What is an Aquatic Reserve?

Aquatic Reserves are state-owned aquatic lands of exceptional biodiversity and productivity. Created and managed by Washington’s Department of Natural Resource’s (WA DNR) in 2004, the Aquatic Reserve Program brings together local and state governments, non-governmental organizations, Tribes, and citizens interested in preserving and restoring these ecologically important areas.

To date, seven areas have been designated Aquatic Reserves in Washington, all within the Puget Sound region. The designation process encourages public engagement, which helps to preserve the environmental, scientific and educational value of these public lands without diminishing the ability of individuals to fish, boat or recreate in these areas. To learn more visit http://www.dnr.wa.gov and search for Aquatic Reserve Program.

Visit the Smith and Minor Islands Aquatic Reserve

To increase public participation in the Aquatic Reserve process, the Smith and Minor Islands Citizen Stewardship Committee was created. This group works with DNR’s Aquatic Reserve program to implement actions at the Reserve that help it stay healthy and protected.

Opportunities for involvement include...

Learn about the Reserve: Committee members offer free presentations about the Aquatic Reserve to community groups and classrooms.

Education Projects: We make presentations to community groups and classrooms, design interpretive signs, webpages and fliers. We can use help with any of these tasks. Do you have other education ideas? Contact us or attend our next meeting and share your ideas!

Citizen Science Projects: Our volunteers are currently performing shoreline sediments sampling to investigate the location of forage fish spawning grounds. We are also surveying disturbances to birds and mammals in the Reserve.

Regulatory review projects: We watch for activities that may affect the Reserve’s shorelines and habitats and provide policy recommendations as needed. This could include mapping and reporting marine debris or commenting on a proposed project.

Contact Robin Clark at Robin@whidbeywatersheds.org to request a presentation, learn more about the committee and for more information about our projects!

 Interested in protecting the Smith and Minor Islands Aquatic Reserve?

Join the Smith and Minor Islands Citizen Stewardship Committee!

This project is funded by a grant from the Environmental Protection Agency, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Department of Natural Resources.

To get involved in any of our projects or the Citizen Committee itself please contact:
Robin Clark- Robin@whidbeywatersheds.org - (206) 235-3321
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What makes our Smith and Minor Islands Aquatic Reserve so special?

**Interesting Features**

- **Productive habitat**: The reserve includes nursery and feeding areas for migrating, nesting, and foraging birds, fish, and marine mammals including nutrient-rich shallow, deep, and open-water habitats, high bluffs and a variety of beach types; from large rocky cobbles to sandy flats.
- **Smith and Minor Islands** are surrounded by the Aquatic Reserve. (Image 1 is the view of Smith Island from Whidbey).
- **Over 300 species** of macro algae, including Washington State’s largest kelp forest (Image 2).

**Diversity of Wildlife**

- **Surf Smelt** (Image 3) a type of forage fish, use the beaches as spawning grounds. Forage fish are a very important food source for marine birds, salmon, and other large marine predators.
- **Smith and Minor Islands** are part of the San Juan National Wildlife Refuge due to the nesting, breeding, feeding, and resting grounds for many bird species including the Tufted Puffin (Image 4).
- **Four species of salmon** (Chum, Coho, Pink, and Chinook) use the shallows of the Reserve as rearing habitat (a place for juveniles to feed and adjust to salt water) before heading out to the ocean. (Image 5 is a juvenile Chinook salmon.)
- **Marine mammal sighting** occur often in the Reserve, especially in the summer months when the resident Orca pods travel through the area. Smith Island also provides harbor seals (Image 6) with a haul out and pupping site.

**Threats to our Reserve**

**Pollution**: Marine debris, both floating in the water column and washed up on shore threaten all species of life in the Reserve. Potential oil spills by vessels using the major shipping lanes adjacent to and within the Reserve is another threat to this productive marine ecosystem. Recreational use of boats also increases the risk of litter and chemical pollution.

**Shoreline modification**: Construction of hard shoreline armoring (Image 7) and overwater structures are ecological concerns. These activities reduce the amount of suitable habitat for forage fish spawning, nesting for birds, and riparian vegetation along the shoreline, which provides critical shading of the nearshore habitat during the summer.

**Climate change**: If climate scientists’ prediction of sea level rise, ocean acidification, increased storms, and coastal flooding is correct, the Reserve will be severely impacted by greater erosion, loss of bird nesting and seal haul out/ pupping habitat, and kelp beds no longer supportive of calcium-bodied life, the base of the marine food chain.

**Invasive species**: Due to the large amount of vessel traffic, especially from international waters, ballast water containing invasive species is a concern. Additionally, invasive species that are already present at the Reserve pose a threat to native species as their presence forces competition for habitat and food (Image 8).