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News Release



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Oil Spill Funds Purchase Old Growth

One of the last coastal old-growth timber stands in Southwest Washington will be added to the Willapa National Wildlife Refuge thanks to action by The Nature Conservancy of Washington and federal, state and tribal trustees working for restoration of natural resources damaged by the 1991 *Tenyo Maru* oil spill. Using \$1.2 million in funds from the Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) settlement under the Oil Pollution Act, the trustees, who include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Washington Department of Ecology, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Washington Department of Natural Resources, and the Makah Tribe have purchased the 338-acre Teal Slough property from The Nature Conservancy of Washington. The Conservancy bought the land from the Hancock Timber Resource Group in May of 1999 with today's transfer in mind. Teal Slough is located at the base of the Stanley Peninsula, near the mouth of the Naselle River and adjacent to the Willapa National Wildlife Refuge. It will belong to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and will be managed as part of the refuge.

The acquisition includes 60 acres of old growth, where some of the trees are 35 feet or more in circumference and thought to be 800 years old and where several small streams are teeming with salamanders.

"Teal Slough is a biologically rich and very diverse property," said Anne Badgley, Director of the USFWS Northwest Region. "It includes old growth timber nesting habitat for marbled murrelets, streams that will help with our effort to restore local salmon runs, and important habitat for Van Dyke and Dunn's salamanders. We're delighted with this addition to the refuge."

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Curt Soper, director of conservation for The Nature Conservancy's Washington office agreed. "Only

about one percent of the old growth forest in Southwest Washington is still standing,” Soper said. “It’s critical that remnants such as Teal Slough be protected. Teal Slough is also a pivotal property, connecting existing protected areas with areas that are targeted for protection. We’re glad we could help with that effort.”

Scientists estimate that the 1991 *Tenyo Maru* oil spill killed 7 to 11 percent of the marbled murrelet population along Washington’s outer coast. Murrelets are robin-sized seabirds that feed on small fish but fly up to 50 miles inland to nest on the large branches of mature conifers. The Washington, Oregon and California populations of marbled murrelets are listed as a threatened species under the federal Endangered Species Act. The Washington population is also listed as threatened by the State of Washington. Marbled Murrelets currently nest on a portion of the Teal Slough property.

During the development of the *Tenyo Maru* restoration plan, the trustees recognized the value of nesting habitat for marbled murrelets, rare along Washington’s southern coast, and decided to protect the Teal Slough stand and surrounding regrowth area. The purchase is the first of a number of marbled murrelet habitat restoration actions to be completed under the plan. Other projects will help restore seabird and kelp populations, injured by the oil spill, through habitat protection and restoration. These will include efforts to protect and restore additional marbled murrelet habitats; restore common murre colonies in the Copalis National Wildlife Refuge; educate the public to reduce disturbance of seabird nesting colonies; and provide partial funding for an oiled wildlife rehabilitation center. A completed project provided partial funding for an emergency rescue tug stationed at the entrance to the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

In addition to marbled murrelet protection, Teal Slough supports a number of other wildlife species that live in mature forests, including Vaux’s swift, pileated woodpeckers, Van Dyke’s salamanders and others. Streams that flow through the area may support coho, chinook, and chum salmon and coastal cutthroat trout, a candidate species for federal listing under the Endangered Species Act.

The acquisition will assist the refuge in its effort to bolster rare and declining species. It will compliment existing old growth western redcedar and western hemlock forest marbled murrelet habitat on the refuge’s nearby Long Island. The new property includes hillsides that have been logged over the past two decades, which will allow for restoration and expansion of the large contiguous forest habitat.

Willapa Bay is the largest estuary on the Pacific Coast north of San Francisco and is considered the cleanest estuary in the continental United States.

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