

*With over 400 miles of Puget Sound shoreline on the Great Peninsula, streams and estuaries are a vital part of the region's ecology. A water-endowed region, hundreds of estuaries and streams dot the landscape, fed by an extensive network of springs and wetlands. While often individually small in size, collectively, these creeks and coves have a big impact on the health of Puget Sound and Hood Canal. Streams and estuaries provide a multitude of important ecosystem benefits to both humans and wildlife.*

*Creeks, tidelands, and lagoons are recognized as critical habitat for many fish, birds, and marine life. Riparian areas and wetlands also provide flood protection and help maintain water quality by filtering pollutants and excessive nutrients from runoff before it reaches Puget Sound. Conservation of shoreline can also provide points of public access to enjoy the region's beauty, and for passive recreation, such as kayaking and bird watching.*



Great Peninsula Conservancy's **Streams & Estuaries Initiative** puts these special habitats amongst our highest conservation priorities. This focus is borne out by recent research showing declining ecosystem health in Puget Sound and Hood Canal. Even with GPC's extensive track record of conserving streams and estuaries, there is much more to be done. These fragile lands are highly valued both for their role as wildlife habitat and for their importance in helping to protect and restore the overall health and beauty of waters that surround the Great Peninsula.

**In the coming years, the Streams & Estuaries Initiative will:**

- Protect critical streams, estuaries and shorelines that provide important ecological functions and community benefits.
- Provide state-wide efforts to restore Puget Sound to health by 2020.
- Inspire long term protection of aquatic lands through outreach to communities and other conservation groups in local watershed stewardship.

Specific strategies for achieving the Initiative's goals include:

**Develop partnerships with government agencies, tribes, community groups, and other conservation organizations to protect a diverse mix of streams and estuaries with high ecological and public benefits.**

As a small organization, GPC relies heavily on strong community ties and active volunteers to achieve our objectives. These deep community roots serve us well when we need to tap outside expertise. With nearly 30 years of conservation accomplishments in the region, we have access to landowners, environmental professionals, and trusted members of the community. Nurturing long-standing relationships while collaborating with new groups will increase the pace and quality of land conservation.

**Work with communities in conservation and restoration at a watershed level.**

GPC will build partnerships on the premise of local community engagement in conservation.

**Leverage state, federal, and private funding dedicated to wetland, coastal, bird, and salmon restoration to protect critical fish and wildlife habitat associated with streams and estuaries.**

Puget Sound lowland streams, estuaries and shorelines are critical to the health of the Sound, and the wildlife and humans that depend on it. The Great Peninsula's unique freshwater habitats and nearshore ecosystems are especially important to all of Puget Sound. Biologists have found salmon and steelhead populations that originated from all over Puget Sound utilizing the shorelines of West Sound. The West Sound's peninsulas and islands are a vital component of a living and breathing Puget Sound ecosystem.

**Conservation and Recovery of Puget Sound and Hood Canal.**

Restoring Puget Sound to health by 2020 remains the primary goal of the Puget Sound Partnership. GPC will play a key local role in protecting critical habitats that impact Hood Canal and Puget Sound health.

The Great Peninsula's streams and estuaries may be small in size, but they are high in importance for the impact they have on Puget Sound's fisheries and on the overall health of the Sound. Streams provide vital spawning and rearing habitat for salmon and critical habitat for many other species of wildlife. Estuaries, where fresh and salt water mix at the convergence of streams and Puget Sound, have especially high species diversity. Their nutrient-rich waters and tidal fluctuations help fish, shellfish, birds, and other wildlife flourish. Estuaries provide an important transition zone for young salmon as they prepare for their migration out to sea. These same waters harbor large numbers of waterfowl, shorebirds, and wading birds, especially during fall and spring migration and over winter.

Conservation of stream and estuaries is one of GPC's highest priorities. Please join us in protecting these vibrant ecosystems.