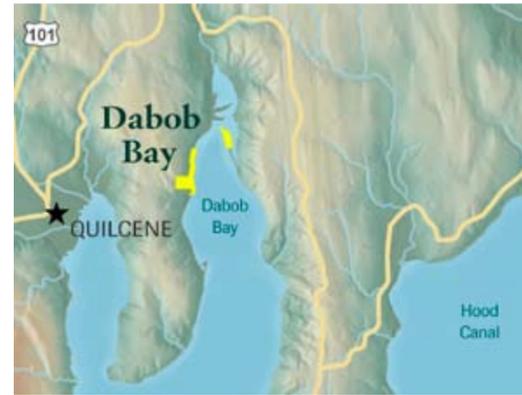


Restoring Dabob Bay

We're taking a multi-pronged approach to restoring Tarboo-Dabob Bay on Hood Canal. This bay is one of the top three oyster-growing areas in the world—a nursery that supports young oysters for all of Puget Sound. Marbled murrelets feed in the bay. Forage fish such as Pacific sand lance and surf smelt spawn on the beaches. Tarboo Creek is home to steelhead, coho and chinook salmon. It's one of the largest bays on Hood Canal that is still relatively untouched by development. We have a chance here to preserve and protect nature's processes in a landscape in which people live and work.

It's not enough to protect just the estuary. The forested slopes that surround the bay, the bare bluff that feeds fine sediments to maintain a healthy and productive beach, and Tarboo Creek, where salmon swim up and freshwater flows down, also must be protected and restored. This work represents a cooperative effort among many partners—private landowners, commercial oyster growers, a cooperative timber company, the Jefferson Land Trust, Jefferson County, state and federal agencies, and the Conservancy. It has also taken the leadership of a committed biologist, Peter Bahls, whose organization, the Northwest Watershed Institute, is the catalyst that has brought all these players together.



▶ Oyster growers head out at 5 a.m. to tend the beds in Tarboo-Dabob Bay. Dabob Bay is critical for Puget Sound oysters, says Dave Steele, who with his brother owns Rock Point Oysters, one of three commercial oyster operations in the bay. The family donated a conservation easement on Long Spit to the Conservancy in 1986. His family has been growing oysters here since 1942. "Dabob Bay is the key to all the oysters in Puget Sound," he said. "It's a natural nursery for them." He's concerned about residential development and logging in the area, both of which have the potential to increase runoff into the bay. Previous logging has generated landslides that smothered oysters.



We're going out and getting our hands dirty to make it better.

—SUSAN FREEMAN



◀ Conservationists Scott and Susan Freeman turned their convictions into action. Susan has solid conservationist credentials—her grandfather was Aldo Leopold, widely considered to be the father of wildlife ecology. In 2004, she and her husband Scott were seeking to buy a property where they could do significant conservation work and called the Jefferson County Land Trust. "They called us back the next day and told us that Peter Bahls was looking for a conservation buyer for some land where he had a grant to restore a salmon stream. It was a perfect match," Susan said. They bought the property, and Bahls used his grant to "re-meander" that stretch of Tarboo Creek, or reintroduce natural bends to a stream that had been artificially straightened. The Freemans planted about 3,000 trees and continue to steward their land to restore and protect the stream and the terrain that surrounds it. "We're going out and getting our hands dirty to make it better," she said.

◀ Biologist Peter Bahls admires one of the towering trees he helped preserve near Tarboo Creek. It was the chirruping of osprey that gave a young habitat biologist for the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe an opening to protect 158 acres on Tarboo Creek in Hood Canal. In 1996, surveying the area after it was proposed for logging by Pope Resources, he'd found big old trees and significant habitat for salmon and other species. "I was at my wits' end trying to figure out how to protect this parcel," said Peter Bahls, now the executive director of the Northwest Watershed Institute. Returning late one night from the Folklife Festival in Seattle, he decided he was too tired to drive all the way back to his home in Port Townsend. He pulled over along lower Tarboo Creek and wandered into the forest to roll out his sleeping bag. The next morning he awakened to cries from an osprey nest in the tree above his head, a discovery that put a temporary hold on the cutting. Ultimately the 158 acres were acquired by the state Department of Fish and Wildlife as a critical habitat preserve.



PHOTOS BY JOEL ROGERS



▲ The Conservancy has been working in Tarboo-Dabob Bay since the late 1980s and first accepted the gift of an easement on Long Spit from the Rock Point Oyster Company in 1986. In the late 1980s, the Conservancy purchased several tracts to initiate the Department of Natural Resources' Dabob Natural Area Preserve. Most recently, the Conservancy purchased 28 acres of uplands and a half-interest in 30 acres of tidelands (nearly one mile) to create a new natural area, part of ongoing efforts with the Alliance for Puget Sound Shorelines. Work to remove a road and restore natural stream flow in the 28 acres of uplands is planned within the next year.

▼ Restoration is working: Peter Bahls and a group of biologists are monitoring schools of coho salmon fingerlings that hatched out of the gravel and are growing in a newly re-meandered stretch of Tarboo Creek. From left, Bahls; Paco Rodriguez, biologist with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Rachel Maggi, biologist with U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service; and Greg Shirato, wildlife biologist with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.



▲ Northwest children are never daunted by rain! Students from Swan School in Port Townsend planted native trees and shrubs on the re-meandered Tarboo Creek in 2007. This past summer, they came back and spent a rainy day monitoring their plantings to see how they fared.