Washington Department of Natural Resources established Maury Island Aquatic Reserve in 2000 as part of a state-wide system of seven marine aquatic reserves designated to protect important native ecosystems. Maury Island Aquatic Reserve includes 5,530 acres of state-owned aquatic lands surrounding Maury Island and Quartermaster Harbor.

A series of shoreline protected areas managed by King County, Vashon Maury Island Land Trust, and Vashon Parks District adjoin the reserve in many locations. These neighboring preserves provide recreational opportunities and important additional ecological protections that support the health of wildlife, habitats, and life processes in the aquatic reserve.

This map highlights recreational, ecological, and cultural/historical places of interest in this network of preserves. We hope this guide helps you explore and enjoy what this special area has to offer.

Within the reserve, eelgrass beds, kelp beds, sand and mudflats, estuaries (where fresh and saltwater mix), and natural shoreline stretches provide a supporting habitat structure that hosts many forms of life. The reserve fully contains one of Puget Sound's 18 distinct Pacific herring spawning areas. Pacific herring along with surf smelt, and sand lance (all present in the reserve) are important prey for salmon and birds. Salmon-rearing and migratory corridors are present within the reserve, and orca whales, harbor seals, humans, and sea lions visit these shores to take advantage of the food sources. The reserve contains Central Puget Sound's most important western grebe wintering area. More than 78 other species of birds use the reserve as well. Often overlooked, but just as magnificent to behold, are the plethora of marine invertebrates that call these shores home.

The beach and upland parks adjacent to the Aquatic Reserve boundaries support the ecological health of the aquatic reserve through naturally vegetated shorelines that deliver food and shade to marine organisms and enhance beaches through natural erosion. These parks also provide additional habitat for species that use areas outside reserve boundaries to nest, breed, or forage (such as osprey and river otters).

Lastly, healthy streamside forests in these protected areas support clean freshwater inputs into estuary environments.

The diversity, abundance, and beauty of this area have long attracted human inhabitants. Traditionally, Quartermaster Harbor was home to some of the sx̌əbal̓hí peoples (also known as Shomamish in the Chinook trade jargon), including eight permanent villages, over 20 longhouses, and numerous sites for gathering shellfish, berries, roots, cattails, and other resources throughout the islands. The rich cultural importance of this area comes through in many sx̌əbal̓hí stories that take place in specific places within the reserve. Early pioneers and homesteaders also settled in this area contributing to a long and interesting human history. From the early sx̌əbal̓hí presence to modern day visitors and residents, you are part of this evolving human story.

While much natural history is documented for this area, we are still learning about what lives here and how life is changing in the reserve through time.

We welcome your help as eyes and ears for us as you travel the waters and upland parks of this area. We gladly accept species sighting reports, questions, and photos at the Vashon Nature Center website (www.vashonnaturecenter.org). Share what you see!
Ostreola conchaphilia here each summer. Aggregating anemone. The Coast Guard residences can be rented through many shoreline species use the diversity of cobbles, large rocks, marsh (now rare habitat in Puget Sound). This marsh was partially filled to ward low oxygen levels than shallower areas.

100 or less in the last three years. Christmas Bird counts show a decline from around 1,600 birds in 1998 to numbers so vast that sea eagles are regulars, as are harbor seals, sea lions, sand dollars, piddock clams (in exposed clay layers), and kelp crabs. Locals claim there are huge sharks in the deep water hole off Point Robinson in the winter, later for the kazio call of black scoters. A Chinese immigrant community called little Hong Kong occurred along this stretch of beach in the late 1850s. Across the water to the south is Tacoma’s Point Ruston, the former site of mining this area. Sand here enters an offshore drift area that feeds beach-nourishment. Restoration of the weed line armoring, and associated fill to create a new tidal inlet. New sand and gravel replaced material lost by shoreline erosion. Standing dead trees were installed to provide bird perches. Forested trails above Dockton Park eventually lead to the beaches of Maury Island Natural Area. Look for the shy few trees in the forest just above the docks.


docks offer great sea-life viewing. In 2008, slanders Karlata Robinson spotted the invasive Japanese sea snail Diodora niponica while studying diving. These sea squat snails squat out all other life. In response, the Department of Fish and Wildlife closed the dock for two weeks to scrub planks with acetic acid to rid them of the sea squat. While this did not take hold. Just southwest of the boat launch, King County has removed more than 100 creosote piles. 100 feet of shore-line armoring, and associated fill, to create a new tidal inlet. New sand and gravel replaced material lost by shoreline erosion. Standing dead trees were installed to provide bird perches. Forested trails above Dockton Park eventually lead to the beaches of Maury Island Natural Area. Look for the shy few trees in the forest just above the docks.


MAURY ISLAND AQUATIC RESERVE

Together these former gravel mine areas (now King County Park/ Forests) are among the longest stretches of protected shoreline on the islands. Maury Island Marine Park was created in 1995. Maury Island Natural Area was created in 2010 after a dramatic 15-year David-and-Goliath battle between local environmental groups and a multinational mining company intent on mining this area. Sand here enters an offshore drift area that feeds beaches as the long stretch of Point Robinson. This sand travels to other islands. Restoration of the weed line armoring, and associated fill to create a new tidal inlet. New sand and gravel replaced material lost by shoreline erosion. Standing dead trees were installed to provide bird perches. Forested trails above Dockton Park eventually lead to the beaches of Maury Island Natural Area. Look for the shy few trees in the forest just above the docks.


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