

News

Partnership delivers interim report to Governor

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# News Release

## For Immediate Release

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## **Groups form new alliance to save Puget Sound's shorelines**

*With gift from The Russell Family Foundation, three groups launch multi-year campaign*

Seattle – Saying the time to act is now, three leading conservation organizations—with support from a top regional foundation—launched on Tuesday an \$80 million campaign to restore and protect Puget Sound's ecologically rich shorelines and ensure they're available for people to enjoy for generations to come.

People For Puget Sound, The Trust for Public Land and The Nature Conservancy have formed the Alliance for Puget Sound Shorelines, a groundbreaking new partnership that will work to restore and protect hundreds of miles of shoreline and create 10 new parks and natural areas along Puget Sound over the next three years.

The Russell Family Foundation awarded the newly formed Alliance \$3 million to launch the campaign and begin the conservation work immediately. The groups will use the gift as a catalyst to raise a total of \$80 million from the public and private sector for the first three years of the program. The three-year effort will lay the groundwork for what will ultimately be a 10-year, multi-billion-dollar campaign, putting the effort to save the Sound on par with other large-scale estuarine restoration projects, such as those currently underway in the Chesapeake Bay and the Everglades.

The Alliance is focusing on the Sound's shorelines because of their immense ecological importance and integral connection to the health of the entire Puget Sound. Shorelines play a key role in the region's quality of life, connecting people to an inland sea that is at the heart of the region's cultural, social and economic identity.

“Saving the shoreline is necessary to saving the entire Sound. Ecologically, this is where the action is,” said Kathy Fletcher, executive director of People For Puget Sound. “And equally important, it's how most people relate to the Sound. Shorelines matter enormously to people.”

## Puget Sound Nearshore Partnership – News Releases

All three organizations praised the leadership of The Russell Family Foundation, which has worked closely with the three groups to shape a vision and plan. The effort comes at a perfect time, they added, since key elected and civic leaders are increasingly focused on the Sound's health..

“Thanks to The Russell Family Foundation, we have an opportunity to make a lasting contribution to our region's ecologic, social and economic health,” said Roger Hoesterey, regional director at The Trust for Public Land. “People care deeply about Puget Sound. By working together, we can ensure our children's children are able to enjoy it as we do today.”

“The ecologic diversity of the Sound's 2,500 miles of shoreline is astounding. Life abounds here,” added David Weekes, director of The Nature Conservancy's Washington state chapter. “If we want to save this remarkable inland sea, the time to act is now.”

Puget Sound's shorelines have been in decline for years, with thousands of acres contaminated by toxins, 75 percent of the Sound's salt marsh habitat destroyed and one-third of the shoreline altered or engineered from its natural state. What's more, less than 10 percent of the shoreline is open to the public.

This decline in habitat has had an impact on wildlife. Of the Sound's 18 threatened or endangered species, nine rely directly on shoreline habitat. Even the health of the region's beloved orca whales, declared endangered last month, is connected to shorelines, because the shorelines are the basis for a food web that feeds salmon and, ultimately, orcas.

The region's economy is also affected by the Sound's decline. Since 1980, nearly 30,000 acres of commercial shellfish beds have closed due to contamination, and Hood Canal's low oxygen levels resulted in a die-off of tens of thousands fish in 2004 alone.

But civic will to protect and restore the Sound is growing, the three groups noted, creating a time of great opportunity. Governor Christine Gregoire has launched the Puget Sound Partnership, a 16-member panel of leading citizens—including Fletcher from People For Puget Sound—to develop a 15-year plan to turn the corner on the Sound's most vexing problems. Thanks to The Russell Family Foundation support, the Alliance will be able to contribute to the Partnership's effort and add momentum to this historic endeavor.

The three organizations have already spent months working together and are poised to begin identifying shoreline sites that have high conservation value and can be restored, purchased or protected by other means.

Nancy McKay, environmental sustainability manager for The Russell Family Foundation, said the three groups have the right mix of skills to spearhead this significant undertaking. Collectively, she said, they have considerable expertise in science-based conservation and restoration, public policy, fundraising and advocacy—as well as a demonstrated commitment to the region's ecologic health.

“We have enormous confidence in these three groups and, just as importantly, in our region's deep commitment to Puget Sound,” McKay said. “It's time to undertake the hard work of bringing people together around a shared vision—a healthy Puget Sound that is accessible to all.”

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**People For Puget Sound** is a citizens' group working to protect and restore the health of Puget Sound and the Northwest Straits through education and action. On the Web at [pugetsound.org](http://pugetsound.org).

**The Nature Conservancy** is a private, international, non-profit organization that preserves plants, animals and natural communities representing the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive. On the Web at [nature.org](http://nature.org).

## Puget Sound Nearshore Partnership – News Releases

**The Trust for Public Land** is a national nonprofit land conservation organization that conserves land for people to enjoy as parks, gardens and other natural places, ensuring livable communities for generations to come. On the Web at [tpl.org](http://tpl.org).