

PRESS RELEASE
September 28, 2004

MASON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
411 NORTH 5TH ST
SHELTON, WA 98584
(360) 427-9670 EXT. 419

TO: KMAS, KRXY, SHELTON-MASON COUNTY JOURNAL, THE OLYMPIAN, SHELTON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, NORTH MASON CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, CITY OF SHELTON, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL, THE SUN

RE: County to Consider Acquisition of Large Nature Park on Oakland Bay

Mason County Commissioners are inviting public comment on the proposed purchase of approximately 80 acres on the east shore of Oakland Bay for a future county nature park.

The unique property has nearly 2,000 feet of pristine shoreline on the Oakland Bay. In addition, nearly 1,500 feet of Malaney Creek meanders across the site, mixing with the tidal marine waters at an intact estuary. The entire marine shoreline is forested with large cedar, madrona and maple trees. Much of the rest of the property is covered with fir, cedar and maple trees.

Located on the property is a turn-of-the-century summer home built by Mr. O'Neill, owner of the then largest mercantile store in Mason County. The family also was a pioneer in the oyster planting industry, propagating the eastern oyster in Oakland Bay.

The County is partnering with Capitol Land Trust, a nonprofit conservation organization, to acquire the property. The owner desires to see the acreage preserved for the public and not developed. Conservation covenants will be used to protect the outstanding salmon habitat along the marine shoreline and creek.

To enable public ownership, the owner is offering to sell the property at less than its anticipated market value. The proposed cost of the land is 1.2 million dollars. Approximately six hundred thousand dollars (50%) of the acquisition cost is proposed to be paid from a Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB) grant. SRFB funds are intended to preserve and restore nearshore and creek salmon habitat. The balance will come from County REET funds. REET funds can only be used to acquire and improve parks and are separate from the County's operating budget. This joint effort between Mason County and Capitol Land Trust provides a rare opportunity to obtain a property of regional significance, at a greatly-reduced cost for local residents.

In the future, the County intends to construct nature trails, interpretative signs and an interior parking area, creating a public resource similar to the Woodard Bay Conservation Area north of Olympia. The property also has immense value for the unique educational opportunities it offers. In recent years, kids from nearby Pioneer School have been studying and restoring nearby salmon habitat and many local educators are excited about the possibility of visiting this site.

Commission Herb Baze believes “In a few short years, opportunities to preserve such unique lands under public ownership will disappear forever. This property will be an asset for generations to come”.

“Preserving this site and the salmon habitat will enable my grandchildren to experience what Mason County looked like in years past. It is a legacy from our generation to the next”, stated Commissioner Wes Johnson.

“In the future, this beautiful nature park will be a significant living educational tool for our children,” said Commissioner Jayni Kamin, “and it will serve as a major asset for tourism in our county.”

To view pictures of the property go to the county website at www.co.mason.wa.us and click on Press Releases, 2004.

Written comments can be mailed to the Mason County Commissioners, 411 North 5th Street, Shelton, WA 98584 until October 13, 2004. A public hearing is scheduled on Tuesday, October 19, 2004 at 9:30 a.m. in the Mason County Commission Chambers, 411 North 5th Street, Building 1, Shelton, to receive public comment.

BOARD OF MASON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Wesley Johnson
Chairperson

Herb Baze
Commissioner

Jayni Kamin
Commissioner