

*The Olympian*

## **Department of Natural Resources buys South Sound land along Kennedy Creek for conservation**

**BY SARA GENTZLER**

July 20, 2019

Kennedy Creek, a stream that touches Thurston and Mason counties and stretches from Capitol State Forest and Summit Lake to Totten Inlet, is home to average fall runs of about 30,000 chum salmon, making it “one of the most productive chum salmon spawning streams in Washington,” according to the state Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

In 2004, Olympian reporter John Dodge wrote that the creek “cascades and tumbles through a gorge of black basalt vertically uplifted eons ago, then settles back into a stream that flows about three miles to the Kennedy Creek estuary at the foot of [Totten] Inlet.”

Its estuary has been a Natural Area Preserve — 203 acres managed by DNR that includes salt marsh, tide flats, uplands, riparian forests, and the tidal reaches of the Kennedy and Schneider Creeks, according to DNR’s website — since 1999.

Now, DNR has purchased 656 acres along the creek with the aim to conserve more of the area’s ecological value and make parts available to the public for low-impact recreation and education.

Michele Zukerberg, DNR’s natural areas manager for this part of the Puget Sound region, told The Olympian the acquisition will allow DNR to look at the area in a more comprehensive way.

“I think having a more cohesive corridor that’s... in the state’s conservation program makes sense for that area,” Zukerberg told The Olympian. “We have to preserve the estuary, and then put further protections up the majority of the creek itself. I think everybody agrees that’s valuable for that important creek and estuary, which protects shore birds and the whole salmon cycle.”

The department designated the freshwater area all along Kennedy Creek a Natural Resources Conservation Area in July 2016. The area connects to the estuary and the existing preserve. That designation, Zukerberg said, opened up the possibility for DNR to purchase land from willing sellers within the boundary.

The willing seller of this particular 656-acre area within the boundary was Green Diamond Resource Company, which owns and manages working forest lands. The state bought the land for \$4.1 million, according to DNR's press release announcing the purchase. Funding came from the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program and the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program, according to the release.

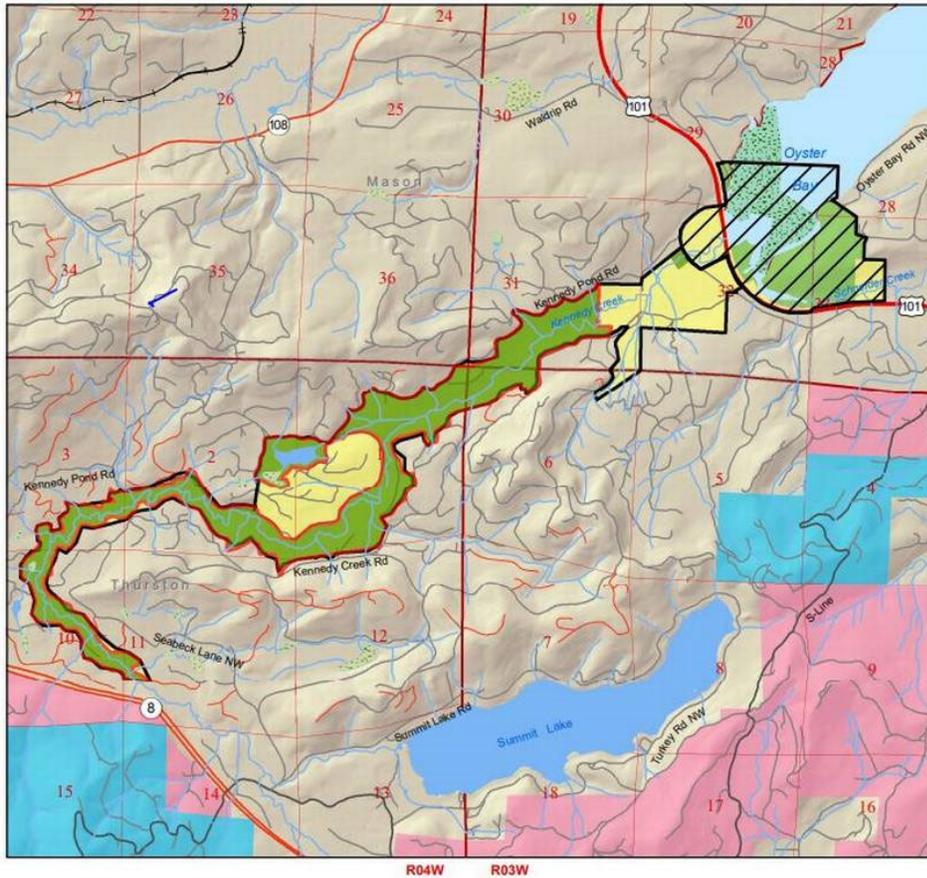
Patti Case, Public Affairs Manager for Green Diamond, said a series in The Olympian written by John Dodge is what made the company aware of the public's interest in the land, years ago.

“That working forest includes those riparian stream buffers, so we've conserved that fish habitat, that wildlife corridor for many, many years,” Case told The Olympian. “And we're excited for DNR to do the same things, but be able to manage that passive recreation in a more proactive fashion.”

Zukerberg said other areas within the boundary remain under other ownership: Green Diamond, as well as Taylor Shellfish and other private landowners.

The Kennedy Creek Salmon Trail, which is within the boundary, is owned by Taylor Shellfish and operated by the South Puget Sound Salmon Enhancement Group. The trail is open to the public on weekends and to school groups on weekdays each year when chum salmon are spawning — this year, Executive Director Lance Winecka told The Olympian that'll be November 2 through December 1.

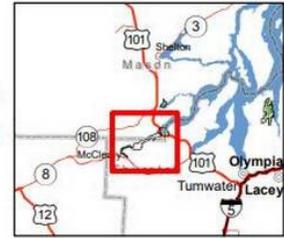
## Kennedy Creek Natural Area



Puget Trough Ecoregion

### MAP LEGEND

- Green Diamond Resource Company - DNR Purchase Property
- NAP Boundary
- NRCA Boundary
- Natural Area Preserve
- Natural Resource Conservation Area
- Lands Eligible for Inclusion
- Granted Trust Lands
- Forest Board Trust Lands
- State Tidelands withdrawn from Leasing for Conservation Purposes



T19N  
T18N



0 1,000 2,000 4,000 6,000 8,400 Feet

Disclaimer: Extreme care was used during the compilation of this map to ensure accuracy. However, due to changes in ownership and the need to rely on outside information, the Department of Natural Resources cannot accept responsibility for errors or omissions, and, therefore, there are no warranties which accompany this material.

Conservation Lands - Melrose - June 2019



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**NATURAL RESOURCES**  
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STATE OF WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

The area DNR purchased is traditional territory of the Sah-Heh-Wa-Mish/T'Peeksin people of Totten Inlet, predecessors of Squaxin Island Tribe, according to DNR's press release.

Ray Peters, Intergovernmental Affairs/Council Liaison for Squaxin Island Tribe, said the tribe's goal "is always to improve fish habitat, water quality, and preserve cultural and treaty rights."

The stream, he said, affects the aquatics of Totten Inlet "as well as preserving our right to gather, hunt, and fish."

Peters said the tribe will "continue to look at ways to be effective co-managers."

“We enjoy a good government-to-government relationship with the Department of Natural Resources and specifically appreciate the leadership of the commissioner, and look forward to our continued work around the Kennedy Creek,” Peters said.

In the months to come, Zukerberg said the department will be connecting with the tribe, the other entities that manage land in the watershed, and members of the public to begin the planning process for stewardship of the land. She said the goal is to have that part of the planning complete by June 2020.

Immediate actions may include signage and weed control, Zukerberg said, but the timing for bigger changes is unclear due to decision-making and funding questions.

Similar Natural Resources Conservation Areas, like Woodard Bay, include land that’s open to low-impact public use and educational opportunities for school groups alongside land that isn’t open to the public. Zukerberg said the area along Kennedy Creek presents unique physical and management constraints, with its steep slopes, a need to protect the creek for salmon, and a need to balance what’s practical with reserved tribal treaty rights.

“We’ll be in that process of exploring with the public and our partners in the watershed and the tribe: What are appropriate areas [for public use] and how to protect sensitive areas and retain the ecological value of the site,” Zukerberg said.

**MEDIA CONTACT:**

Sara Gentzler  
360-754-5459

Sara Gentzler joined The Olympian in June 2019. She primarily covers Thurston County government and its courts, as well as breaking news. She has a bachelor’s degree in journalism from Creighton University.