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# tx<sup>w</sup>aalqəł Conservation Area Phase IV Property Management Plan



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City of Gig Harbor  
3510 Grandview Street  
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 txʷaalqəł Conservation Area. txʷaalqəł 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 Phase 4 of the txʷaalqəł Conservation Area. Phases 1 & 2 were covered under a plan adopted in 2023. 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. While a property management plan is not required for Phase 3, the city is considering completing a separate Phase 3 property management plan.

The city, with assistance from Great Peninsula Conservancy, acquired Phase 4 of txʷaalqəł Conservation Area, north of Phases 1 and 2, in August of 2024. The conservation area will be protected, preserved, and maintained in perpetuity, in accordance with agreements with Pierce County Conservation Futures.

## Property Overview

The txʷaalqəł Conservation Area Phase 4 contains 11.41 acres and is listed in Table 1 below. The property contains sensitive areas, including three acres of wetlands, steep slopes, and approximately 500 lineal feet of a salmon-bearing stream, North Creek, which is also known locally as Donkey Creek. The property is bordered on the west by property 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 txʷaalqəł Conservation Area, for 6.2 miles and ends outside of city limits. The trail is 16 feet wide with 4-foot gravel shoulders.

On the east side of the property is Burnham Drive. The intersection where Harborview Drive merges to become Burnham Drive is adjacent to the property. This is a very busy

thoroughfare in Gig Harbor connecting downtown to the shopping, housing and amenities at Gig Harbor North.

North Creek runs through this phase of the conservation area as it heads south through other phases of the conservation property, crosses under Harborview Drive and North Harborview Drive, eventually emptying into Gig Harbor Bay near Austin Estuary. 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. Small numbers of invasive species are present, including English ivy, holly, and Himalayan blackberry. There are also some cultivated plants near the former homesite, including large rhododendron and other domestic plants. 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	11.50
2	Shaw/Warren/Peschek	0221061000 0221061113 0221062100 0221061070 0221061071 0221061044	10/28/2022	5.42 2.76 2.82 9.90 1.32 1.65
3	Haub Property	0221061107	8/23/2022	5.15
4	Brooks Property	0221061081	8/27/2024	11.41
			Total	51.93 acres

Land Use History

The property was historically home to tx<sup>w</sup>aalqəł, a village of the sx<sup>w</sup>əbabč band of the Puyallup Tribe. tx<sup>w</sup>aalqəł means “a place where game exists,” and was inhabited by the sx<sup>w</sup>əbabč 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<sup>w</sup>əbabč 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.

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The first three phases of the Conservation Area were part of the Burnham Homestead, claimed by Dr. Alfred Burnham in 1884. This property lies just north of that area, but was used for logging.

A home was built on the property in approximately 1957. The former owner reported that the residence burned down prior to 1980. The home wreckage was removed, but the foundation remains. There is also some debris, including metal drums, remaining at the property. The drums and foundation will need to be removed for liability reasons before public access can be opened to the site.





*Remains of house foundation and chimney retain water in wet season, February 2025*





*House Foundation in dry season, August 2025*

In addition to the house, there is a driveway culvert on the property that has been washed out, but is partially blocking the stream. It is covered by dense brush and is hard to access, but is listed in Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife fish passage maps as a partial barrier to fish passage.





*Culvert under former driveway. Driveway and culvert are both washed out and form a partial stream blockage. Photo courtesy WDFW.*

## Conservation Priorities

The conservation goals and priorities are the same for both Phases 1 and 2 of the tx<sup>w</sup>aalqəł Conservation Area.

### 1. Archaeological and Historic Landmark Sites

The tx<sup>w</sup>aalqəł Conservation Area was a significant part of tx<sup>w</sup>aalqəł, the main village site of the sx<sup>w</sup>əbabč, the Native American band living in this area for time immemorial until the mid-1850s.

This particular site, along with previous phases, 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.

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The Puyallup Tribe has confirmed that this parcel is on the Washington Information System for Architectural and Archaeological Records (WISAARD) database, the state's digital repository for architectural and archaeological resources and reports. Past exploitation and destruction of burial sites have made the protection of these sites a top priority to local tribes. These sites are of the highest importance to the Tribe and are protected by Tribal, State, and Federal Law.

To date, it is believed that the integrity of the archeological and historical elements has been largely preserved on this site. This is extremely rare and unique for the area. Conservation of the proposed property will assist in the protection and preservation of non-renewable Tribal Cultural Resources and assure their benefit to past, present, and future Tribal History.

## **2. Critical Salmon Habitat**

The txʷaalqəl Conservation Area is characterized by a uniquely undeveloped, fully functioning streamside forest, through which North Creek passes. . The property contains almost 500 feet of North Creek, forested riparian buffer on both sides of the creek, and more than three acres of wetlands identified by Pierce County mapping. The Wild Fish Conservancy identifies this area as supporting a surprisingly healthy habitat vital to salmonids. Juvenile coho salmon and Coastal Cutthroat Trout (priority fish species) were documented in abundance during a 2018 survey. 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.

This property provides spawning and rearing habitat, critical for the successful reproduction, and growth of salmon and trout. Downstream, the "Donkey Creek Coop Egg Rearing Incubator" is operated by the Gig Harbor Commercial Fishermens' Club with the support of the WDFW and is intended to increase the population of chum salmon.

This property expands a large area of critical habitat found within the txʷaalqəl Estuary. The City daylighted Donkey Creek under North Harborview Drive in 2005 and significantly improved fish passage. The City plans to daylight the extremely obstructive culvert under Harborview Drive in the coming years, which will greatly improve fish passage through this important area and should boost the fish population.

## **3. Trails and Corridors**

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



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The acquisition of this phase of 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 Cushman Trail was recently extended to the south in unincorporated Pierce County to connect with the Tacoma Narrows Bridge and 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 2, access is not formalized, nor

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is it listed on the city's trail inventory. The bridge on Phase 2 was deemed not safe for pedestrians in a 2024 inspection by Pierce County.

Since the Phase 2 bridge was not deemed safe and the driveway is washed out on Phase 4, it will become a longer-term goal to install a pedestrian access bridge to connect the trail system to Harborview Drive. That will consist of a pedestrian bridge either at the current location on Phase 2, or at the site of the former driveway on Phase 4, which has a smaller distance to span.

A spur trail will be developed from the Phase 2 loop trail to the old homesite. This trail will be natural surface. This work will take place after the foundation is mitigated and the debris is removed. Signage will be added to direct walkers.

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.



*An example of trail profile to be installed in the Conservation Area*

## **Educational Signage**



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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 August 2025, 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 is also a partially blocking culvert where the driveway to the former home used to be. It is mostly overgrown and hard to access, but crews should be able to access the culvert, break it up and carry it out.

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
House foundation and debris removal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Construction</li></ul>	2027	\$20,000	REET
Driveway Culvert Removal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Permitting</li><li>Removal</li></ul>	2027	\$10,000	REET
Spur trail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Connection between Phase 2 loop trail &amp; Phase 4 old homesite</li></ul>	2027	\$15,000	General fund

Trail signage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wayfinding &amp; educational signage</li> </ul>	2027	\$5,000	General fund
Invasive species removal	Volunteer events may be used for this, such as Parks Appreciation Day.	Ongoing	\$10,000	General fund
Trail maintenance		Ongoing	\$1000/year	General fund
Maintenance & monitoring		Ongoing		General fund

## Activities Allowed on Conservation Properties

Activities allowed on the txʷaalqəl 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
- 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, including as part of possible future tree donation program.