

HISTORY

THE FORMER GOSS LAKE WOODS. a 600 acre forest formerly managed by the State of Washington Department of Natural Resource, encompasses a wide range of habitat and its residents are many. Pileated woodpeckers, hairy woodpeckers, downy woodpeckers, red-napped sapsuckers, barred owls, great horned owls, Cooper's hawks, black tailed deer, cottontail rabbits, chickarees, chipmunks, and flying squirrels, to mention just a few, call these woods home. Stands of mature second growth Douglas fir, western hemlock, western white pine, wild rhododendron, and a large community of evergreen huckleberry provide forage and shelter for these residents, an ever more valuable aquifer, and solace for the many humans who go there to "recharge batteries" depleted by our terribly modern world.

Over the years, local citizens have created in these woods a complex network of trails for non motorized public use. These trails were built by a dedicated group of volunteers AT NO COST TO GOVERNMENT. The trails interconnect with other trails on adjacent private lands, which the owners have graciously opened up to the public. The Saratoga Woods Preserve (see MAP) further connects with these trails. Thousands of your fellow citizens enjoy these woods and trails each year, and the thrust of continued maintenance is provided by volunteers.

IN THE LATE 1800's the Federal Government mandated that new states each place a portion of their public land into trust for the benefit of their state's school system. 120+ years ago, of course, there were a lot more natural resources available for sale than there were students and schools in need of funding. Now there is no way that the schools can be funded by the sale of the State's natural resources alone, much less leave anything for future generations. These days, less than 7% of Washington's school budget comes from the DNR's sale of timber and real estate. Nevertheless, until the recent transfer of the Woods to Island County, they could have been logged at any time.

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, alarmed by the rapidly diminishing amount of open public space on our island, we met with the DNR's Commissioner of Public Lands Jennifer Belcher to urge that owing to these lands' heavy recreational use, their educational potential as an "outdoor classroom", and their proximity to residential neighborhoods, the people of the State of Washington's interests would be best served if these lands were set aside permanently for recreational and educational use.

As a result of that meeting and others, the Woods were placed on the Trust Lands Transfer Program (TLTP) list of 1996. The TLTP was created by the Legislature in 1989 to help solve just this sort of problem. This was a ray of hope for the Woods.

In the winter of 1999-2000, one of the adjacent private landowners noticed that the Woods were being surveyed by the DNR. The DNR foresters told him that they were planning to "harvest" the timber the following summer. The response from both our community and from our representatives was huge. To make a long story short, we were told that the Woods would be saved by way of a 30 year logging rights easement granted to Island County. No one would be able to log these woods for the next 30 years; by then of course Whidbey Island will most likely be so built out that to log the Goss Lake Woods would be tantamount to clear-cutting Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. The woods seemed permanently saved.

Alas, in this day and age things are not always what they seem. Early in 2001 we learned that -- in a political maneuver, the Legislature had removed the Goss Lake tract from the TLPT list.

Again we made a lot of noise with a letter writing and e-mail campaign, and were again heard.

In the spring of 2003, our members, along with the Friends of Saratoga Woods and the Whidbey Camano Land Trust, mounted another campaign to save this unique ecosystem. The DNR finally transferred these woods to Island County Parks Department supervision.

A LOSS OF A FRIEND, AND A NEW NAME

In 2006, the Woods lost one of its greatest advocates and friends, Gary Putney. His work on the trails system, his enthusiasm and energy for life, and his straightforward manner were monumental and are sorely missed. As one member of our group averred, he was everything John Wayne ought to have been, but in real life. Early in 2007, the Island County Commissioners voted to rename the Goss Lake Woods THE PUTNEY WOODS in his honor.