
tx^waalqəł Conservation Area Phase I & II Property Management Plan



May 2024

City of Gig Harbor
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Gig Harbor, WA 98335
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Introduction

In 2022, the City of Gig Harbor acquired eight properties to be set aside for conservation purposes. The properties were acquired in three phases. With consultation from the Puyallup Tribe, Gig Harbor Land Conservation Fund, Gig Harbor Parks Commission, and City Council, the properties were named txʷaalqəl Conservation Area. txʷaalqəl was the name of the village that originally encompassed this area and was partially located on the Phase 1 property along North Creek. The area was home to a band of the Puyallup Tribe known as the sxʷəbabč, or Swiftwater People. Assistance in purchasing the properties came from Pierce County Conservation Futures, the Puyallup Tribe, and the Gig Harbor Land Conservation Fund.

This property management plan covers Phases 1 and 2 of the txʷaalqəl Conservation Area. Phase 3, a 5.15-acre property, is separated from the others by a major road, Harborview Drive, does not have the same critical areas and fish habitat, and was not funded using Conservation Futures funds. The city is working with Great Peninsula Conservancy to acquire a 4th phase of txʷaalqəl Conservation Area, north of Phases 1 and 2.

The conservation area will be protected, preserved, maintained, and enhanced in perpetuity, in accordance with agreements with Pierce County Conservation Futures.

Property Overview

The txʷaalqəl Conservation Area Phase 1 and 2 properties contain 35.39 acres and are listed in Table 1 below. These conservation properties are mostly sensitive areas, including wetlands, steep slopes, and approximately 2,000 lineal feet of a salmon-bearing stream, North Creek, which is also known locally as Donkey Creek. The properties are bordered on the west by parcels owned by Tacoma Power. The Tacoma Power parcels are 100 feet wide and contain powerlines that start at Lake Cushman in Mason County and supply power to the City of Tacoma. Tacoma Power allowed the City of Gig Harbor to construct the Cushman Trail along the length of their property. This popular multimodal trail extends from Borgen Boulevard, north of the txʷaalqəl Conservation Area, for 6.2 miles and ends outside of city limits. The trail is 16 feet wide with 4-foot gravel shoulders.

North Creek runs through both phases of the conservation area. According to a 2018 survey conducted by Wild Fish Conservancy, biologists found much of North Creek to be intact with a healthy streamside forest compared to elsewhere in the area. The stream provides conditions that are considered good salmon habitat, including pools, riffles, spawning gravels, shade, and large woody debris. Juvenile coho and cutthroat trout have been documented by Wild Fish Conservancy, and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife has identified chum and steelhead in the stream.

The existing trees and plants, for the most part, are part of a dynamic, resilient, and healthy native forest that needs minimal management. Some invasive species are present, including English ivy, holly, and Himalayan blackberry. The invasive species tend to be closer to Harborview Drive and the Cushman Trail and are not extensive. The mature trees and undergrowth provide shade for North Creek.

Table 1: Conservation Properties by Phase

Phase	Name	Parcel Number(s)	Date Acquired	Acreage
1	Lyons Property	0221061108	4/28/2022	11.5
2	Shaw/Warren/Peschek	0221061000 0221061113 0221062100 0221061070 0221061071 0221061044	10/28/2022	23.87
			Total	35.37 acres

Land Use History

The property was historically home to tx^waalqəł, a village of the sx^wəbabč band of the Puyallup Tribe. tx^waalqəł means “a place where game exists,” and was inhabited by the sx^wəbabč for many years without disturbance from European settlers. In 1840, Gig Harbor was “discovered” by members of the Wilkes Expedition. The first European settlers came in 1867. By 1915, the sx^wəbabč inhabitants were forced to relocate to the Puyallup Reservation in order to make room for European arrivals. The property was then used for logging. A large mill was located at the mouth of North Creek, on what is now Austin Park.

The properties were part of the Burnham Homestead, claimed by Dr. Alfred Burnham in 1884. He filed the plat for the original town of Gig Harbor in 1888. The original old-growth timber was likely logged by Burnham and milled within the harbor.



Figure 1 - Graphic courtesy of Harbor History Museum

The original state highway connecting the Tacoma Narrows to Bremerton also ran through this property. The old roadbed can be accessed on Phase 1, directly across Harborview Drive from Austin Street. It runs generally north-south between North Creek and Harborview Drive.

Phase 1

Phase 1, also known as the Lyons property, lies just north of Gig Harbor's Wastewater Treatment Facility. Approximately 0.4 acres of the property are cut off from the remainder of the 11 acres by the Cushman Trail/Tacoma Power property. This property contains approximately 750 lineal feet of North Creek. It has about 615 feet of road frontage along Harborview Drive. It is heavily encumbered by critical areas, including North Creek and associated wetlands, as well as steep slopes. There are no signs of previous buildings on this site, but manmade features include the Cushman Trail on the west, and the old state highway roadbed on the east side of the property.

Phase 2

Phase 2, known as the Shaw/Warren/Peschek property, contains six parcels that were owned by three different property owners prior to the city purchasing the properties. This property contains an old roadbed used for logging activities and a bridge over North Creek. Much of the old roadbed has become a trail that is overgrown and is not readily visible from Harborview Drive. The trail forms a loop that is traversable and is proposed to be opened to the public once the bridge is inspected and upgraded for pedestrian safety. The properties are remarkably free of large amounts of invasive plants.

Conservation Priorities

The conservation goals and priorities are the same for both Phases 1 and 2 of the txʷaalqəl Conservation Area.

1. *Archaeological and Historic Landmark Sites*

The txʷaalqəl Conservation Area was a significant part of txʷaalqəl, the main village site of the sxʷəbabč, the Native American band living in this area for time immemorial until the mid-1850s.

The Puyallup Tribe has confirmed that this particular site would have been vital to every day tribal life and has a high likelihood of archaeological findings/cultural resources. Similarly, entities including WA State Parks GIS, USGS, Bureau of Land Management, EPA, NPS, USDA, WA DAHP, and Pierce County consider this property “High Risk” in terms of the likelihood of archeological/historical findings and significance.

To date, the integrity of the archeological and historical elements has been preserved on this undeveloped site. The Tribe is partnering with the city to preserve the important anthropological resources and historic significance.

The Puyallup Tribe also values this property for its salmon habitat conservation purposes (Priority 2). Puyallup Tribe culture teaches that its people came from “the salmon people”; therefore, salmon protection is a top priority. The protection of salmon allows the Puyallup Tribe to continue their cultural practices and way of life, connecting tribal members to their past, allowing them to thrive presently, and ensuring their cultural existence in the future.

The Puyallup Tribe and the City of Gig Harbor executed an intergovernmental agreement in May 2023 that recognizes the Tribe’s contribution of \$50,000 for the Phase 1 acquisition. The Tribe will work with the City of Gig Harbor on trail interpretive signage addressing the historical and cultural significance of the site, as well as traditional plant names. The Tribe’s Culture Department will use the sites to practice traditional gathering.

2. *Critical Salmon Habitat*

The txʷaalqəl Conservation Area is characterized by a uniquely undeveloped, fully functioning streamside forest, through which North Creek passes. The Wild Fish Conservancy identified the property as supporting a surprisingly healthy habitat vital to salmonids in a 2018 survey. Juvenile coho salmon and coastal cutthroat trout (priority fish species) were documented in abundance. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) also documented both chum salmon and ESA-listed Puget Sound steelhead trout within this reach of North Creek. West Sound Partners for Ecosystem Recovery’s

2020 East Kitsap Steelhead Recovery Plan classifies North Creek as a Tier 3 Drainage in the Curley Creek-Frontal Colvos Passage subwatershed.

The conservation properties provide spawning and rearing habitat, critical for the successful reproduction and growth of salmon and trout. Nearby, downstream near the mouth of Donkey Creek is the “Donkey Creek Coop Egg Rearing Incubator”, also known as a remote site incubator (RSI), which is operated and maintained by the Gig Harbor Commercial Fisherman’s Club with the support of the local Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife fish hatcheries and is intended to increase the population of chum salmon. The future of that incubator is under discussion. The property also contains what Wild Fish Conservancy called a non-fish perennial tributary, running along the western edge of the parcel, whose water quality directly affects fish habitat downstream.

The conservation properties expand an existing seven acres of critical habitat found within the txʷaalqəl Estuary. The city daylighted Donkey Creek under North Harborview Drive in 2013 and significantly improved fish passage. Owning this subject property will facilitate the city’s plans to open the culvert under Harborview Drive, identified as obstructive to fish passage by the Wild Fish Conservancy and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, connecting Donkey Creek Park with the Phase 1 property.

3. Trails and Corridors

The unique location of this parcel provides important opportunities for passive recreation and wildlife connectivity.

The acquisition of the txʷaalqəl Conservation Area furthers the city’s PROS plan goals.

Provide a diversified park system that preserves and enhances significant environmental resources and facilitates the protection of threatened species, preservation habitat, and retention of migration corridors that are unique and important to local wildlife.

-Goal 2: City of Gig Harbor 2022 PROS Plan

Develop a high quality system of park trails and corridors that provide alternative transportation options and low impact recreational opportunities for residents of all ages and abilities in coordination with the city’s Active Transportation Plan.

-Goal 3: City of Gig Harbor 2022 PROS Plan

The PROS plan further states “...the trail connection between the Cushman Trail and downtown Gig Harbor should be constructed to improve trail access to the waterfront.”

That important connector trail, which has been discussed for many years, can be accomplished on these phases of the conservation area, through close coordination with the Puyallup Tribe.

The Cushman Trail will eventually be extended to the south in unincorporated Pierce County with the Scott Pierson Trail into Tacoma. To the north, the city and its partners plan to extend the trail to link up with the Key Peninsula and, eventually, trails in Kitsap County.

A limited number of other low-impact interpretive trails will be created for public benefit and to protect sensitive areas, including the loop trail accessed from the northern portion of Phase 2.

These properties constitute a critical wildlife corridor from Gig Harbor Bay to spawning areas in North Creek. Priority species present in Gig Harbor (Bald Eagle, Osprey, Purple Martin, Great Blue Heron, Chinook Salmon, Coho Salmon, and Cutthroat Trout) need streams, wetlands, shorelines, etc. for breeding, foraging, and travel. Other upland mammals use North Creek as a source of drinking water. The Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife has identified estuaries and mature forests as priority habitats, both key features of the conservation area.

Long-term Management Goals

Public Access

Passive public access is a priority for the long-term management of the txʷaalqəl Conservation Area. While the area is accessible now via the loop trail on Phase 1, access is not formalized, nor is it listed on the city’s trail inventory. The first step to make it available to the public is inspection of the bridge over North Creek and changes to make it safer for pedestrians.

After the bridge on the loop trail is deemed safe for the public, trimming of vegetation should be done once a year, with regular inspections for obstacles and trail damage. A sign at the trail access point on Harborview Drive will be added with rules and wayfinding.

In 2024, design for the Cushman-Harborview Connector Trail will begin. This will be done in consultation with the Puyallup Tribe, as the properties are known to have been inhabited by the sxʷəbabč people. The pedestrian trail will be gravel, and four to six feet wide. The preferred path will minimize tree removal. Horses will be prohibited, and riding bicycles will not be allowed. This trail will connect the Cushman Trail to Harborview Drive.



Figure 2 Similar trail profile to proposed Harborview-Cushman Trail Connector

A spur trail for views of North Creek will be developed. This trail will be crushed gravel or natural surface. A connector trail between the Cushman-Harborview Connector and the loop trail on Phase 2 will also be designed.

As part of the purchase and sale agreement for Phase 2, the city is obligated to name and provide signs for a feature(s) named for Richard H. Shaw, the former owner of some of the parcels in Phase 2. This will be done in consultation with his family.

In addition to the trails and signage, benches will be placed along the trails where appropriate.

Any work done will be coordinated with the Puyallup Tribe, and an inadvertent discovery plan and procedures for unanticipated discovery of cultural resources or remains will follow that plan. A contractor or city staff will notify the Tribe and Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) if resources or remains are discovered. Interested Tribes will also be invited to observe ground-disturbing work on the sites.

Educational Signage

The city will work with the Puyallup Tribe and the Harbor History Museum to create educational signage about the Tribe's history and cultural influences in the area. Signage will also identify native plants with their Twulshootseed names.

Stream Protection

The biggest planned impact to stream health is removal of the culvert conveying North Creek under Harborview Drive. It will be replaced with a bridge. As of April 2024, design is at 60 percent. It is intended to provide a trail under the bridge that will connect with the Cushman-Harborview Connection. The culvert has been identified as a fish passage barrier, impeding fish access to 1.8 miles of stream with good spawning and rearing habitat, according to Wild Fish Conservancy.

There are ongoing discussions about whether the existing remote site incubator (RSI), maintained by the Gig Harbor Commercial Fisherman's Club, should be replaced. If replaced, the city is asking for a 20-year commitment from the Fisherman's Club. Please note, the RSIs are located on the city's Donkey Creek Park and not on the conservation properties.

The stream habitat on the two phases of the property is intact with good habitat features and a healthy streamside forest, according to a 2018 stream mapping project conducted by Wild Fish Conservancy. The goal of stream protection will be achieved by leaving the streamside vegetation intact, while monitoring for invasive species.



Figure 3 – Fish passage barrier downstream of Phase 1 property – to be replaced with a bridge

The city plans to rezone the properties, which is currently a mix of General Business District, Single-Family Residential, and Medium Density Residential. As part of the 2024 Comprehensive Plan update, the city will create a new Conservation zone, which will limit allowed uses to passive recreation, with some allowances for facilities such as trailhead parking and restrooms.

To further protect North Creek, the city will work with volunteers and hired crews to remove invasive plants in the conservation area.

Maintenance and Monitoring

The city will monitor the trails and public access points for potential management problems at least once quarterly, exceeding the national Land Trust Alliance's Standards and Practices. Potential problems include dumping, safety hazards, spread of invasive species, trespassing, encroachment, or encampments. The city will promptly respond to any complaints or notifications about such issues.

Staff will photograph key parts of the conservation area every three years to monitor forest and stream conditions.

Project Implementation Plan and Timeline

Project	Project elements	Timeline	Budget	Funding Source
Cushman-Harborview Trail Connector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design & Permitting Construction 	2024 2025-2026	\$200,000 \$500,000	HBZ funds
North Creek Culvert Replacement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design & Permitting Construction 	2024-25 2026-27	\$1,300,000 \$7,500,000	Stormwater REET RCO Grants
Phase 2 loop trail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pedestrian bridge structural inspection/rating Vegetation control (ongoing) Pedestrian bridge upgrades 	2024 2024 2025	\$8,000 \$10,000 \$30,000	REET General Fund REET
Spur trails	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connection between Phase 2 loop trail & Harborview-Cushman Connector Fish viewing spur trail construction 	2026 2026	\$4,000 \$10,000	REET HBZ funds
Trail signage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trailhead signage on Harborview & Cushman (part of capital project) Educational signage 	2026 2026	\$5,000 \$15,000	REET General fund
Pavement removal				

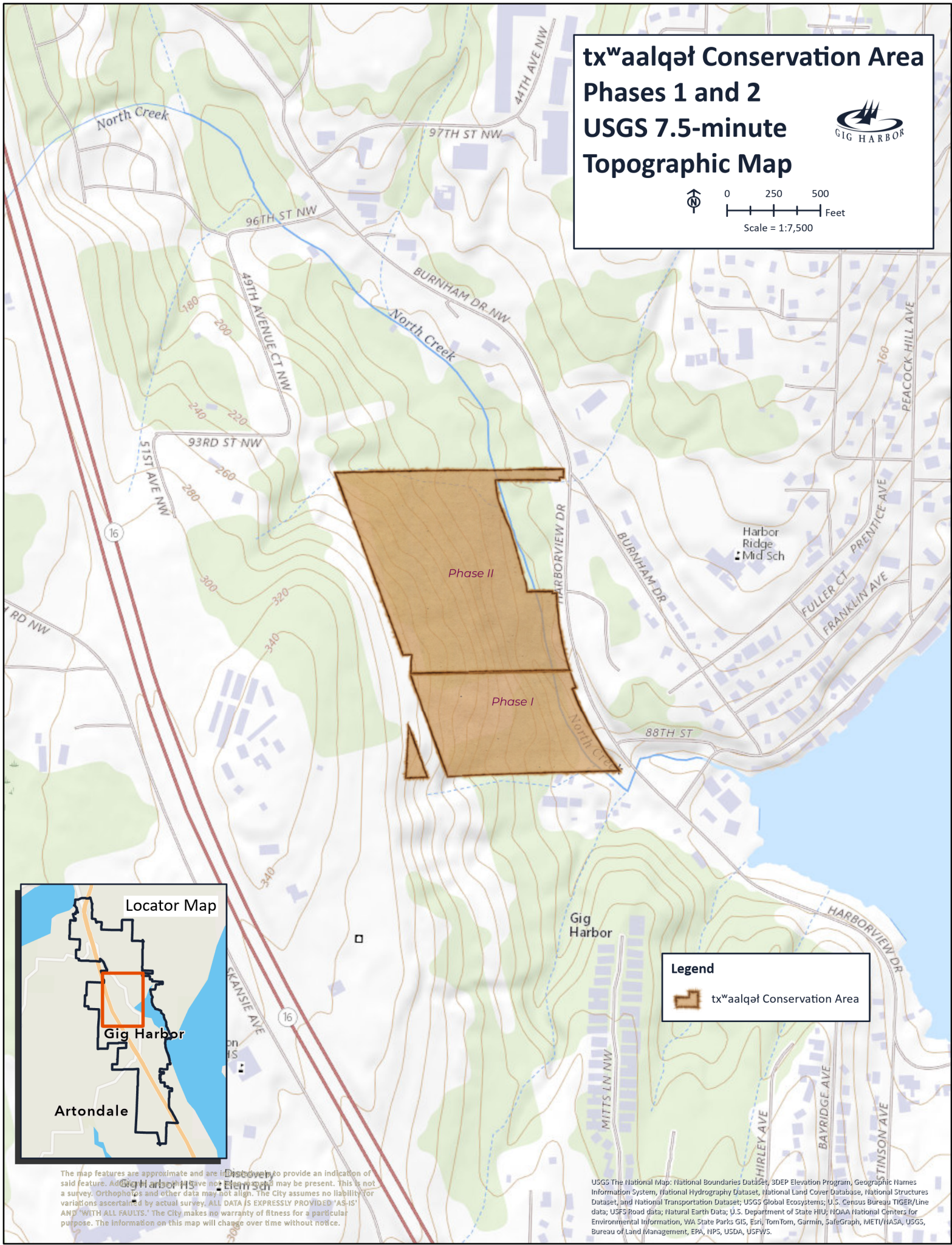
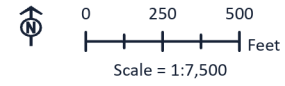
Property rezone	Create Conservation zone to protect property in perpetuity.	2024	N/A	N/A
Invasive species removal	Volunteer events may be used for this, such as Parks Appreciation Day.	Ongoing	\$10,000	General fund
Trail maintenance		Ongoing	\$5000/year	General fund
Maintenance & monitoring		Ongoing		

Activities Allowed on Conservation Properties

Activities allowed on the txʷaalqəł Conservation Area will be limited to:

- Passive recreation
 - Walking/hiking
 - Horses not allowed
 - No off-leash dogs
 - No motorized vehicles
 - Biking not allowed, except on adjacent Cushman Trail
 - Wildlife Viewing
- Native plant gathering by tribes
- Installation of features that support passive recreation
 - Educational signs
 - Wayfinding or directional signs
 - Benches
 - Trails and necessary structures; boardwalks, pedestrian bridges, retaining walls, with appropriate permits.
- Invasive plant removal
- Trail maintenance
- Removal of diseased, danger, and/or hazard trees determined to pose an imminent threat or danger to public health or safety, or to public or private property, or serious environmental degradation may be removed or limbed, with the tree left onsite. Trees removed will be replanted at a 3:1 ratio in accordance with the City of Gig Harbor's Urban Forestry Management Plan, adopted in 2023.
- Tree planting to create new understory, where appropriate

txʷaalqəl Conservation Area Phases 1 and 2 USGS 7.5-minute Topographic Map

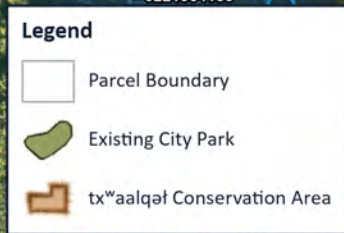


Legend

txʷaalqəl Conservation Area

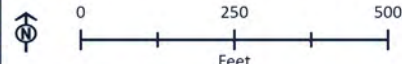
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USGS The National Map; National Boundaries Dataset, 3DEP Elevation Program, Geographic Names Information System, National Hydrography Dataset, National Land Cover Database, National Structures Dataset, and National Transportation Dataset; USGS Global Ecosystems; U.S. Census Bureau TIGER/Line data; USFS Road data; Natural Earth Data; U.S. Department of State HII; NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information, WA State Parks GIS, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, SafeGraph, METI/HASA, USGS, Bureau of Land Management, EPA, NPS, USDA, USFWS.



WA State Parks GIS, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, SafeGraph,
METI/NASA, USGS, Bureau of Land Management, EPA,
NPS, USDA, USFWS, Hexagon Imagery 2023.

tx^waalqəł Conservation Area Phases 1 and 2 Human-Made Features



Cushman Trail

Existing Bridge
over North Creek

Existing
Road Grade

Phase II

Phase I

Former State
Highway

HARBOR RIDGE
MIDDLE SCHOOL

BURNHAM DR

HARBORVIEW DR

PRENTICE AVE

AUSTIN ST

North Creek



Legend

- Existing City Park
- tx^waalqəł Conservation Area
- Stream

Human-Made Features

- Existing Trail
- Potential Trail
- Existing Onsite Bridge

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txʷaalqəl Conservation Area Phases 1 and 2 Access Map



Existing Bridge
over North Creek

Potential
Access Point

Cushman Trail

Phase II

Potential
Access Point

Potential
Access Point

Phase I

Potential
Access Point

North Creek



Legend

- Existing City Park
- txʷaalqəl Conservation Area
- Stream
- Existing Onsite Bridge
- Potential Foot Bridge

Potential Future Trails System

- Existing Trail
- Existing Trail to be Opened
- Potential Trail(s)

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