



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service/Elle Henke

Mt. Rainier towers over the Delta

MEET THE NISQUALLY DELTA

Seen from Interstate-5 the Nisqually Delta is a glimpse of open space between Olympia and Tacoma. But for those who take the time to look closely this mosaic of grasslands, salt marshes, forests, and mudflats teems with wildlife. The Nisqually River, Puget Sound, McAllister Creek, and the encircling Brown Farm Dike join to create a variety of habitats that in turn attract a great variety of animals. Woodpeckers hammer in the woodlands, sand shrimp burrow in the mudflats, and hawks soar overhead in search of mice. Waterfowl also find the Delta inviting, with as many as 20,000 ducks and geese passing through on their fall migration and many staying through the winter. No matter what time of year, the Nisqually Delta abounds with wildlife living in an environment protected especially for them.

National Audubon Society/P. LaFourrette



Greater scaup



The Nisqually Delta



National Audubon Society/G.W. Robinson

Barn owls feast on Delta mice and voles

Most of the Nisqually Delta is owned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and is under the protection of Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge. Surrounding areas make up the Nisqually Habitat Management Area owned by the Washington Department of Game. Together these agencies manage the Delta for wildlife and to be enjoyed by people.

Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge is open to the public during daylight hours throughout the year. Visitors are encouraged to bring binoculars and cameras, and may use Refuge photo blinds, enjoy the observation deck at the Twin Barns, or walk over seven miles of trails. Pets are not permitted on the refuge.

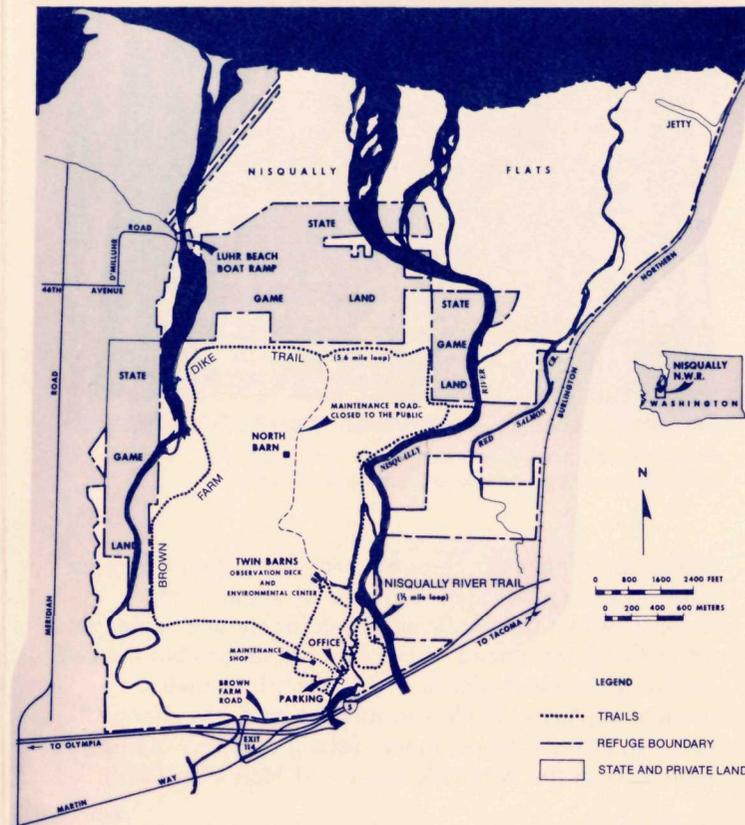
Nisqually Habitat Management Area offers a boat launch at Luhr Beach, fishing and boating in the waters surrounding the Delta, and hunting during waterfowl season.

Whether boating the waters of the Habitat Management Area or hiking the trails of the National Wildlife Refuge, visitors to the Nisqually Delta will find the opportunity to observe a wide variety of wildlife in a unique natural setting.



Great blue heron

National Audubon Society/G.W. Robinson



For more information about Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge contact:

Refuge Manager
Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge
100 Brown Farm Road
Olympia, Washington 98506
(206) 943-7577

For more information about Nisqually Habitat Management Area contact:

Washington Department of Game
905 E. Heron
Aberdeen, Washington 98502
(206) 753-2600 (Olympia) or
(206) 533-9335 (Aberdeen)

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Department of the Interior
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The Nisqually Delta

past, present and future





Yelm Jim's fish trap

WHAT GOOD IS THE DELTA FOR PEOPLE?

People have lived near the Nisqually Delta for hundreds of years. During that time the value people saw in the land has been reflected in the uses they have made of it.

Before white settlement, local Indian tribes recognized the value of the Delta for providing food and shelter, as well as the spiritual value of Medicine Creek, now known as McAllister Creek. Clams, crabs, and oysters were abundant and hunting parties returned with ducks as well as deer. Weirs, spears, and gaff hooks were used to catch salmon, which were plentiful in both Medicine Creek and the Nisqually River.

When employees of the Hudson's Bay Company moved into the area during the 1830's the commercial sale of wildlife began. Fort Nisqually was built east of the mouth of the Nisqually River and soon became an active fur trading post. Hundreds of beaver, muskrat, otter, and raccoon pelts were bought at the Fort and sent on to eastern and foreign markets.



A founders plaque and memorial grove were dedicated in 1984 and plans made to begin an environmental essay contest.

The white settlers also brought with them the concept of land ownership, an idea with little meaning to the Indians. When the Medicine Creek Treaty was signed in 1854 the tribes agreed to live on reservations but insisted on the guaranteed right to hunt and fish in their traditional places. While surrounding land has changed ownership many times, Indian fishing nets can still be seen in both the Nisqually River and McAllister Creek.

By 1904 Alson L. Brown recognized the value of the Nisqually Delta for agriculture. Crews of men using horse-drawn scoops built dikes to hold back the seawater and make the land a farm. The "Brown Farm" was known throughout the area for its comb honey, mincemeat, and other delicacies as well as for chickens, butter, sausages, and cheese.

As cities grew around Puget Sound people began to see other uses for the Nisqually Delta. When the Brown Farm was offered for sale in the early 1960's the city of Seattle considered using the land as a garbage dump, while Tacoma and Olympia proposed building a deepwater port. Other citizens, however, recognized the value of the Delta as habitat for wildlife. As a result of their actions the Nisqually Delta was purchased by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Washington Department of Game and set aside for wildlife to use and for people to enjoy.

The Twin Barns were built on the Brown Farm in 1932

PEOPLE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

At the time the Nisqually Delta was proposed for development many people began to recognize that the "best" use of the land might not necessarily involve industrial and commercial development. They had seen wildlife habitat disappear around Puget Sound as communities and industry grew, and they knew that the environmental qualities that attracted wildlife had value for people as well.

The proposals to develop the Nisqually Delta triggered citizen action. In 1965 the "Washington Citizens Committee for Outdoor Resources" was organized for the purpose of preserving the Delta from industrial development. Members were encouraged to express their concern by lobbying, writing to their legislators, and voting. As a result the Washington Department of Game began purchasing land on the Nisqually Delta in the area that had been proposed for development.

By 1970 the Nisqually Delta Association was formed and became the lead organization for focusing citizen concern and involvement. They were supported by members of many other organizations, including the Washington Environmental Council, many chapters of the National Audubon Society, and Washington State Sportsmen's Council, the League of Women Voters, and many other organizations and individuals.

Their actions put pressure on legislature to protect the Delta by law. Various bills were introduced, and in 1970 the Washington House of Representative commissioned a special study to investigate the compatibility of industrial development with preservation of wildlife habitat. The results of the Ray-Alcorn Study were definite: a wildlife refuge and port development could not coexist.

By 1971 the effort to preserve the Delta changed from local to a national level when the area outside the Brown Farm Dike was declared a National Natural Landmark. When the U.S. Congress and the Department of the Interior approved funds in 1974 to create Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge many years of perseverance and effort by local citizens came to fulfillment.

WHAT'S THE OUTLOOK FOR THE FUTURE?

Citizen involvement has helped secure long-term protection for the Nisqually Delta through ownership by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Washington Department of Game. However, development of surrounding areas continues to be a potential threat to the wildlife value of the Delta. Continued citizen involvement in planning and decision making processes will reflect the value people place on wildlife and habitat and will determine their continued existence on the Nisqually Delta.

Artwork for the "Get Moving to Save Nisqually Delta" poster was donated to the Nisqually Delta Association by Tom Ingham.

