

## **Nisqually Reach Aquatic Reserve Technical Advisory Committee**

June 25, 2019 Review of Boundary Expansion Proposal; Final July 18, 2019

### **Recommendation for the Commissioner of Public Lands**

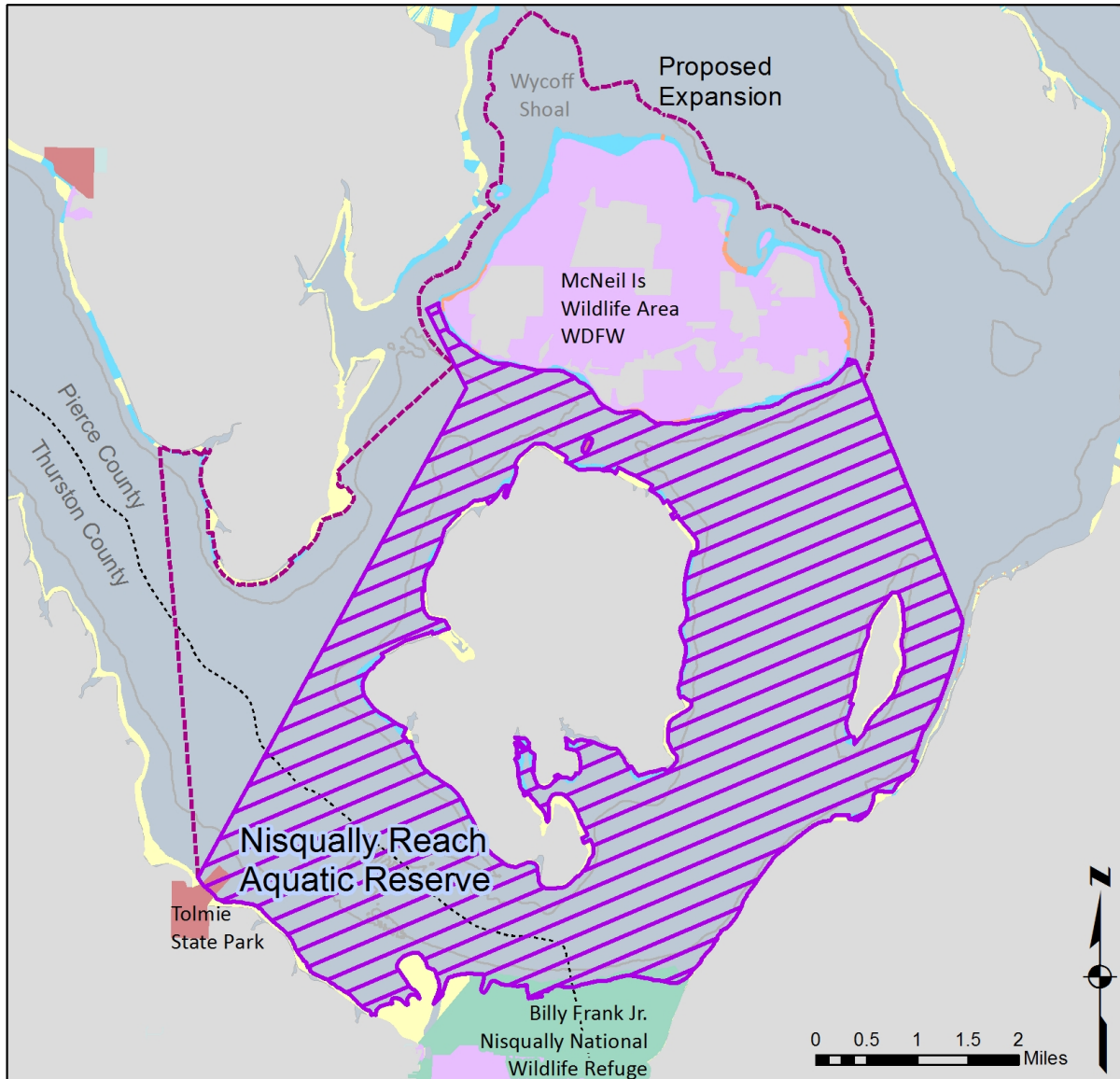
The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) unanimously recommends expanding the Nisqually Reach Aquatic Reserve to include the state-owned aquatic lands surrounding McNeil Island and the southern tip of Key Peninsula. The TAC finds the expansion area to represent an unparalleled opportunity to add and strengthen the protection of keystone functionally undisturbed habitat areas in south Puget Sound. Conservation of this area leverages existing conserved lands immediately adjacent to the proposed expansion site to maximize ecological benefits and ecosystem connectivity. The existing anthropogenic impacts are considered to be minimal and can be readily addressed through restoration efforts that have already been initiated on McNeil Island. Further, the relatively undisturbed nature of the site provides an exceptional baseline for conducting research across the entire region and expands the education and outreach opportunities associated with the existing Reserve.



Important environmental attributes noted by the TAC include:

- Several pocket estuaries, feeder bluffs, distinctive natural shoreforms - sand spits and barrier spits, salt marsh, macroalgae and eelgrass beds including
  - large shoal with eelgrass bed,
  - and one of a few areas in South Sound where the presence of bull kelp has been documented in recent years.
- Functional, intact shoreline processes - extensive unarmored shoreline allows unimpeded sediment supply to beaches, undiminished forested shore areas provide shade, organic detritus, and terrestrial insect prey supply for migrating juvenile salmonids
- Abundant upper intertidal forage fish spawning beach habitat, and abundant forage fish (herring, anchovy) prey resources
- Inclusion of the pre-spawner herring holding area for the genetically unique Squaxin herring stock
- In conjunction with the existing NRAR, incorporates all identified deep-water rockfish habitat in south Puget Sound
- Largest seal pupping area in south Sound adjacent to McNeil Island
- McNeil Island shorelines support important rearing habitat for juvenile salmonids
- Incorporates acreage of Audubon Important Bird Area: foraging and refuge habitat, including alcids, grebes, loons and ducks, in the Reserve.
- Connection to the restored Nisqually Delta and ecosystem
- Connection to several upland conservation areas on Key Peninsula; opportunity to connect this community to ongoing monitoring and education
- Enhanced functionality for buffering and increasing resiliency of the entire South Puget Sound ecosystem




# Nisqually Reach Aquatic Reserve






DRAFT Expansion Proposal



-  Nisqually Reach Aquatic Reserve (~14,700 acres)
-  Draft Proposed Expansion Boundary (~5,400 acres)

**Assumed Tideland Ownership**

-  State-owned aquatic lands (DNR-managed)
-  Other Public Ownership (Non-DNR)
-  Private Ownership

-  County boundaries
-  100' bathymetric contour
-  WA State Parks
-  WA Dept. of Fish and Wildlife
-  US Fish & Wildlife Service

Every attempt was made to use the most accurate and current geographic data available. However, due to multiple sources, scales, and the currency of the data used to develop this map, the Washington Department of Natural Resources cannot accept responsibility for errors and omissions in the data. Furthermore, this data is

## **Management recommendations**

- The TAC is supportive of modifying the boundary of the NRAR to surround McNeil Island and the southern end of Key Peninsula.
- Encourage conservation partners (GPC, NLT, USFWS, WDFW, Pierce County) to continue their conservation efforts on adjacent uplands.
- Encourage land managers of McNeil Island (WDFW, DNR, DOC) to continue clean-up, connectivity, and restoration of nearshore landforms and processes as soon as possible.
- Identify research and restoration targets in the expansion area
- Comprehensive assessment of resources on the expansion area (nearshore submerged aquatic vegetation inventory, etc.)
- Limit adverse human impact, especially around McNeil Island, in order to preserve the surrounding tidelands in a natural functioning condition

## **Members of the Technical Advisory Committee:**

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