Along this trail, catch a glimpse of the past as well as the future. You'll travel back 15,000 years to the time when ice covered the land, learn how a missed chicken dinner 150 years ago earned a slough its name, and discover the connection between today's forests and tomorrow's salmon.
Exceptional Places

The Department of Natural Resources accepts with pride the charge to safeguard and share with you this special component of the Grays Harbor Heritage.

Outstanding ecosystems including salt marshes, mounded prairies, oak woodlands and ponderosa pine forests, are being protected statewide in natural areas as the “last of the best.”

“We are spared to see the wilderness bud and blossom as the rose.”
—Mrs. David (Mary) Byles, Grays Harbor pioneer, the Montesano Vidette, 1898

For more information on the Chehalis River Surge Plain, contact the Department of Natural Resources Central Region office in Chehalis at (360) 748-2383 TTY (360) 740-6841 or 1-800-527-2387.
When much of the earth’s water was locked up in vast ice sheets and glaciers, sea level was lowered several hundred feet and the Pacific shoreline was some 30 to 40 miles west of today’s coast.

About 15,000 years ago, ice flowed south from Canada, between the Olympic Mountains and Cascade Range. Rivers that normally flowed into Puget Sound were blocked. Lakes formed and drained southwest into the Chehalis River. In time, glacial meltwater also flowed into the Chehalis, temporarily producing a river 20 times larger than you see it today.

Geologists refer to rivers like the Chehalis as “underfit,” because the river is much narrower than its flood plain. They would know that the river had once been much wider just by looking at the above photograph.

What will the river look like in another 15,000 years?
With a shake and a rattle

The Union Pacific and Milwaukee Road locomotives first thundered along this route on August 15, 1910. Seventy-five years later, the trains were gone. The Milwaukee Road had gone bankrupt and after numerous slides and washouts, the Union Pacific rerouted its trains to the more stable tracks on the north side of the river. Today, this trail guides you along the original railroad route, through an area of the preserve recovering its natural splendor.
**What do we mean by a surge plain?**

When tidewater comes up the river, the salt-heavy ocean water sinks, pushing and lifting the freshwater to the top. The higher freshwater floods the land and spreads out, running backward into sloughs where it remains until the tide changes course.

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**What makes this surge plain special?**

This is one of the few places left where the mixing of saltwater and freshwater occurs naturally. The coming together of saltwater and freshwater in a natural way creates a flood control zone for man, a unique plant community and habitat for fish and other wildlife.

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**Why isn’t the slough empty at low tide?**

Normally, only the upper slough entirely empties at low tide. Many sloughs, including this one, receive water run-off from the surrounding hills and thus are streams as well as sloughs.
Long shadows, cool waters, young salmon

Letting trees grow tall and thick, drop their leaves, age gracefully, and finally fall into the slough helps young salmon (fry) survive. The long shadows cool the water, and the fallen trees create quiet pools where fish can rest and feed.

SALMON WEIR
This sketch of Indians fishing in the Chehalis River with a weir was made by a member of the Charles Wilkes expedition in 1842. A weir is a fence usually made of wood that is placed in a river that directs the fish into a gap fitted with a basket that serves as a pen for easy capture.
Would a hat made of spruce roots keep you dry?

The answer is the Sitka spruce, *Picea sitchensis*. You knew that “tree” was the answer to most of the questions, but did you know that parts of violins, guitars, and pianos are made from spruce? It has “perfect pitch.”

Spruce is the most abundant evergreen tree in the surge plain and is often found sprouting on old logs. Its wide, flaring base allows it to thrive in such wet places. Trees with broken tops provide good roost and nest sites for eagles, ospreys, heron, and other birds.

Sitka is the world’s largest spruce. It can grow up to 210 feet and live to be 800 years old.

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➤ What is not married, but has a ring?
➤ What has a trunk but never gets around?
➤ What makes music but has no sound?

Finely split Sitka spruce roots were used by Lower Chehalis Indians for making woven, water-tight baskets and rain hats. Designs were added by weaving in bleached or dyed grasses.
In 1859, the young Methodist-Episcopal minister, J.S. Douglas got around the newly formed Grays Harbor circuit by rowboat, shoes, saddle, and canoe. One fall afternoon, Reverend Douglas set out to row from the Byles home (Cosmopolis) to the Scammon family claim (South Montesano). Thoughts of a fine chicken dinner filled his mind until he found himself at the “end of the river.” He had missed the main channel and entered a slough. He was late for his dinner and his bed, but the story so amused the people of Grays Harbor that they named the waterway before you “Preachers Slough.”