



# ISLAND COUNTY PLAN FOR PARKS AND HABITAT CONSERVATION

Existing Resources Summary Memo

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Prepared by:



MIG, Inc.  
815 SW 2nd Avenue, Suite 200  
Portland, Oregon 97204  
503.297.1005  
[www.migcom.com](http://www.migcom.com)



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# EXISTING RESOURCES SUMMARY

## 1. Introduction

In Spring 2010, Island County and the Whidbey Camano Land Trust (WCLT) formed a collaborative partnership to develop a Parks and Habitat Conservation Plan for the County. The planning process creates a unique opportunity to systematically address



declining funding resources that have made it difficult for the County to provide and care for parks and natural resources on Whidbey and Camano Islands.

The plan will focus on the role that Island County plays in managing and protecting parks and habitat areas, since many other jurisdictions also provide natural and recreational resources throughout the County. The plan will provide strategies and direction to make the best use of existing resources and work with other providers as potential partners to ensure that parks, facilities, and habitat area remain vital assets for the community.

### *Purpose of this Memo*

The purpose of the Existing Resources Summary Memo is to identify and document existing County landholdings associated with parks and habitat conservation, within the context of the county's many jurisdictions. More specifically, this document:

- Presents the park and habitat inventory by department;
- Identifies park resources provided by other jurisdictions;
- Proposes a classification system for County-managed lands;
- Presents a habitat classification system;
- Summarizes the County's facility inventory;
- Maps the location of all parks and habitat areas by ownership and by classification; and

- Discusses key findings and issues identified in the inventory and classification process.

## 2. Parks/Habitat Areas by Jurisdiction



There are multiple jurisdictions and agencies responsible for managing parks and habitat areas within Island County. For this reason, planning for parks and habitat conservation requires consideration of jurisdictional boundaries and responsibilities. While the ownership matrix is complex, it also creates a number of opportunities for partnerships and collaborative efforts. Maps 1-4 in Appendix A illustrate the location of parks and habitat areas for Island County and other jurisdictions.

### *County Inventory by Department*

Island County owns more than 3,372 acres of park and habitat land, managed by Public Works or the Parks Department. In addition, there 293 acres of open space properties held as potential park and habitat areas, but currently not assigned to a particular department for management. Table 1 summarizes County parks and habitat land. A full inventory is presented by site in Appendix A.

Table 1: Island County Park/Habitat Land by Department

Department	# of Sites	Acres	% of Total
Parks Department	46	1,807.1	53.6%
Public Works	9	934.0	27.7%
Unassigned	44	293.1	8.7%
Special Maintenance Areas	3	6.3	0.2%
School Trust Lands (Leased)	7	331.5	9.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>3,372.0</b>	<b>100%</b>
Other County Sites (non-parks)*	5	44.8	

Source: Island County, 2010

\*Several non-park sites are noted separately in this inventory. The Parks Department is responsible for outdoor maintenance and landscaping at four sites. The Public Works Department coordinates with the Fairgrounds, which is under the jurisdiction of the General Services Department.

- *The Parks Department* is responsible for over 1,800 acres of parks and habitat lands in Island County, such as Rhododendron Park and the Four Springs Lake Preserve.
- *The Public Works Department* includes the Parks Department, along with the Paths and Trails, Roads, Solid Waste, and Storm and Surface Water divisions. It manages more than 930 acres, including Deer Lagoon, North and South Greenbank Farm, the Kettles Trail System and a few beach access sites.
- *Island County* also owns or holds 44 parcels that are not assigned to a particular department or division for management as parks/habitat. With 293 acres, these unassigned sites include wetlands, beach access, and a number of tax-title lands.<sup>1</sup>
- Through inter-local agreements, *the Parks Department* maintains three sites that are owned by other jurisdictions. These include the Clover Valley Off-Leash Area, Oak Harbor Dog Park, and a section of Freeland Park owned by the Port of South Whidbey.
- *Island County* leases over 330 acres of School Trust Lands from the Washington State Department of Natural Resources, including Elger Bay Preserve, High Point Trust land, Strawberry Point Trust Land, Swantown Trust Land, Skyline West Trust Land, Smuggler's Cove Trust Land, and Wahl Road Trust Land.

In addition to these parks and habitat areas, several non-park and habitat areas are noted separately in Table 1. The Parks Department is responsible the maintenance of four non-recreational sites, such as the Courthouse Campus and the North Whidbey Family Resource Center. The Public Works Department coordinates with the County Fairgrounds, which is under the jurisdiction of the General Services Department.

### *Parks and Habitat Areas Managed by Other Jurisdictions*

As noted in the Planning Context Summary Memo, multiple agencies within the County provide parks and recreation facilities as well as protect natural resources and open space. Table 2 summarizes the known inventory of other agencies, totaling approximately 11,361 additional acres. This inventory is not comprehensive, and does not include all parks or habitat areas in Island County. However, it helps paint a picture of the major landholders involved in providing/protecting park and habitat areas.

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<sup>1</sup> The County has 18 tax title lands, which are held for repayment of back taxes.

As shown in the table, the State of Washington and Non-Profits, such as the Whidbey Camano Land Trust and Nature Conservancy, each provide more acreage for parks/habitat areas than Island County. However, these three jurisdictions are the largest land holders in the park and habitat system.

Table 2: Parks and Habitat Areas Owned by Other Jurisdictions

Jurisdiction	# of Sites	Acres*
<b>Towns and Cities</b>		
Coupeville	10	29.8
Langley	32	76.0
Oak Harbor	32	159.2
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>265.0</b>
<b>School Districts</b>		
Coupeville School District	6	50.2
Oak Harbor School District	8	160.4
South Whidbey School District	7	190.7
Stanwood Camano School District	2	39.9
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>441.2</b>
<b>Other Jurisdictions</b>		
Federal Government*	13	491.8
State Government	21	4,726.8
Port Authorities	8	181.0
Parks & Recreation Districts	4	308.6
Non-Profits	11	4,677.0
Others/Private	4	269.4
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>10,654.7</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>11,360.9</b>

Note: This inventory is not comprehensive, and does not include all parks or habitat areas in Island County.

\*This category does not include acreage for open space and pocket parks owned by the US Navy. No GIS acreage data were available.

### *The Whidbey Camano Land Trust*

Several conservation organizations are actively working throughout the county to secure land for conservation. The Whidbey Camano Land Trust (Land Trust) plays an important role in the conservation and protection of land in Island County, and has partnered with the County in the preparation of this Parks and Habitat Conservation Plan. The Land Trust acquires land and conservation easements through donations and purchase in order to protect coastal areas, wetlands and streams, wildlife habitat, working farmlands, scenic vistas, natural areas and trails. The Land Trust then provides ongoing stewardship

on the fee lands it owns and conducts monitoring on lands that are subject to conservation easements held by the Land Trust. In some cases, the Land Trust transfers ownership of acquired parcels to other jurisdictions, such as Island County, with a conservation easement in place to restrict future use. In addition, the Land Trust often assists with stewardship on lands that it helped to protect but that are owned by other entities, such as Saratoga Woods.

**Conservation Easements**

In addition to the land owned by the County and other jurisdictions, additional habitat areas are protection through conservation easements. Conservation easements may be purchased and held on privately-owned lands to protect lands from development and preserve specific conservation values, such as farmland or forest.

As shown in Table 3, the Land Trust and the National Park Service are major holders of conservation easements in Island County.

Table 3: Conservation Easements in Island County

Jurisdiction	# of Easements	Acres
National Park Service	3	1,857.7
Land Trust	28	1,064.1
Island County	9	191.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>3,113.1</b>

**3. County Parks & Habitat Conservation Areas**



Island County owns and manages an extensive network of land for recreation and habitat conservation. Land has been added to the parks and habitat system for different reasons, including providing shoreline access, protecting viewpoints, providing recreation opportunities, conserving natural resources, and supporting other specialized County services.

The County's land holdings are part of a larger natural resource and habitat network that extends across Whidbey and Camano Islands and is

supported by many different jurisdictions. These different networks are contiguous in some places, such as where the Etheyl Taylor Property is located adjacent to Deception Pass State Park or where the Greenbank Farm area includes adjacent properties owned by the County, Port of Coupeville, and the U.S. Government. The networks of all open space properties from multiple jurisdictions form a county-wide parks and habitat system.

### *Classifying the System*

To better understand the role that County sites play within the larger park and habitat system, Island County's park and habitat areas were classified based on existing physical characteristics, level of development, and related maintenance needs. The mix of natural areas and developed park land categories is summarized in Table 4.

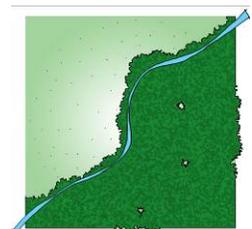
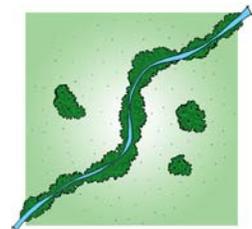
Table 4: Island County Park/Habitat Land by Classification

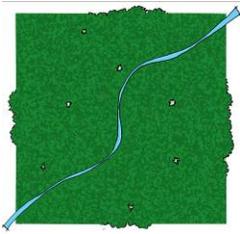
Classification	# of Sites	Acres	% of Total
Developed Parks	23	31.2	1%
Hybrid Parks	18	299.8	9%
Habitat Conservation Areas	26	2,829.7	84%
Subtotal	67	3,160.7	
Undesignated	42	211.3	6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>3,372.0</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Island County, 2010

As noted in Table 4, the County provides approximately:

- 30 acres of developed parkland.* Developed parks are primarily focused on the provision of recreation or other developed park uses, although some of these sites may include remnant natural areas, such as stands of native trees or waterfront. Freeland Park, Dave Mackie Park (also known as Maxwellton Beach), and the Maple Grove Boat Ramp are examples of developed parks. Developed park acreage accounts for only 1% of the entire system.
- 300 acres of hybrid parkland.* Hybrid parks have a dual focus of providing developed recreation areas—such as sports fields, boat ramps, or campgrounds—and protecting natural resources. Parks such as Rhododendron Park, Dan Porter Park, and West Beach Vista are examples of hybrid parks. Developed park acreage accounts for approximately 9% of the entire system.





- *2,800 acres of habitat conservation areas.* Habitat Conservation Areas are primarily focused on habitat conservation. These natural areas or preserves typically included limited facilities such as trails, picnic tables/shelters, kiosks, swimming beaches, and parking. In some cases, habitat conservation areas may have no facilities at all. Camano Ridge, Saratoga Woods, and Putney Woods are examples of habitat conservation areas. Eight-four percent (84%) of Island County's park and habitat system is comprised of habitat conservation areas.
- *200 acres of undesignated sites.* Undesignated sites are County-owned or County-held properties that have not been designated for a particular use. Most of these sites are less than an acre in size, and many are not named. Eighteen of these sites are tax-title properties, which the County is holding until back taxes are paid. Undesignated sites account for 6% of the current system.

### *County Habitat*

Island County owns and manages an extensive network of land for recreation and habitat conservation. Most County parks and habitat areas protect some amount of natural resources—although at very different sizes and scales. These County sites contribute to a larger habitat network that extends across Whidbey and Camano Islands and is supported by many different jurisdictions.

To better understand what types of habitat are protected by Island County, habitat types were identified using the United States Geological Survey's Northwest Regional Gap Analysis data.<sup>2</sup> Appendix D summarizes the methodology of this analysis and presents the habitat inventory for the County park and habitat system.

Twenty-five potential habitat types were identified in Island County. The habitat types were further grouped into seven categories:

- Water;
- Developed Parkland;
- Farmland;
- Shoreline/Tidal Habitat;
- Forest;
- Freshwater Habitat; and
- Prairie & Oak Woodlands.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://gap.uidaho.edu/index.php/gap-home/Northwest-GAP>

Table 4 illustrates the specific types of habitat identified in Island County for each broader category. With the exception of Developed Parkland, each sub-group reflects Gap Analysis typology. The definition for Developed Parkland was refined and is presented in Appendix D.

Table 4: Island County Habitats

Habitat Type	Habitat Sub-group
<b>Water</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open Water</li> </ul>
<b>Developed Parkland</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developed, Open Space</li> <li>• Developed, Low Intensity</li> <li>• Developed, High Intensity</li> </ul>
<b>Farmland</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pasture/Hay</li> <li>• Cultivated Cropland</li> </ul>
<b>Shoreline/Tidal Habitat</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unconsolidated Shore</li> <li>• Temperate Pacific Intertidal Mudflat</li> <li>• North Pacific Montane Massive Bedrock, Cliff and Talus</li> <li>• North Pacific Maritime Coastal Sand Dune and Strand</li> <li>• North Pacific Hypermaritime Shrub and Herbaceous Headland</li> <li>• North Pacific Maritime Eelgrass Bed</li> <li>• Temperate Pacific Tidal Salt and Brackish Marsh</li> </ul>
<b>Forest</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• North Pacific Maritime -Douglas-fir-Western Hemlock Forest</li> <li>• North Pacific Broadleaf Landslide Forest and Shrubland</li> <li>• North Pacific Lowland Riparian Forest and Shrubland</li> <li>• Harvested forest- regeneration</li> </ul>
<b>Freshwater Habitat</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• North Pacific Shrub Swamp</li> <li>• North Pacific Intertidal Freshwater Wetland</li> <li>• Temperate Pacific Freshwater Emergent Marsh</li> <li>• North Pacific Bog and Fen</li> <li>• North Pacific Hardwood-Conifer Swam</li> </ul>
<b>Prairie &amp; Oak Woodlands</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• North Pacific Herbaceous Bald and Bluff</li> <li>• Willamette Valley Upland Prairie and Savannah</li> <li>• North Pacific Oak Woodland</li> </ul>

Table 5, on the next page, presents the findings for the broader habit types by park classification. As noted in the table, most acreage within the park and habitat system (77%) is forested. Shoreline/ tidal habitat accounts for 12% of the County system. Developed parkland (occurring in parks of all types) accounts for just over 2% of the park and habitat system.

Table 5: Habitat Acreage by Park Classification (# of Acres)

Land Classification	Water	Developed Parkland	Farmland	Shoreline/ Tidal Habitat	Forest	Freshwater Habitat	Prairie & Oak Woodlands	Total Acreage*
Developed Parks	-	26.9	-	0.8	0.2	-	-	27.9
Hybrid Parks	-	27.8	-	2.7	262.9	0.0	-	293.4
Habitat Conservation Areas	152.7	10.2	36.3	280.3	2,190.4	60.8	-	2,730.7
Undesignated Sites	2.7	10.2	0.5	112.0	52.4	31.9	2.0	211.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>155.4</b>	<b>75.1</b>	<b>36.8</b>	<b>395.8</b>	<b>2,505.9</b>	<b>92.7</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>3,263.7</b>
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>4.8%</b>	<b>2.3%</b>	<b>1.1%</b>	<b>12.1%</b>	<b>76.9%</b>	<b>2.8%</b>	<b>0.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

\*The total acreage is based on a USGS Groundcover Analysis of vector areas, which differs from total park acreage. See Appendix D for more information.

Not unexpectedly, Developed Parks are primarily composed of developed land, but also include limited forest and shoreline habitat as well. Hybrid Parks are mostly forested, with some park development. Habitat conservation areas are characterized primarily as forest and secondarily as shoreline/tidal habitat. However, these natural areas also preserve some farmland and freshwater habitats. Approximately half of the acreage in Undesignated Sites includes shoreline/tidal habitat.

### *County Recreation Facilities*

Island County parks offer a wide range of outdoor recreation facilities. Appendices A and B contain a comprehensive inventory of County park and habitat areas, indicating the amenities<sup>3</sup> and recreation facilities at each site. Table 6 summarizes the numbers and types of outdoor recreation facilities in Island County.

As noted in Table 6, the County provides mostly passive recreation opportunities, with facilities such as lawns, dog parks, picnic areas, and community gardens. The most common type of recreation facility in

<sup>3</sup> Park amenities include elements such as park identification signage, parking, restrooms, etc., which support park function and use.

Island County is public beach access (at 25 sites), followed by picnic areas and tables (at 20 sites). Sixteen sites include unpaved (soft-surfaced, developed) trails, and 12 sites provide public boat access. In comparison, only three sites offer sport courts and sport fields.

Table 6: Island County Park and Recreation Facilities

<b>Outdoor Recreation Facilities</b>	<b># of Sites</b>
Beach (Swimming or Waterfront Access)	25
Boat Facilities <sup>1</sup>	12
Camping Areas	1
Dog Park	4
Garden	2
Picnic Area/Tables	20
Picnic Shelter	11
Playground	4
Sport Court (Basketball, Volleyball, Tennis)	3
Sport Fields: Open Turf Play Area	6
Sport Fields: Baseball/Softball	3
Sport Fields: Soccer, Football, Lacrosse	0
Trails (unpaved)	16

<sup>1</sup>This includes Boat Launch, Boat Ramp, and Boat Dock / Marina.

While this analysis notes trails as recreation facilities, trails can also support connectivity and non-motorized transportation. Appendix C presents an overview of trails within Island County. It includes details on the trail type (pedestrian, equestrian, bike, water, etc.), trail surfacing (hard or soft), and the associated amenities and facilities provided (trailheads, boardwalks, viewing blinds, picnic areas, etc.).

As noted in the appendix, most trails within parks support pedestrian, equestrian and mountain-bike use. Despite the habitat focus in the county, there are surprisingly few nature/interpretive trails. Few are hard-surfaced trails.

Current trail mileage data for Island is limited. In 2006, Island County's Non-Motorized Trails Plan counted approximately 140 miles of off-street trails and pathways.<sup>4</sup> Even then, the majority of trails were unpaved. The Plan defines the existing trail system into three classifications, noting mileage for the 2006 trail system:

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<sup>4</sup> Island County Non-Motorized Trails Plan (March, 2006).

- *High-Standard Trail:* A multiuse trail with paved or compacted surface, formal access and high quality amenities (5.5 miles).
- *Medium-Standard Trail:* A narrower, paved or non-paved surface, which may or may not have formal parking or a trailhead (11.7 miles).
- *Wildland Trail:* A primitive to well-maintained trail with native surfacing (57.2 miles).

## 4. Key Issues

Several key issues were identified in the mapping and inventorying of the County park and habitat network.

### *Land Management*

Island County owns, manages, and/or maintains a substantial amount of acreage dedicated toward recreation, conservation, or other open space uses. Just over half of this acreage (1,807 acres) is managed by the Parks Department, who also oversees several trust lands and special maintenance areas. But a significant portion (934 acres) is managed through Public Works, and 44 sites (293 acres) are not assigned to any department at this point. The Parks & Habitat Conservation Plan should address “who” within the County should manage these sites, as well as “why” the sites are being managed. Understanding the function and purpose of the sites will be critical in creating a sound land management strategy for Island County.

### *County Niche*

Island County has 3,732 acres of park and habitat land, of which developed parks account for approximately 1 percent. Many other organizations and agencies protect land or provide recreation opportunities within the County as well. This includes more than 15 providers, over 11,300 acres of parks and open space, and diverse facilities that support sports, recreation, environmental education, and cultural and habitat preservation, and associated uses.

Currently, there is no guiding vision about what role the County should play—in relationship to these other entities—in providing parks and habitat areas. Nor has there ever been guidance on the role that County-owned parks and habitat lands should play within the larger multi-jurisdictional open space system. This planning process should help determine the County's primary role (niche) in providing recreation and conservation services, and the ramifications for the lands the County owns or maintains.

### *Land Distribution*

Island County is one of multiple providers of parks and habitat conservation areas within the county. As a result, the distribution of County resources varies for different geographic areas on the islands, creating different types and levels of service. As Island County's niche is defined through this planning process, it will be determined if the County's role should vary geographically, with area-specific policies and strategies developed for Camano, North Whidbey, Central Whidbey, and South Whidbey Islands. This area-based strategy could be similar to the approach taken in other countywide planning efforts.

### *Park and Facility Condition*

The condition and maintenance of amenities and facilities varies across the county. In April 2010, a brief park tour of County parks and habitat areas included visits to 14 sites on Whidbey Island and 10 on Camano Island. Several system-wide issues were noted on the tour, such as aging facilities, deferred maintenance, boundary issues/conflicts with nearby neighbors, lack of consistent park signage/identity, insufficient parking and support amenities, invasives, forest management concerns, trash removal, water rights issues, facility programming/scheduling, and in some cases, site access. In general, many sites would benefit from site master plans that clarify their purpose/function before identifying needed improvements. Also, it should be noted that volunteers play an important role as stewards of various parks, which contributes to the varied level of service levels for site maintenance and development.

### *Trails*

Public involvement activities conducted as part of this planning effort revealed that trails and trail-related activities were priorities for County residents. If the County's niche, as defined through this planning process, includes providing countywide trails and pathways, the 2006 Island County Non-Motorized Trail Plan offers an excellent starting point for identifying needs and defining the scope of the County's involvement.

### *Habitat Areas*

Habitat conservation areas represent more than 84% of Island County's parks and habitat. While many people are working to preserve land within the county and have detailed habitat information for several key sites, the habitat inventory summarized in this memo represents the first comprehensive look at habitat within County's landholdings. The broad habitat categorization will provide a foundation for the assessment of current and future needs for additional habitat areas, such as shorelines, upland forests, or grasslands. It also allows the County to evaluate its role as a habitat protector/conservator as part of its overall service niche,

weighing or potentially balancing its role of providing recreation, conservation, and other services.

### *Resource/Asset Management*

The ownership/management of 3,372 acres of land and associated facilities raises one large overarching question: how will the County most effectively be able to take care of its existing resources and assets? In the larger planning context, this raises a variety of other questions that need clarification through the planning process. Should the County divest itself of some properties or specific responsibilities to be able to focus remaining resources on providing services within its niche? Will it (and if so, how will it) be able to help meet additional recreation or habitat conservation needs in the future? Will it maintain the role it has played in relationship to other partners, or will these roles change? Defining the expansive inventory creates a foundation from which these land and facility management questions can be addressed.

## **5. Next Steps**

This memo highlights the County's inventory, distribution of resources, and issues related to land management and the provision of parks and habitat areas in Island County. It provides a foundation for next steps in the project, including the exploration of potential County roles, using case studies to investigate different management and operation strategies. This memo also precedes the forthcoming needs assessment, which will evaluate park and habitat needs, as well as the suitability of the existing inventory of lands to support the County's desired or anticipated niche in providing park and habitat services. Together with a County vision for parks, recreation, trails, and habitat areas, the needs assessment will help define the level of service that the County should strive to maintain in the future.

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