



Aquatic Reserves Program

DNR PROTECTS MARINE AND FRESHWATER STATE-OWNED AQUATIC LANDS

The Washington state Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is steward of more than 2.6 million acres of aquatic lands — beneath the Puget Sound and the Straits, navigable lakes and rivers and many beaches. As steward, DNR establishes aquatic reserves throughout the state — where appropriate — to protect important native ecosystems.

The focus of the Aquatic Reserves Program is to conserve high-quality native ecosystems in both freshwater and marine environments. This effort promotes the preservation, restoration and enhancement of state-owned aquatic lands that are of special educational, scientific or environmental interest.



Smith and Minor Aquatic reserve in Island County
Photo: DNR

Partnerships for Conservation

The Aquatic Reserves Program aims for a collaborative approach toward the management of a site. DNR works with federal, state, local, tribal and non-governmental organizations, as well as private citizens to identify important resources and features for conservation at each reserve. Communities aid in the development and implementation of site-specific plans through serving on committees and by providing formal comments.

Benefits of Aquatic Reserves

- Protection of important habitats and species
- Resources for restoration, monitoring, debris clean-up
- Site interpretive signs, and help managing volunteer groups and stewards
- Puget SoundCorps team available to work on reserves
- Elevated public awareness about special qualities of a site
- Coordination with partners, neighbors, local governments and work with tribal governments

Establishing New Reserves

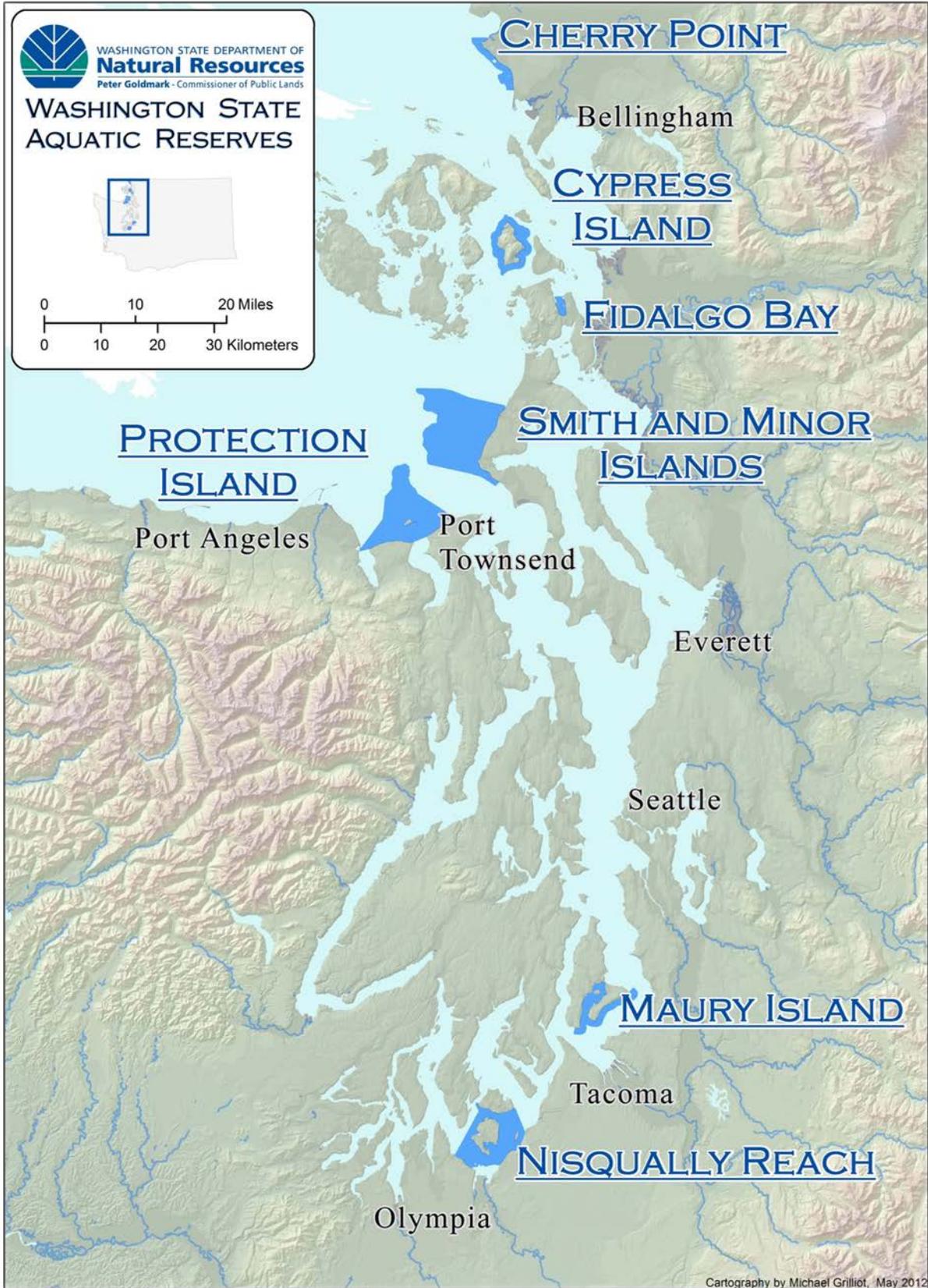
Public and private organizations and individuals may propose a site for aquatic reserve designation. Interested parties submit letters of intent to DNR's aquatic reserves program. If the site meets the aquatic reserve criteria, DNR and the site proponent will develop an official proposal and host open houses for public input and review. A management plan is developed with citizen and stakeholder input to establish goals and objectives for protection of the site.

Uses within Aquatic Reserves

Managing aquatic reserves does not affect private or other adjacent land ownership. Due to longstanding use authorizations and/or leases, it may be necessary for DNR to continue authorizing existing mixed uses within an aquatic reserve. DNR will emphasize mitigating impacts by enhancing the health of the ecosystem components within a reserve, and will work to ensure negative impacts of existing uses are reduced in the long term. Reserve status does not affect access or regulation of fishing.

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