes, and open spaces of the Great Peninsula region of west Puget Sound, Washington. GPC's roots extend back to the 1980s with the formation of four local land trusts. These four land trusts merged in 2000 to create a regional land trust serving a constituency of over 250,000 residents spanning Kitsap, Mason and western Pierce counties. In partnership with the communities we serve, GPC has protected over 10,800 acres of working forests, salmon streams, marine shorelines and community parks.

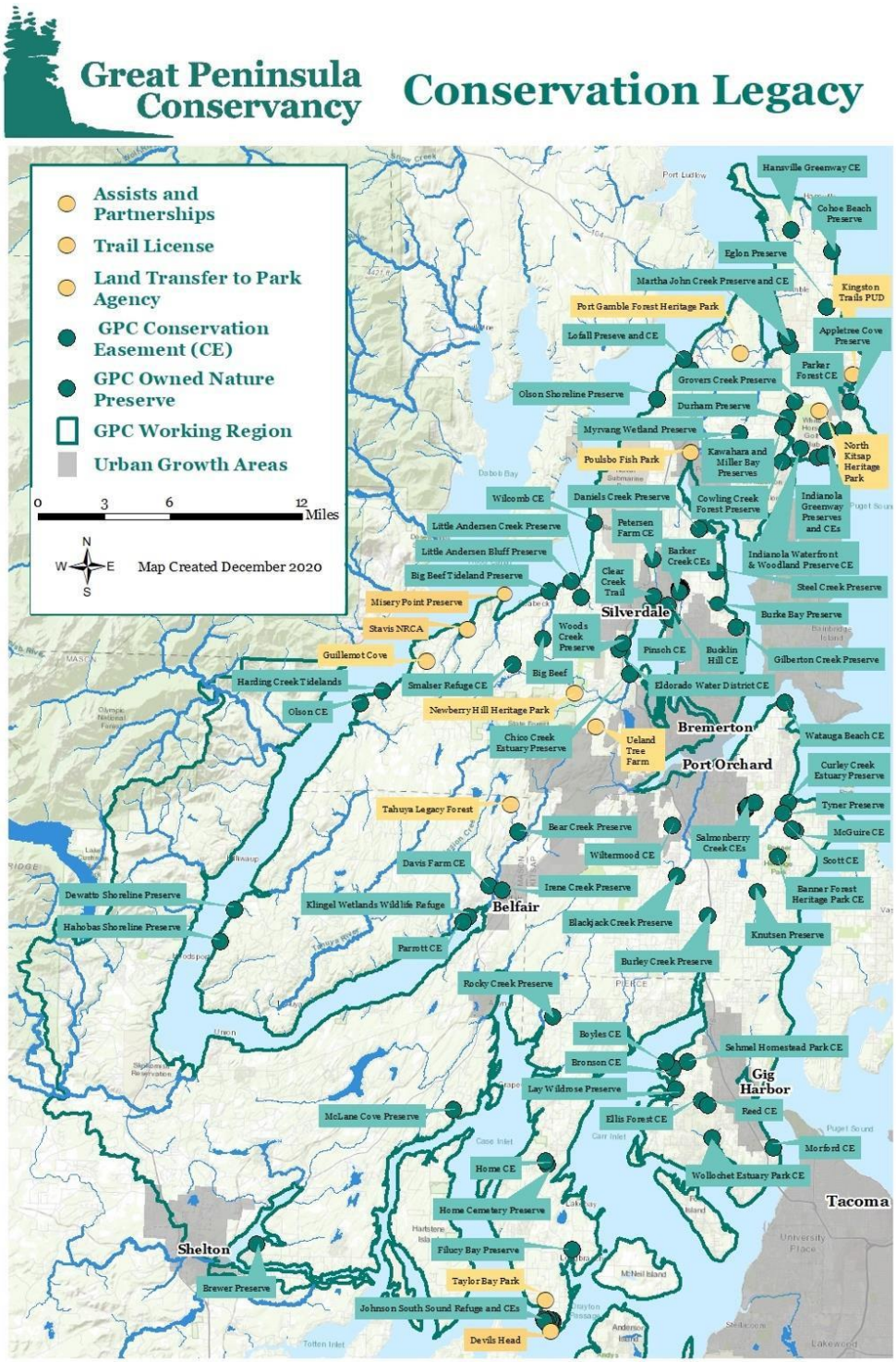
GPC's Conservation Program is growing rapidly, having conserved more than 600 acres of land over the last five years (2016-2020). This achievement marks an organizational shift from GPC's inception as a locally focused organization concentrating on obtaining donated land and conservation easements, to a higher-capacity regional organization identifying, developing and implementing complex conservation transactions. Meanwhile, the size of the geographic region we serve—spanning three counties—and the urgency of conserving high-priority lands before they convert to other uses, demands that we do more.

Plan Purpose

This Conservation Plan is an update and revision to GPC's 2016-2021 Conservation Plan. Its purpose is to develop a robust strategy for GPC's conservation program that can be effectively implemented to conserve high priority landscapes. The Conservation Plan provides GPC's staff, Board of Directors and committees with a tool that helps identify and evaluate proposed projects in order to use our limited resources wisely. Additionally, a function of the Conservation Plan is to put GPC's priorities, our Conservation Initiatives, into a concise, understandable form that staff and the Board of Directors can communicate to the broader community. It is also important to note that the Conservation Plan is

restricted to our land conservation work and does not address the other important work of GPC such as land stewardship and education.

The "Conservation Partnerships" and "Criteria for Project Selection" sections of this plan emphasize a conservation approach that evaluates, prioritizes and strategically develops successful projects. This document adheres to the Standards and Practices established by the Land Trust Alliance. Specifically, the Plan underscores our conservation priorities by describing how it is advantageous to work with willing landowners, and when appropriate, to collaborate with like-minded project partners on conservation projects.



Organization Strategic Plan

The Board of Directors adopted a Strategic Plan in 2021, providing the overarching vision for the work of the organization. The following are the relevant excerpts that set the groundwork for the Conservation Plan:

Mission Statement
Protecting forever the natural habitats, rural landscapes, and open spaces of the Great Peninsula of Washington's Puget Sound

Organization Goals and Objectives
Goal 1 (applicable to Conservation Plan)
Conserve important and threatened lands in Great Peninsula Conservancy's working region

- ➢ Conserve ecologically valuable habitat including shoreline, estuaries, streams, freshwater wetlands, and forests
- ➢ Conserve working lands
- ➢ Expand community greenspaces and trails

Implementation plan

GOAL 1: Conserve important and threatened lands in Great Peninsula Conservancy's working region

Ten Year Vision: Large tracts of climate resilient forestland, extensive stretches of near-pristine marine shoreline, undeveloped estuaries, undisturbed reaches of freshwater streams, wetland complexes, and locally-important community greenspaces and working lands across the GPC's working region are protected forever

Five Year Objectives

1. **Conserve important habitat**
   a. Protect significant continuous stretches of climate resilient natural shoreline, estuary, and coastal wetland important to salmon, forage fish, migratory birds, other wildlife, and people
   b. Protect lands along rivers/streams, ponds, and wetlands that safeguard habitat for wildlife, preserve water quality/quantity, and create wildlife movement corridors
   c. Protect upland forests for their habitat value, as well as to increase landscape connectivity, enhance climate resilience, and improve watershed function
2. **Conserve working lands**
   a. Protect working farms that produce food, protect habitat, preserve the scenic character of rural communities, and enhance the sustainability of rural life
   b. Protect large tracts of climate resilient, sustainably managed working forests that preserve landscape connectivity and watershed function
3. **Expand community greenspaces and trails**
   In response to community needs and in partnership with community groups, protect cherished community greenspaces with significant value for wildlife and biodiversity, opportunities for passive recreation and trails, and at high risk of conversion to incompatible land uses

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

This strategic direction's primary goal is to enhance Great Peninsula Conservancy's role in advancing larger scale projects of regional significance. This will catalyze community recognition and support of GPC as a regional land trust with capacity to be active throughout the entirety of our geographic region. It seeks to provide a directional framework that informs how and where our land trust dedicates resources to conserve landscapes that are local and regional priorities. Another goal for this plan is to lay out a strategy for increasing our organizational capacity to develop and effectively implement our essential conservation work. The strategic direction is based on our **Criteria for Project Selection**.

Criteria for Project Selection

1. *A commitment to full project life cycle* including feasibility and assessment reports, restoration project design, implementation and stewardship. In addition, a programmatic expansion from a focus on land acquisition to restoration within GPC's stewardship program.

2. *Nexus and anchor project selection and development* – Intentional target selection and development of anchor projects within a watershed or drift cell landscape context. Characteristics of these projects are:
    - Fundable and competitive for grants at a regional scale
    - Provide leverage to expand conservation scope at a landscape scale by being intrinsically compelling to local communities
    - Provide leverage through match and/or donated lands
    - Act as a nexus for expansion into a multiple parcel acquisition project
    - Provide benefits at multiple scales when nested as a smaller scale project within a larger project framework in support of strategic partnerships (example- Grovers Creek Preserve 2015 within the Kitsap Forest and Bay Project) and
    - Serve to advance a larger project or initiative such as the Kitsap Forest and Bay Project, or the Navy's Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration.

3. *Multiple Parcel Conservation Projects within a watershed and drift cell setting*- these projects are often developed from an anchor project. Another approach is to seek funding independently for larger landscape-scale projects that achieve significant conservation outcomes within priority watersheds and drift cells. These projects provide significant lift ecologically, as well as providing essential staff and programmatic capacity over a two to three-year period.

4. *Strategic Alliances and Partnerships* provide opportunities to work collaboratively on conservation projects and programming of common interest. Other opportunities include coordinating on larger-scale conservation projects that would otherwise be beyond current capacity.

Climate Resilience

Great Peninsula Conservancy has long felt that by protecting ecologically valuable habitats, it was advancing climate resilience, but has not used climate resilience as a specific criterion in evaluating new projects to conserve. However, with resources available to predict the anticipated effects of climate change in our region, examining potential projects through the lens of climate resilience can add another

tool to our toolbox of project selection, alongside the many other criteria GPC uses prioritizing projects for conservation.

Predicted Effects of Climate Change on GPC's Region

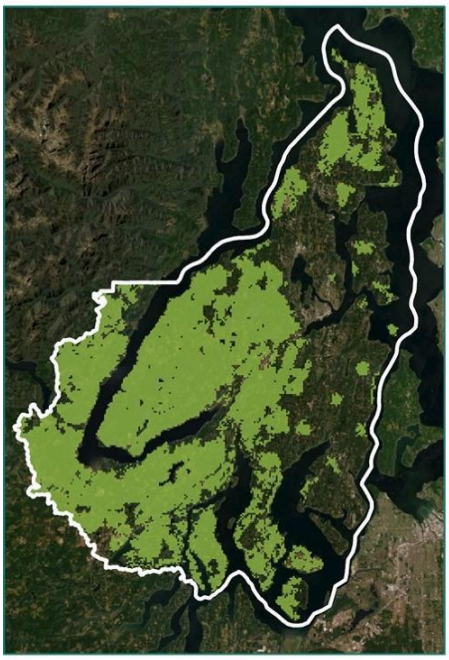
In 2020, GPC staff prepared a literature review of the best available science predicting the effects of global climate change on our working region. Current models project climate-driven changes in our region to include:

- *Increases in annual temperature*. The current warming trend in Puget Sound is expected to continue, with a predicted increase of 4.2°F - 5.5°F by 2050 and 5.5°F - 9.1°F by 2080, with ranges based on global emissions scenarios.
- *Shifts in seasonal precipitation*. While the average annual precipitation is not projected to change, models predict that summer precipitation will decrease by 22% and heavy winter rainfall events will increase in both frequency and intensity.
- *Shifts in seasonal streamflow*. Expected to track patterns set by precipitation, summer streamflows are expected to decrease and winter flows are expected to experience higher peak flows during heavy winter rainfall events. More drastic seasonal patterns are expected to lead to unprecedentedly low summer flow, increased stream temperatures, and decreased moisture in wetlands.
- *Decreased water availability*. Across western Washington, driven by drier and warmer conditions, forests are expected to experience reduced water availability and increased susceptibility to fire, insects, and disease.
- *Sea level rise*. The experienced effects of global sea level rise will vary between shoreline communities, but because the majority of the Kitsap Peninsula is concurrently subsiding (sinking), the effects are likely to be exacerbated within GPC's working region. Sea level rise will have impacts on our shoreline ecosystems, including more frequent and severe coastal flooding, more rapid erosion of coastal bluffs, and changing coastal habitats. As sea level rises, tidal ecosystems will be pushed inland, or in cases where shorelines are heavily developed, will likely disappear.

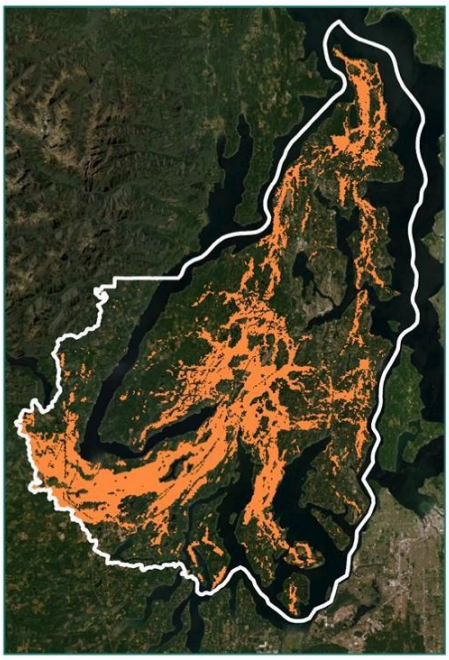
Climate Resilient Land

GPC Staff and a geographic information systems consultant (CORE GIS) conducted a spatial analysis of GPC's working region in 2021. The analysis relied largely on data from The Nature Conservancy's (TNC) Resilient and Connected Landscapes project, which identified resilient and connected lands across North America. *Resilient lands* are those identified as likely to maintain function in the face of the changes and stresses put on a system due to climate change based on the physical traits of land: lands that contain a diversity of microclimates, created by elevation, topography, geology, soils, etc., will have greater resilience to the stressors caused by climate change. *Connected lands* are identified vital corridors across the landscape that provides space for species to adapt the impact of climate change by migrating or moving to where conditions and resources are best suited for their survival – even when areas that sustained them for generations are no longer able to do so. In a region rich with peninsulas, connectivity is especially vital for maintaining landscape level linkages across already narrow strips of land, such as the isthmus connecting the Kitsap Peninsula to the Olympic Peninsula southeast of Belfair.

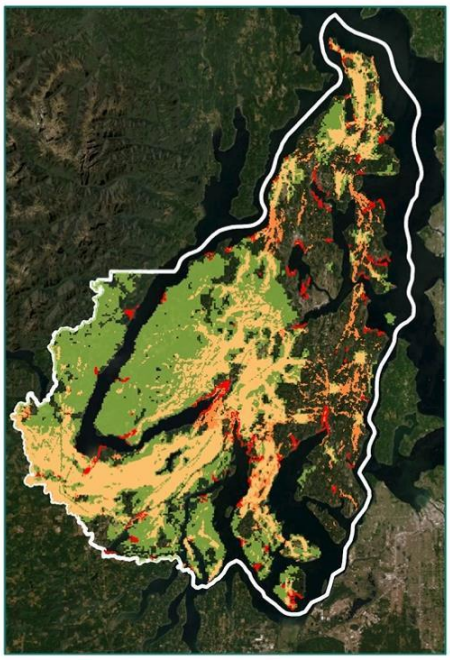
Loss of landscape connectivity would make our region's natural systems even more vulnerable to the effects of climate change.



Climate Resilient Lands (in green) include areas identified by the Nature Conservancy's Resilient and Connected Landscapes project to likely be able to sustain natural processes under predicted the effects of climate change.



Connected Lands (in orange) include areas identified as likely to provide space for species to move and migrate in adaptation to climate driven changes.



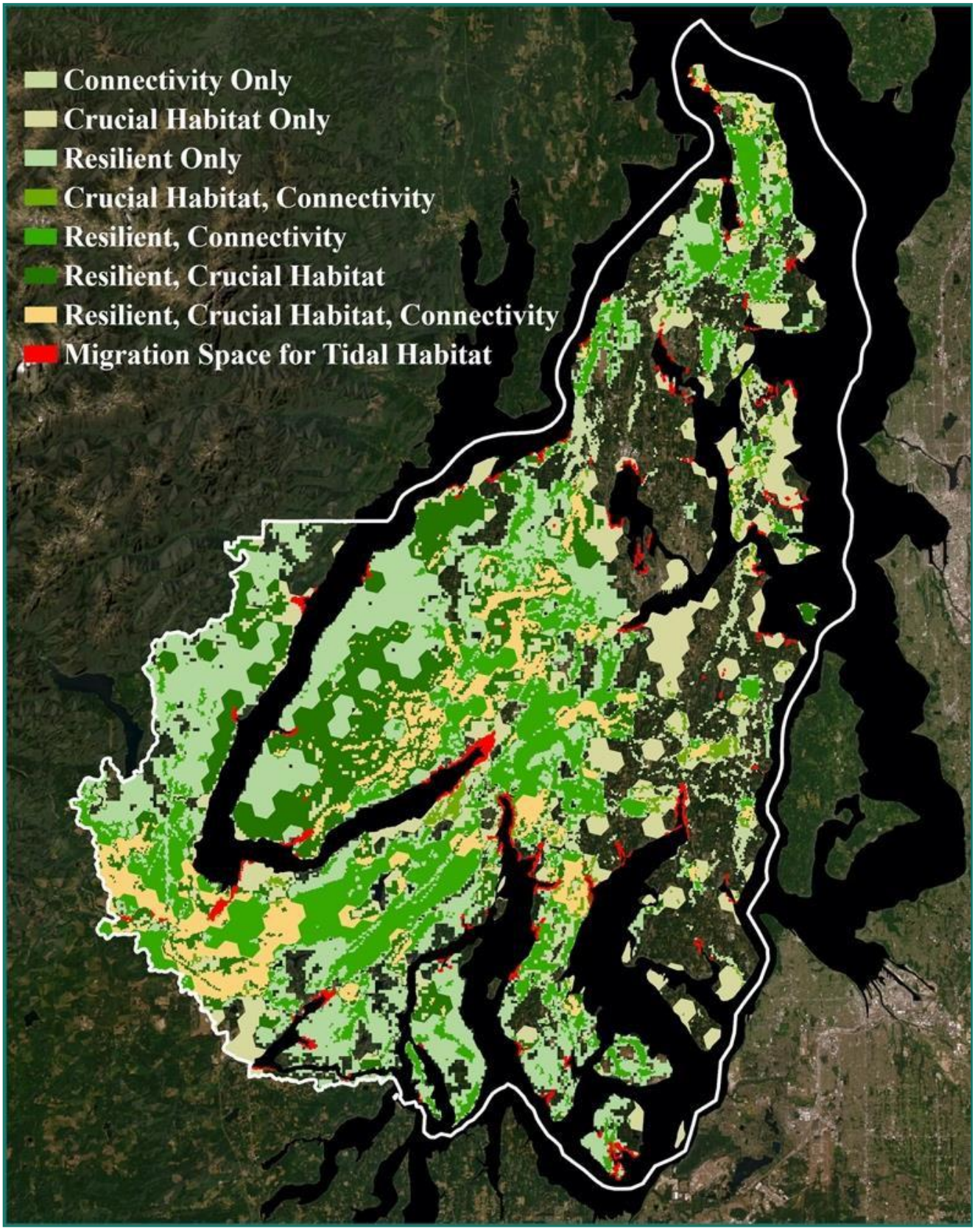
Areas identified as having both **Resilience and Connectivity** (in yellow) provide multiple benefits in adapting to the effects of climate change. **Migration Space for Tidal Habitat** (in red) include areas that don't currently contain tidal habitat, but could provide space for tidal habitat to migrate to as sea levels rise.

Integrating Climate Resilience into GPC's Work

The spatial analysis project produced a prioritization map that includes lands identified by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to contain critical habitat for both terrestrial and aquatic species, as well as lands identified by the TNC as vital for resilience or connectivity. The combination of these datasets highlights lands that contain all three characteristics, lands that are not only critical for wildlife today but are likely to continue to be critical habitat and corridors in the future. Additionally, the prioritization utilized data from The Nature Conservancy that identifies potential migration space for tidal habitat - upland areas that currently do not support tidal habitat but could as sea level rise cause tidal ecosystem migration.

The prioritization identified many areas across the region as having high benefit for climate resilience, including many focused around stream-systems, estuaries and isthmuses. These include some areas that GPC has prioritized for some time, including North Kitsap, northern Key Peninsula, and Lynch Cove. Additionally, there were large areas of prioritized resilient land in portions of our region in which GPC has been less active, including the Tahuya Peninsula, western Hood Canal, and the isthmus connecting the Kitsap Peninsula to the Olympic Peninsula. These less developed areas have opportunities for large-scale projects that could add significantly to the climate resilience of our region.

Summary Map of GPC's Climate Resilient and Connectivity Analysis



While the spatial analysis, using the Resilient and Connected Landscapes data, is a tool to guide conservation on a landscape scale, there are key findings from this research that can add to the resiliency of our region, both on and off the areas identified by the analysis. Across our region, there are natural features that we can prioritize in order to dampen the expected effects of climate change:

- *Freshwater wetlands* present an opportunity for mitigation of changes in precipitation patterns, as intact wetlands increase water storage within freshwater systems. Protecting and restoring wetlands and their associated buffers can safeguard the service that wetlands provide as "sponges" in watersheds, which can provide flood control, mitigate pollution and decrease erosion of sediment during high flows. Additionally, wetlands in areas critical for aquifer recharge can improve streamflow and recharge groundwater.
- *Migration Space for Tidal Habitat* will become increasingly valuable in response to sea level rise projected to affect our region's shorelines within the century. By protecting shorelines and adjacent uplands, we can provide space for tidal ecosystems to migrate inland in response to rising sea levels – especially vital shoreline habitat, such as estuaries and embayment habitats.
- *Connectivity and corridors* will continue to be a vital element in our working region, ensuring that species have the ability to migrate and move through the region in response to climate change impacts. Strategically protecting connected properties, especially along vital, natural wildlife corridors, such as streams and their associated riparian buffers, can help protect the natural flow and function of ecosystems that would be lost if these areas were fragmented.

Working Geography

Great Peninsula Conservancy's service area includes Kitsap, Pierce and Mason County as shown on the map below. While the service area includes a large section of Mason County, the southern portion of the County outside of the Hood Canal watershed is an area where GPC is not actively seeking projects, but could consider projects that serve the mission such as conserving large sections of shoreline or important wildlife corridors.

The results of the climate resiliency and connectivity analysis clearly show the importance of Mason County. Bordered by the barriers of Hood Canal, Puget Sound and the greater metropolitan area of Seattle/Tacoma to the East, land-based habitat connectivity of our working geography is predominantly from the southwest. Maintaining wildlife corridors south and west into the Olympic Peninsula is critical to maintaining biological diversity of our entire working area. If connectivity is lost, especially in and around the bottleneck around Belfair, our entire geography will suffer.

The Tahuya Peninsula also shows much promise for climate resiliency. With a landbase in working forestland and not yet facing extreme development pressure, the opportunity for large landscape scale conservation and forestland preservation still exists. Particular areas of interest are the Tahuya and Dewatto watersheds.

Western Hood Canal in Mason County is also an important geography for climate resiliency and connectivity. Nestled between the Olympic National Park and US Forest Service land is a mix of State Department of Natural Resources (DNR), private timberland and shoreline property. New partnerships with the Skokomish Tribe, DNR, Olympic National Forest and Olympic National Park will be explored. Given the difficulties of managing land far from our office, a particular emphasis on will be placed on assist or transfer projects where GPC is not the long-term owner.

Since the bulk of our conservation work will continue to occur in the more densely populated eastern area of our geography, additional staffing capacity is needed to take full advantage of conservation opportunities throughout our working geography.

CONSERVATION INITIATIVES

The Conservation Initiatives are the basis for a road map to conserving the most valued and threatened landscapes that best reflect the interests, concerns and needs of people who live, work and play on the Great Peninsula. This plan supports and advances the conservation program's three Conservation Initiatives. The Conservation Initiatives identify crucial landscapes deemed crucial for preservation. The focus areas were generated to further define the initiatives and create a clear locus of interest within each broader landscape.

Conservation Initiative I: Habitat

The core of GPC's work remains conservation of high quality and fully functioning habitat. Shorelines, estuaries, streams, freshwater wetlands, and forests provide vital space for wildlife, sustain ecosystem services important to people, and enhance the climate resiliency of this region.

Shorelines and Estuaries

Shorelines, deltas and estuaries form the interface between terrestrial and marine landscapes. These nearshore ecosystems are some of the most diverse in the Puget Sound, and in GPC working region, they encompass more than 578 miles to inter-connect terrestrial, freshwater, estuarine, and marine systems. Due to this connectivity, the condition of nearshore habitats greatly influences the productivity of the entire Puget Sound basin. In addition, nearshore ecosystems support many ecosystem goods and services most valued by our human communities.

Focus Areas

- Intact Drift Cells and Reaches
- Embayments and Coastal Inlets
- Estuaries
- Shoreline Public Access

Needs Assessment

Nearshore ecosystems are defined as those ecosystems within a narrow strip where the land and streams meet the sea. The Nearshore extends from the water-ward depth of light penetration, estimated as 10 meters below the mean high-water mark, across the shoreline to the uplands that directly influence the shore. Uplands that directly influence the shore, or are influenced by the shoreline, are estimated as 200 meters landward of the shoreline. In addition, the nearshore includes streams and rivers to the upstream extent of tidal influence, and their riparian areas. Puget Sound shorelines are dynamic ecosystems made up of distinct drift cells, each with their own areas of sediment input, transport and deposition.

The health and biodiversity of Puget Sound rely on continued efforts to protect and restore the least degraded and intact nearshore habitat. The nearshore provides food, refuge, migration routes, breeding and nursing areas for marine life. Nearshore habitat supports invaluable biodiversity including more than 220 species of fish, 26 kinds of marine mammals, 100 species of birds and 1000s of species of marine invertebrates (Trust for Public Land, Puget Sound Shoreline Strategy 2012). Nine out of ten species listed by the federal government as endangered or threatened within the Puget Sound region use or inhabit the nearshore environment. These habitats also sustain shoreline related industries such as fisheries, shellfish growing, tourism and recreation vital for the sustainability of local and regional economies.

By concentrating our conservation efforts on priority shorelines called out in nearshore assessments, our objective is to conserve the diversity of habitats and habitat sustaining processes that are comparatively intact and healthy. Our conservation efforts will encompass conservation of priority habitats embedded within a landscape scale that includes:

- Nearshore habitat from tidelands to riparian uplands above feeder bluffs
- Drift cell health including feeder bluffs, beaches, and accretion habitats
- Associated coastal shore forms such small barrier lagoons, closed lagoons/marshes, pocket estuaries
- Embayments and coastal inlets assigned high protection potential within PSNERP Strategy 2012
- Estuaries at the head of coastal inlets and embayments

According to the Puget Sound Nearshore Ecosystem Restoration Project (PSNERP), only 112 of 828 natural shoreline segments have no stressor associated with them. In fact, armoring is found in 78% of shoreline segments and along 27% of the shoreline of Puget Sound (Technical Report 2011-03).

While priority healthy shorelines will be the focus of our work, consideration will also be given to projects where restoration of natural shoreline is feasible. Removing armoring or fill is critical in restoring the health of Puget Sound, and GPC should explore partnerships with restoration-focused organizations, particularly the local salmon enhancement groups and conservation districts.

Another key finding of the climate resiliency work is identifying areas of shoreline migration. Sea level is predicted to rise considerably by the end of this century, and important nearshore habitat will need to migrate upwards and further inland. This is especially important for estuary and embayment habitats. The resiliency analysis identifies key areas where opportunities still exist for this estuary migration to occur. Additionally, identifying and conserving drift cell features, such as feeder bluffs, that maintain sensitive and vital habitats such as lagoons, can assist in maintaining sediment inputs needed to maintain healthy function, even in the face of sea level rise.

Drift Cells and Reaches

A drift cell, or littoral cell, is a segment of shoreline that encompasses a single system of sediment input, transport and deposition. Not only are the structure of beaches within a drift cell strongly affected by sediment input and transport processes, but the spawning ability for salmonids and feeder fish are affected as well (PSNERP 2010). With extensive bulkheading at the base of feeder bluffs and banks, the protection of intact or minimally degraded feeder bluffs is critical to the health of drift cells as these bluffs provide the sediment that nourishes healthy beaches, spits and other habitats reliant on sediment transport in tidal areas. The land trust will conserve associated upland property based on connectivity of shoreline to upland especially where permanent or intermittent streams outlet into nearshore areas. GPC will focus conservation efforts on those drift cells that are assigned as having High Protection Potential within PSNERP's 2012 Strategies for Nearshore Protection and Restoration in Puget Sound.

Embayments and Coastal Inlets

The PSNERP divides embayments into four main categories: Open Coastal Inlet, Barrier Lagoon, Closed Lagoons and Marshes and Barrier Estuary. A large number of the embayments on Puget Sound are formed and enclosed by barrier beaches, emphasizing an important geomorphological relationship between the wave-dominated beach environments and small protected estuarine environments (Shipman 2008). GPC will focus conservation efforts on those embayments and coastal inlets that are assigned as having High Protection Potential within PSNERPs 2012 Strategies for Nearshore Protection and Restoration in Puget Sound.

Estuaries

Estuaries are transition zones between land and sea. They are found in sheltered bays, inlets, and lagoons where freshwater rivers and streams meet and mix with salt water, forming a melting pot of

organic and mineral nutrients. The nutrient-rich soup of the estuary nourishes plankton, kelp and aquatic plants which, in turn, support oysters, clams, crabs, salmon, and birds. Primary focus for conservation of nearshore ecosystems will be on identifying shoreline segments with little to no stress or disturbance in Mason, Kitsap and west Pierce counties. The general framework for establishing projects will specifically emphasize creating and maintaining connectivity amongst the drift cells, reaches, and embayments which support critical species while maintaining and/ or increasing shoreline access for recreation and sustainable economic uses.

Shoreline Public Access

It is widely recognized that exploration of inlets, rocky headlands, salt marshes and beaches is a wonderful reason to call the Puget Sound home. In addition to local residents, millions of people travel to the Puget Sound annually which drives a strong tourist industry. In 2013, the Trust for Public Land (TPL) published the Puget Sound Shoreline Strategy Update wherein they recognize several key factors that will significantly affect future efforts to conserve shoreline access: population growth, sea level rise due to climate change, and waterfront real-estate demand.

Methods Proposed

Our primary strategy for enhancing public access will be to work collaboratively, relying on TPL GIS mapping to identify priority acquisition areas in specific local areas within our geography that currently have a scarcity of shoreline access. We will also look at providing greater access for local underserved areas with higher population density and/or greater projected population growth and development pressures. Public access is often a benefit of our shoreline protection efforts, and often required by granting agencies.

Primary and Secondary Strategy

The objectives of our Shoreline and Estuary Initiative are to place priority primarily on protection of intact habitat and secondarily on restoring habitat that has been minimally impacted or can be restored passively through removal of fill, dikes or levees. The PSNERP Strategies emphasize that "[p]rotection of existing unimpaired systems is more effective and efficient then restoration of impaired systems…

Restoration is recommended for sites where indicators of degradation suggest the opportunity to substantively increase ecosystem services through restoration, but where degradation is not so complex or intense that recovery of self-sustaining and resilient ecosystem services becomes unlikely" (PSNERP 2012).

GPC's Conservation Program will endeavor to pursue projects that afford, either separately or concurrently, protection and restoration opportunities. Restoration projects will involve joint coordination between GPC's Conservation and Stewardship programs. The Stewardship Program will provide project oversight and management from inception through third party restoration implementation, maintenance and monitoring of performance standards and goals. Priority is placed on local projects that have significant community interest and regional impacts. Our conservation strategy will focus on priority habitats as called out through GIS synthesis and peer reviewed nearshore assessments (e.g., PSNERP 2012, etc.).

Streams and Freshwater Wetlands

The conservation of streams and freshwater wetlands is critical to the health of the outlets of coastal inlets and embayments, and to recovery of anadromous fish including Endangered Species Act (ESA) listed salmon. Emphasis within this initiative will be to protect areas with healthy, high-quality habitat and to work strategically with partners to secure, and restore as needed, properties that connect and provide access to isolated habitat, including instream, off-channel, and estuarine habitat made inaccessible by culverts, levees, or other man-made obstructions. As climate change is predicted to create warmer, drier summers, and more intense winter rainfall events, wetlands in particular will play a critical role in mitigating the effects of climate change.

Focus Areas

- Important watersheds with headwaters to bay connectivity
- Riparian Corridors
- Freshwater Wetlands

Needs Assessment

The Puget Sound Basin is composed of at least 11 major watersheds. Watersheds include upland headwater wetlands, forested slopes, and riparian floodplain habitat. Headwater wetlands provide recharge that contributes to underlying hydrology and health of lower elevation floodplains and wetlands and eventually estuaries where fresh water mixes with salt water in the Puget Sound.

Connectivity between riparian areas and uplands provide habitat critical for conservation of amphibians. Connectivity between main stem and tributary riparian corridors provide shade, food and uninterrupted passage for mammals, birds, invertebrates, and migratory fish including federally listed salmon.

Watersheds are negatively affected when the frequency, intensity, and volume of stormwater runoff increases. Peak stream flows spike after removal of vegetation cover as a result of urban development and active construction areas converted to parking lots, roads and buildings. When this occurs, instream habitat is further degraded as greater volumes of water and higher levels of pollution are carried from land surfaces to receiving streams, lakes, and wetlands. Just a few of the cumulative effects of increased impervious surfaces lead to incised stream banks and reduced water quality downstream.

Residential development allowed under current zoning could have significant negative effects including deforestation, increased impervious surface, and increased road density, all of which could degrade the watershed beyond a reparable threshold. Instream physical habitat conditions and the aquatic community generally show rapid decreases in quality and in the abundance and diversity of fish and invertebrate species as basin impervious surface increases to around 10 percent.

Watersheds with Headwaters to Bay Connectivity

The priority in our Stream and Freshwater Wetlands Initiative is the protection of associated priority watersheds at a landscape scale. Designation as a priority watershed is based on a synthesis of regional and local assessments and acknowledged importance for recovery of threatened and/or multiple salmonid species by lead entities (West Sound Partners for Ecosystem Recovery, Alliance for a Healthy South Sound and Hood Canal Coordinating Council). They also meet the following conditions and criteria for adoption as high priorities. Priority watersheds:

- Contain low percentages of disturbed landscape and proportionately higher percentage of riparian and upland forest cover
- Provide critical contiguous and connected habitat for birds, invertebrates, amphibians, ESA-listed anadromous fish and multiple salmonid species
- Have evidence of high terrestrial and hydrologic connectivity between upland areas, lowland wetlands and main-stem riparian corridors
- Drain into intact estuarine habitat within coastal inlets and embayments
- Contain intact headwater forested areas that, through aquifer recharge and surface tributaries, contribute to recharge and/or discharge of water in the overall system.

Riparian Corridors and Reaches

Natural riparian zones are some of the most diverse, dynamic, and complex biophysical habitats on the terrestrial portion of the planet. Although riparian areas constitute less than two percent of all terrestrial systems, they are functionally one of the most significant. Riparian corridors exert a disproportionate influence on hydrologic activities, fisheries, water quality, and wildlife by offering feeding, reproduction, and refuge for invertebrates, fish, waterfowl, amphibians, birds, and mammals. In addition, they have a significant influence on instream habitat. Depending on the type, extent, and density of riparian vegetation, riparian areas may provide shade, improve water quality, store and ameliorate water discharge and contribute large woody debris to increase channel complexity (WDFW, *Aquatic Habitat Guidelines*). Intact streams supply nutrients and detritus that sustain the biological

productivity of downstream estuaries and coastal inlets. An important benefit of riparian corridors is that they are also often critical wildlife corridors, especially in developed areas.

Freshwater Wetlands
Wetlands are landscapes defined by water inundation for a period of time long enough to produce hydric soils and water adapted plants. Wetlands are protected as a valuable resource because of the many ecosystem services they provide. Freshwater wetlands provide flood control, groundwater recharge, and mitigate pollution and sediment load during storm events. Protecting, buffering and restoring wetlands is a key strategy to mitigate impacts of climate change. Targeting wetland areas critical for aquifer recharge and improving streamflow is an important regional strategy.

Methods Proposed
Emphasis within this initiative will be to protect areas with healthy, high-quality habitat. In addition, emphasis is placed on preventing further degradation by strategically securing properties that connect fragmented habitat, including instream, off-channel, and estuarine habitat made inaccessible by culverts, levees, or other man-made obstructions (Roni et al 2002). The primary objective of this initiative is to proactively identify target projects that can provide impetus and momentum to engage stakeholders on large scale efforts. In partnership, GPC can develop, fund and implement riparian corridor projects as a local match and leverage funds to participate on larger scale projects.

The following watersheds are noted as high priority watersheds in multiple local and regional assessments and provide a framework for continuing, and future, projects:

- *North Kitsap* – Miller Bay basin-Grovers and Cowling creeks; Port Gamble Bay basin - Martha John and Gamble Creeks
- *East Kitsap* - Chico, Blackjack and Curley creeks
- *South Sound* – Coulter, Rocky, Minter-Huge creeks. Filucy Bay, Burley Creek.
- *Hood Canal* - Big Beef, Little Anderson, and Stavis creeks; Dewatto, Skokomish, Tahuya and Union rivers (Further research is needed to identify and plan activities in the watersheds flowing into Hood Canal that GPC has not had a historic presence in.)

Forests

Forests provide habitat value for wildlife, sustain landscape connectivity, enhance climate resilience, sequester carbon, and improve watershed function. High priority will be given to large tracts of intact forest, forests with rare species or communities, old growth and second growth mature forest and forest with a diversity of site conditions and other factors that lead it to be more resilient to climate change.

Focus Areas

- Wildlife Corridors
- Community Forests

Needs Assessment

Due to its small geographic range while being in close proximity to major employment centers, Kitsap County is the third most densely populated county in Washington State (Kitsap County Department of Community Development 2006). From 1970 to 2019, the population increased from 100,000 to 270,000 people and is expected to grow to 330,000 people by 2025 (Office of Financial Management). Of all the Water Resource Inventory Areas, Kitsap County and a portion of West Pierce County, are at the greatest risk of conversion from forest to non-forest use with a projected 21-40% conversion between now and 2050. Of Kitsap County's private forestland acres, 59% have positive conversion risk value, placing it 3rd among all Western Washington counties behind Island and San Juan counties (NW Environmental Forum, RTI 2009).

The Great Peninsula is distinguished by large continuous blocks of forest lands, but these tracts are in jeopardy due to high population growth and its associated land conversion via development. The threat is greatest at the boundaries of urban growth areas such as Gig Harbor, Port Orchard, Bremerton, Silverdale, Poulsbo, and Kingston. In order to offset these pressures, we need to act quickly to identify and conserve priority working forest lands that meet our priority criterion of retaining large upland forest corridors and conserving forest lands at high risk of conversion. Conservation of Kitsap County working forests will protect the multiple benefits of habitat, recreation and employment.

These forests provide a myriad of ecological services, including clean air and water, conservation of biodiversity, and carbon sequestration. Carefully-managed forests may also provide valuable forest products and sustain livelihoods that are important to the local economy. Additionally, forests provide opportunities for outdoor recreation and scenic landscapes that help sustain local communities.

Wildlife Corridors

In our climate resiliency work, much of the Kitsap Peninsula was identified as biologically diverse due to the existence of large contiguous blocks of forest. In addition, our climate resiliency mapping identified many areas throughout our working region that contain narrow and threatened wildlife corridors. Protecting and restoring landscape connectivity of the Great Peninsula's forests is a primary conservation strategy for preserving basin-wide scale ecological processes and biodiversity. Wildlife corridors are important to maintain linkage between areas of large, undisturbed habitat.

Wildlife corridors support a wide diversity of anadromous fish, birds, amphibians and mammal species during all their life stages. These include:

- Anadromous fish – that migrate and inhabit riparian corridors, associated floodplains and side channel habitat to meet life cycle needs,
- Birds – foraging, roosting, refuge and nesting habitat for resident and neotropical migrant passerines and raptors,
- Amphibians – riparian migratory corridors, floodplain and emergent wetland open water areas for breeding and rearing habitats, and
- Mammals – diverse habitats and a large enough wildlife corridor to support foraging and breeding for small and large mammals.

Community Forests

Given the conversion risk of Great Peninsula forests, the community forest model is ideally suited to advance forest conservation at the urban edge. An ideal Community Forest will demonstrate sustainable timber, recreation, cultural resources, high value habitat, carbon sequestration, and improved water quality. High priority will be given to large tracts of intact forest with a diversity of patch and edge conditions, old growth and second growth mature forest, forests with diverse canopy type and structure and forests with rare species.

In the identification and development of a community forest the following criteria will be considered as they have a direct bearing on the long-term sustainability of the forest. These criteria are:

- Community access - secure and reliable access to multiple forest benefits that reflect community priorities, including outdoor education
- Community engagement in forest management and stewardship
- Revenue generation- to advance and sustain forest management objectives to improve timber productivity, ecological integrity and habitat value of the forest
- Ecosystem services – the forest provides a full suite of ecosystem services including carbon storage, water recharge and discharge, erosion control and canopy cover
- Wildlife Corridor – connectivity of the forest with other public and private forests, as well as overall habitat diversity

- Recreational Use - regional/local non-motorized trails for compatible passive recreation (e.g., biking, walking, hiking, and wildlife viewing)
- Cultural and heritage use – tribal cultural use of forests including medicinal, artisanal, craft and building use

Methods Proposed

The primary goal of GPC's Forest Initiative is to protect large continuous blocks of forest with habitat and community value. Priority will be placed on conservation of working forests at the greatest risk of conversion to residential development. In addition, GPC will identify, develop, and conserve a pilot community forest within our geographic range.

The long-term strategic focus of this Initiative is to:

- Conserve those working forest resource lands that are under the greatest threat of conversion to residential development
- Protect forest resource lands that have high site productivity and externalize economic benefit of ecosystem services such as creating a local market for carbon credits
- Protect critical water resources on forest land including aquifer recharge, groundwater supply and contribution to stream base flow to support salmon recovery
- Target, develop and conserve a community forest that engages a community in provision of a full suite of benefits including wildlife habitat, ecosystem services, recreation, employment, and timber products
- Create community forests as pilot/feasibility projects with a replicable approach to expand and be used throughout our geography.

Conservation Initiative II: Working Lands

Working lands include farms, ranches, and forests, and are essential to the character of rural communities, economies, and the sustainability of rural life. Working lands are important from a conservation perspective because they support early-successional and open habitats of far greater conservation value than residential development. Working farms and ranches produce food, protect habitat, and preserve the scenic character of rural communities. Sustainably managed working forests preserve landscape connectivity and watershed function, create jobs, and can also provide recreational opportunities for the general public.

Needs Assessment

Agriculture and working forests have long been an integral part of the local economy of west Puget Sound, and have also been part of the natural and cultural heritage of this region. They also contain a significant amount of the open space that provides

wildlife habitat, scenic views, and watershed protection. These public benefits enhance the quality of life for all residents, but are increasingly threatened. Working lands are in a state of transition as increasing population growth and development pressure drives up land values, and makes it more profitable for farmers and forest owners to sell their land to developers rather than keep working it.

Farms

The farms that remain have largely adjusted their agricultural activity from low-value, land-intensive crops like corn, to high-value, labor-intensive crops like specialty vegetables or berries. This shift from traditional commodity agriculture to more intensive urban-edge farming has resulted in the average farm size being just 23 acres in Kitsap County and 90% of all farms being less than 50 acres (Chase Economics, 2011). In 2007, Kitsap County had only 25 farms larger than 100 acres, and only 26 farms that had over $50,000 in annual sales from agricultural (Chase Economics, 2011). In 2017, ten years later, Kitsap County had 26 farms larger than 50 acres, and only 22 farms that had over $50,000 in annual sales from agricultural products (USDA 2017 Census of Agriculture). Nearly 50% of the value of agricultural products marketed in Kitsap County came from nurseries, greenhouses, and floriculture (Chase Economics, 2011).

Working Forestland

There are two general types of remaining working forestlands in our region. The first is industrial timberland owned by large forestry companies. These are large tracts in the thousands of acres that provide a wealth of early successional habitat, wildlife corridors and a multitude of ecosystem services. They are also important for the regional economy and their continued use as working forestland supports the entire forestry sector, from forestry jobs, to contractors, to local mills. Easements that prohibit development are the primary strategy on industrial timberlands as they eliminate conversion pressure and support the long-term viability of the forestry sector in the region.

The second type of working forestland is small private timberland tracts up to several hundred acres. Owned by individuals, families and private LLCs, these forestlands tend to be less actively managed and are more likely to be subdivided and converted to single family residences on the minimum acreage that zoning allows—typically 5, 10 or 20 acre lots. While funding is difficult to obtain, strategic conservation of important properties is warranted, particularly to secure wildlife corridors and riparian areas. Conservation easements are an important tool, especially to support small forest landowners who wish to keep their land in forestry.

Methods Proposed

- Work with farmland owners to reduce the market value of farmland by extinguishing development potential through conservation easements. Farmland conservation easements can often a substantial cash payment or tax benefit which can help existing farmers be able to afford to continue to farm their land, can help farmers pass their land to the next generation, and can also enable aspiring farmers to be able to afford to purchase land.
- Focus on protecting large farms that provide multiple public benefits, such as protecting stream corridors, scenic open space, and food production.
- Apply the community forest model to access funds and purchase tracts of forestland.
- Purchase conservation easements that prohibit development on working forestlands.

Conservation Initiative III: Community Greenspaces and Trails

Community Greenspaces are natural areas within neighborhoods. Greenspaces are critical to community and individual well-being as they afford opportunities for social interaction, collaboration, outdoor classrooms, and outdoor activity to enhance overall quality of life. Trail systems also are important in linking neighborhoods to natural areas, while also providing physical exercise and connection to nature.

Particular attention needs to be paid to underserved and urban communities without historic access to natural areas. As part of GPC's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion, we must broaden our focus to include expanding and improving outdoor education and recreation opportunities, particularly for low-income students, minority students, and students without family traditions of spending time in nature. This requires new partnerships and a new perspective in ensuring our work benefits all communities in our working area.

Focus Areas

- Community Open Spaces and Greenbelts
- Community Gathering Places
- Water Trails

Needs Assessment

The critical challenge to creating vibrant community greenspaces is to conserve landscapes that capture the imagination of individual people and compel engagement and participation at a community scale. The potential for capturing a community's interest hinges on *site potential* – the ability of a particular place to furnish a diverse and robust spectrum of activities, and *site appeal*- a place's appeal to people at both a personal and social scale within a cultural and familial frame of reference.

A carefully chosen and programmed greenspace will foster a person's and a community's sense of belonging and will express and give purpose and quality to one's life. These places are rich in specific narratives and histories that form the basis of cultural identity and attachment (Basso 1997, Davenport and Anderson 2005).

Community Open Spaces and Greenbelts

Undeveloped open space provides a regional linkage between local communities as well as a connection between public parks, schools, transportation infrastructure and cohesive natural areas. This type of open space promotes well-being in the provision of bicycle and hiking trails, access to habitat for wildlife viewing, and shoreline and stream access. The criteria for identifying priority open space corridors are:

- Large undeveloped private properties adjacent to existing protected areas, parks and preserves, cultural and community lands
- Contiguous property with a high degree of connectivity with anchor/nexus projects within a watershed or drift cell landscape setting
- Conservation of critical lands subject to high risk of conversion that would otherwise fragment and disturb an existing corridor irreparably

- Large scale sites that, if developed, would have high negative impact on downstream, downslope or connected landscapes
- Greenbelts and view sheds that are highly visible from frequented places and transportation corridors
- Properties that are close to and easily accessible by underserved communities.

Community Gathering Places

Great Peninsula Conservancy wants to expand the greenspace program to include outdoor areas that provide high social benefit and are intensively used. Project types might include:

- Community gardens
- Pocket parks
- Small neighborhood open spaces/shoreline access created from abandoned rights of way
- Accessible greens that accommodate community events, gatherings and performances

Within a fabric of a more urban community setting these types of projects might be located within a 10-minute walk from each other and meet a minimum size threshold based on use provision, context and available scale (Alexander 1977). These types of gathering places could also be part of a fabric of interconnected parks system and open space. The greatest opportunity for this type of community greenspace is within neighborhoods of rapidly urbanizing areas where there are proportionately higher rates of development in relation to available greenspace. Communities such as Gig Harbor and East Bremerton would meet these criteria.

Water Trails

In 2012, the United States Department of the Interior created the National Water Trails System to launch "a new network of exemplary water trails that will increase access to water-based recreation, encourage community stewardship of local waterways and promote tourism that fuels local economies across America". This National Water Trails System is administered by the National Parks Service. The Kitsap Peninsula Water Trail—a network of 79 locations where paddlers can launch vessels, take breaks or camp—was designated a national water trail by the National Park service in June, 2014 and is a segment of the Cascadia Marine Trail. Pierce County is currently considering a similar system of water trails. This boosts both counties' profile as a national recreational destination for kayakers, canoers and paddle boarders.

Methods Proposed

The purpose of our Community Greenspace Initiative is to identify and conserve properties that will foster a greater appreciation of the land, nature and natural resources through recreation, education, and community programming. A high priority Community Greenspace will possess the following qualities:

- Provide public access and open space for trails and passive recreation,
- Enhance a sense of belonging and foster a sense of community and local pride,
- Protect a distinctive 'sense of place' within the community by: conserving rural landscapes, quality of life, views and scenic places while fostering an appreciation of natural, historical and cultural heritage
- Enable personal and social connection referentially through heritage, knowledge, stories and storytelling
- Offer multiple avenues for active engagement through passive recreation, exercise, stewardship, place-based education and outdoor classrooms

- Will evolve to become a highly valued place within the community for people of all generations- a "third place" to get together, exercise and interact

A high priority Community Greenspace will be located in proximity to:

- Areas that lack people-centered, publicly accessible outdoor areas within ½ mile of underserved populations
- Existing public facilities within a half mile (school, youth facility, church/religious group, town or municipal buildings, park and ride/transit center)
- Water or scenic views, and/or opportunities for wildlife viewing
- Landscapes with high ecological integrity and habitat value
- A robust setting for outdoor classroom(s) to engage the community in hands on place-based experiential learning.

GPC would work closely with cities, counties and Parks and Recreation districts to identify priorities and draw upon existing assessments for guidance. Examples of guiding assessments include "Looking for Linkage" (Kitsap County 2014), "Pierce County Public Recreation and Open Space Plan 2015," "City of Gig Harbor 2010" and the "PenMet PROS Plan 2006." We will seek out partnership opportunities that provide reciprocal benefit to support GPC capacity and have existing context or project potential for high levels of community engagement and contribution. Such partnerships are crucial, because GPC does not have the staff nor infrastructure to own and manage parks with active recreation. The role of GPC may often be to assist public districts in parkland acquisition by bringing technical experience, capacity and fundraising to a project.

Outreach, conservation and stewardship are the three key components supporting the Community Greenspace Initiative. Outreach will be crucial to identifying community greenspaces where there is a grassroots effort toward conservation. Stewardship will be key for ongoing community engagement. Integration of all three tenets is essential to the success of this initiative. In the long term, additional funding and staffing capacity will be required to fully realize this initiative strategically and programmatically. GPC will work closely with project partners to identify and acquire undeveloped upland and near shore properties that expand the network of greenbelts, gathering places and water trails with priority given to connecting trail systems in Kitsap, Pierce and Mason counties. We will work in close partnership with the Federal and State agencies, the Washington Water Trails Association and County Parks departments.

COMMITMENT TO WORK WITH TRIBAL NATIONS

We recognize that our working area covers the traditional homelands and homewaters of the people of the Port Gamble S'Klallam, Suquamish, Squaxin Island, Skokomish, Puyallup and Nisqually tribes. A vital component of our efforts is to nurture strong and continuing relationships with these tribal nations. GPC has long enjoyed partnerships and collaboration with the tribal nations in our region across the three pillars of our work – conservation, stewardship, and community engagement. GPC will continue to create and nurture deep relationships and search out new opportunities for partnership with the tribal nations who have stewarded the land and water of our region for time immemorial. Every conservation project we engage in takes place on traditional lands of Native American peoples, and we aim to honor both their knowledge of and relationship with the landscapes on which we work. GPC staff will work with local tribal nations to identify properties of high priority to the tribes, collaborate on acquisitions to protect properties with both cultural and conservation values, and communicate with tribal staff early on in the process of projects to identify any significance or concerns of a project to the tribes.

CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIPS

In keeping with the Conservation Goal and Strategies, GPC's Conservation Program will focus staff time and financial resources on the primary Conservation Initiatives. As a small organization, GPC relies heavily on strong community ties and active volunteers to achieve our objectives. GPC strives to create durable partnerships in the community to plan, implement, fund, complete, and steward all conservation projects. GPC will build partnerships premise on local community engagement in conservation. Our current and future partnerships include the following:

Hood Canal Coordinating Council – In-Lieu Fee Mitigation program
Hood Canal Environmental Council-Partner on identifying and funding projects along Hood Canal
Washington Association of Land Trusts – Shoreline Conservation Collaborative, Community Forest
Trust for Public Land – Partnership to advance Navy REPI, WALT Shoreline Conservation Collaborative and other projects/initiatives
Hansville Greenway Association – Greenway West**,** Hawks Pond / Knutson conservation easement,
Salmon Recovery Lead Entities – West Sound Partners for Ecosystem Recovery (WSPR), Hood Canal Coordinating Council (HCCC), and Key and Gig Harbor Peninsula + Islands (KGI)
Salmon Enhancement Groups – South, Mid-sound and Hood Canal
Conservation Districts – Kitsap, Mason and Pierce counties
Audubon Society – Kitsap, Tahoma and Seattle
Friends of Miller Bay – Grovers Creek and Miller Bay
Clear Creek Task Force
Pierce County – Storm Water Management / Shellfish Protection Districts (Filucy Bay, Rocky Bay, **Minter Creek,** Vaughn Bay and Burley Lagoon)
Kitsap County – Completion of Kitsap Forest and Bay Project. Work Closely with Parks Department and assist in development of Conservation Futures program
Navy – REPI program with Navy partners (DNR, TPL, and Jefferson Land Trust)
DNR – Stavis Natural Resource Conservation Area,
Private timber companies – Rayonier, Manke Timber, Alpine Evergreen, Overton and Associates, and Ueland Tree Farm, Green Diamond
Commercial Shellfish companies – Taylor Shellfish Farms, others
Shellfish Restoration – Puget Sound Restoration Fund
Puget Sound Partnership gives Local Integrating Organizations (LIOs) funding to implement Near Term Actions and develop local habitat plans. GPC's service area is covered by three LIOs:

- Alliance for a Healthy South Sound
- Hood Canal Coordinating Council
- West Sound Partners for Ecosystem Recovery

CRITERIA FOR PROJECT SELECTION

GPC's Conservation Committee evaluates potential conservation projects based on land protection criteria and analysis of public benefits as required by Land Trust Alliance Standards and Practices (Standard 8) and adapted for the Great Peninsula context. These Conservation Criteria include clear guidance for selecting land and easement projects that are consistent with GPC's mission and focus on the evaluation of the following:

- **Conservation values of a potential project, including quality of native habitat, presence of unique plants and use by different wildlife species**
  Land and water that supports native species, maintains natural ecological processes, sustains air and water resources and contributes to the health and quality of life for the communities of the Great Peninsula is of highest conservation value
- **Threats to the conservation values**
  Threats most often include activities on or near the project site that lead to degradation of the overall environment as well as loss of conservation values unique to the site.
- **Future ownership of the project**
  GPC chooses the appropriate protection tool to conserve properties, whether this means the land will retain in private ownership or be owned by GPC. GPC may also support worthy acquisition projects that will ultimately be owned by other agencies or organizations.
- **Clearly defined role for GPC**
  GPC is valued and trusted as a conservation leader in communities across the Great Peninsula, and is also valued as a conservation partner by many local agencies and conservation groups. With a 35-year history of conservation accomplishments in the region, GPC has access to landowners, foresters, environmental professionals, and trusted members of the community. In addition to taking a leadership role in projects, when appropriate, GPC will support the efforts and collaborate with other entities on projects that meet GPC's vision for the region.
- **Selection of appropriate conservation tool**
  Land trusts generally conserve lands and waters through acquisition of fee simple property or conservation easements that protect significant features of the property. These land interests may be purchased or received as a donation. GPC can also play a role as a third party to facilitate conservation transactions between other parties. In some circumstances, GPC may advocate for public policies that support land conservation.
- **Geographical location and proximity to established conservation and protected areas**
  Natural areas that connect wildlife refuges, parks, greenspaces, and working lands and provide sufficient space for native plants and animals to move across the landscape over time are the highest priority. Natural corridors, such as greenways and buffer areas along streams that serve as biological conduits and provide opportunities for trails for people to interact with nature are also a high priority.
- **Community support for the project and GPC involvement, with possibility of partnerships**
  Projects that would both enhance the environment and fulfill a community need are rated high in the selection process. Community organizations may specifically ask for GPC's assistance, or GPC may seek partnerships to fulfill a gap in managing or funding projects.
- **Organizational capacity to acquire and steward the property**
  In deciding to pursue or decline a particular project, the Conservation Committee shall weigh other important factors such as community dynamics and project partnerships, GPC's capacity to move the project forward given current staffing and other obligations, and the full range of stewardship risks associated with a property (e.g., realistic and attainable goals for projects with large-scale restoration components).
- **Availability of funding and a realistic project budget**
  GPC shall develop a plan to fund the acquisition and management expenses associated with conservation of any particular project. Assessment of the project budget is critical to determining the feasibility of GPC pursuing a project.

The list above generally represents the most important criteria used for selecting, ranking, and approving/rejecting projects. Ultimately, every project GPC takes part in must be economically feasible, account for direct and indirect costs, and provide funding for future stewardship.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT - COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND INPUT

The objectives of the public input process are to:

- Engage a broader range of individuals in the conservation planning process by gathering their insights about conservation issues on the Great Peninsula
- Connect with current and potential project partners to identify future conservation projects
- Document and summarize input for purposes of updating the draft document, particularly the six-year work plan
- Increase public awareness of GPC's conservation plans and activities

Steps involved in obtaining public input on the Great Peninsula Conservancy Conservation Plan, are summarized as follows:

1. **Web-based Survey** completed by 40 individuals in summer of 2020
2. **Member e-newsletter release** – Staff sent an e-newsletter to GPC members and friends with a link to the Draft Conservation Plan. The e-News explained how to access electronic versions of the plan and associated survey while encouraging comments. Staff sent a follow-up reminder to the same distribution list.
3. **GPC's website** – Staff posted a link to the survey and draft plan at www.greatpeninsula.org for people to access and read the plan provide additional input.
4. **Outreach to project partners** – GPC's Conservation Director sent emails to current and potential project partners explaining the purpose of the Plan, requesting input on the document, and inviting them to complete the survey. Via this targeted contact, the survey and Conservation Plan were distributed to stakeholders including tribal representatives, key volunteers, former board members, politicians, public agencies, conservation groups and other land trusts.
5. **Press Release** – Staff created a press release (Appendix 2) and delivered it to the Kitsap Sun, Belfair Herald, Peninsula Gateway, and Tacoma News Tribune

Feedback from project partners, personal correspondence, and the online survey has been incorporated into the final Conservation Plan. Additionally, the planning process has led to discussion with current and potential partners about conservation priorities which may lead to collaboration on future projects.

Major conclusions from survey and public outreach

Through the web-based survey, GPC asked community members about what they consider to be the highest conservation priorities in our region. The survey had forty respondents, the majority of whom were Kitsap County and Pierce County residents, and whose responses identified three highest priorities:

1. **Protecting intact habitats/natural areas for fish and wildlife**: Ranked as the highest priority by community members, protection of intact wildlife habitat remained consistent as a vital priority. Of those who took the survey, 92% responded that it was "Very Important" that GPC work to preserve intact habitat, and 85% responded that among issues related to quality of life that GPC should be working to improve, protecting additional nature preserves to protect wildlife habitat was "Very Important."

2. **Water resources protection**: Of respondents, 87% ranked water resource protection as "Very important." Further, when asked about the most important ecological services for protection, the top two priorities were (1) water quality and water supply protection and (2) aquifer recharge, and when asked to rate the importance of habitat and landscape types to target for protection, the top two priorities were (1) streams and freshwater wetlands and (2) estuaries and natural saltwater shorelines.
3. **Preserving working forests**. The third highest priority to respondents, with 87% rating it "Very Important," is the preservation of working forests. When asked in more detail about under what circumstances GPC should be involved in preserving working lands, 26% of community members responded that working lands should be protected any way possible, and 74% responded that working lands should be protected only when there are important community benefits, such as preserving scenic open space and walking trails, watershed protection, or providing increased protection for salmon streams. This interest in preserving forests for multiple benefits is consistent with the values of community forests.

The priorities addressed by community members through the survey are reflected in the Conservation Initiatives identified in this Conservation Plan – specifically in the Habitat Initiative, which highlights the importance of water resources in habitat, and in the Working Forests Initiative.

A "Working" Document

The Conservation Plan lays out a six-year work plan for GPC's Conservation Program. This work plan is subject to revision as we compile additional survey results, comments from the community and conduct additional outreach to encourage and facilitate community feedback on local priorities. In general, we will refine this plan every two years based on progress in achieving the Plan objectives, changing conditions both internal and external to GPC, unexpected opportunities, and feedback from project partners. While the work plan may change, it is expected that other aspects of the plan (GPC Mission, Conservation Goal and Strategies, Initiatives, and Criteria for Project Selection) will remain in effect throughout the six-year horizon of the Plan.

ADOPTION

GPC Board of Directors formally adopted the Great Peninsula Conservancy Conservation Plan at the November 17, 2021 meeting.

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