



Aquatic Reserves Program

DNR PROTECTS PUGET SOUND BY CONSERVING AQUATIC LANDS

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

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



Cherry Point Aquatic Reserve located in Whatcom County.
Photo: DNR

Partnerships for Conservation

A benefit of the Aquatic Reserves Program is the partnerships we establish to aid in development and implementation of site-specific aquatic reserve management plans. DNR works with federal, state, local, tribal and non-governmental organizations and private citizens in an effort to identify important resources for conservation at each reserve. An additional benefit of Aquatic Reserve designations is that management plans can be designed to compliment other protective measures within or adjacent to the site.

Types of Aquatic Reserves

- Environmental—reserves that promote conservation and restoration.
- Scientific—reserves that provide unique aquatic habitats for research.
- Educational—reserves that promote opportunities for field-based environmental education.

Establishing new Reserves

Public and private organizations and individuals may propose a site for aquatic reserve designation. Interested parties are required to submit a letter of intent to DNR's aquatic reserves program.

If the site meets the aquatic reserve program criteria, DNR and the site proponent will develop an official proposal, host open houses for public input and review. The last step will be to work on a draft management plan of goals and objectives for the site to ensure proper protection.

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 with a reserve, and will work to ensure negative impacts of existing uses are reduced in the long term.

AQUATIC RESERVES PROGRAM