



Fidalgo Bay Aquatic Reserve

PROTECTING THE UNIQUE HABITATS OF STATE-OWNED AQUATIC LANDS

The Fidalgo Bay Aquatic Reserve, established in 2000, is one of seven reserves in Washington State dedicated to protecting unique habitats and native species.

The reserve contains diverse physical habitats that include tidal flats, salt marshes, sand and gravel beaches, and expansive native eelgrass beds. These habitats are recognized as essential to the reproductive, foraging, and rearing success of many fish and bird species.

This estuary supports spawning and rearing habitat for Pacific herring, surf smelt and sand lance. Fidalgo Bay is also a home and feeding area for migratory birds, Dungeness crab, and animals threatened with extinction and protected under the federal Endangered Species Act, such as the bald eagles, peregrine falcons, and Puget Sound Chinook salmon.



Fidalgo Bay, looking north. Photo: Samish Indian Nation.

About the Fidalgo Bay Aquatic Reserve

- Located in northern Puget Sound in northwestern Skagit County.
- Encompasses approximately 780 acres—or 1.2 square mile—of state-owned tidelands and bedlands.
- Reserve boundaries extend from the southern end of Fidalgo Bay north to a line drawn east and west from Crandall Spit.
- Includes nearly 4 miles of coastline.
- 532 acres of tidelands were gifted from the Skagit Land Trust and made possible by the Coastal Protection Fund and the Texaco-Anacortes Restoration Fund.

Goals of the Fidalgo Bay Aquatic Reserve

- Conserve, at a minimum, and enhance, where there are opportunities, native habitats and migratory birds.
- Protect and restore the functions and natural processes of nearshore ecosystems in support of the natural resources of the reserve.
- Promote stewardship of riparian and aquatic habitats and species by providing education and outreach opportunities and promoting coordination with resource managers from other local, state, federal, and tribal agencies and non-governmental organizations.

What is an Aquatic Reserve?

Aquatic Reserves are state-owned aquatic lands set aside to protect important native ecosystems.

DNR's **Aquatic Reserves Program** ensures environmental protection of these lands through preservation, restoration and enhancement activities, and adaptive management practices.

The program encourages public use and access, provides for greater public input into conservation management, and works with stakeholders and citizens, state, local, federal, and tribal governments to help develop and implement site-specific management plans.

Fidalgo Bay Science and Monitoring

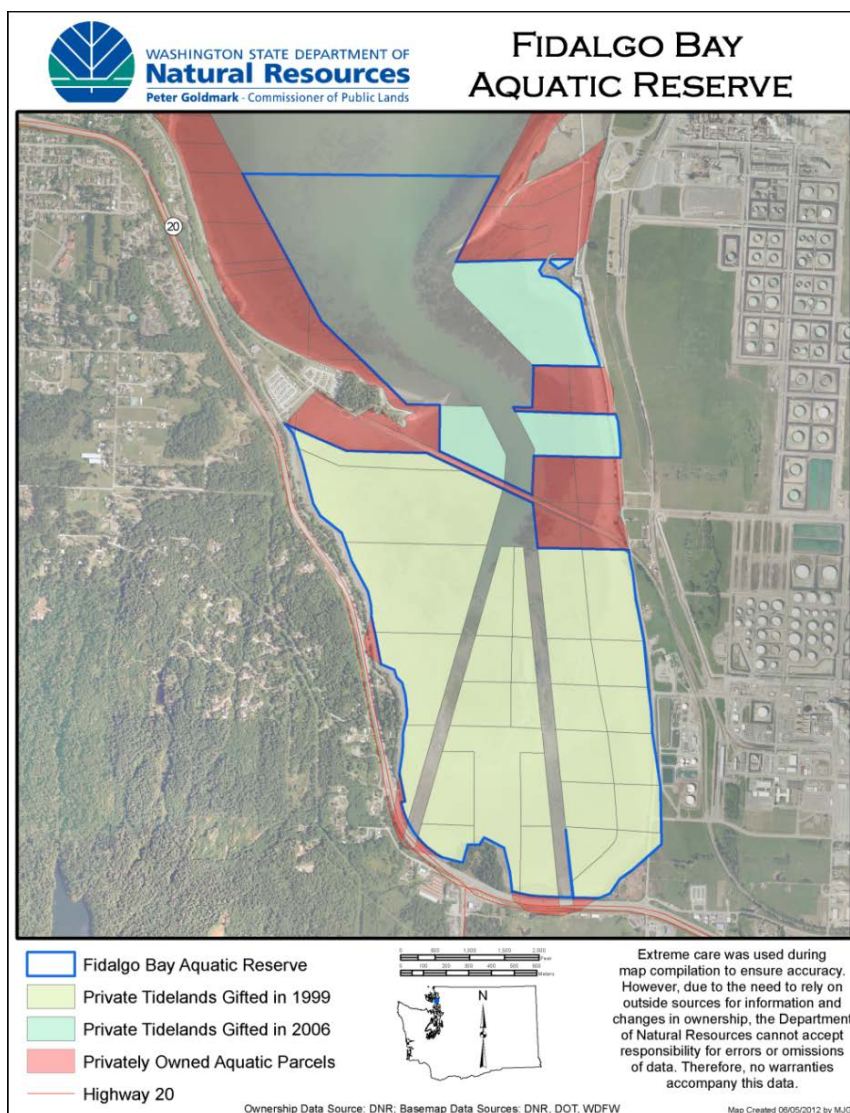
DNR has worked with various partners to explore the physical, chemical, and biological conditions in Fidalgo Bay, through such activities as:

- A **tidal marsh assessment** with the University of Washington in 2005.
- **Water quality monitoring** with the Samish Indian Nation and Washington Department of Ecology in 2007.
- **Surf smelt spawning surveys** associated with beach restoration with Skagit River Systems Cooperative and Salish Sea Biological in 2011 and 2012.

In addition, DNR's Submerged Vegetation Monitoring Program has been **mapping eelgrass** in and around Fidalgo Bay since 2008 and will continue through 2013.

In 2011, DNR partnered with the **Skagit River System Cooperative** to restore spawning habitat on west March Point beaches using Texaco Restoration and Scott Paper Mill damage settlement funds.

Other studies in Fidalgo Bay include **waterfowl surveys** conducted in 2002 and **forage fish surveys** in the 1990s by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. Ecology completed a **sediment quality report** in 1999.



Special conservation designation

The *Fidalgo Bay Aquatic Reserve Management Plan* was developed through an extensive outreach and planning process and adopted in 2008. Reserves are established for 90 years, starting when the site-specific management plan is adopted. This means the Fidalgo Bay Aquatic Reserve will be in place until 2098.

In 1999, the Skagit Land Trust acquired the area south of the railroad trestle and, in 2006, some of the area north of the trestle. Ownership of these areas was transferred to the state to be managed by DNR with a conservation easement held by Skagit Land Trust. The conditions of the easement require that the site be managed solely for preservation of habitat for fish and wildlife uses, as well as limited public use.

Learn more

- For more information about the Fidalgo Bay Aquatic Reserve, go to: tinyurl.com/fidalgo-bay-reserve.
- For more information about DNR's Aquatic Reserves Program, go to: tinyurl.com/DNR-aquatic-reserves.