



## Welcome

The trails through this 70-acre preserve traverse open water, wetlands and forested hillsides.

### To help protect this special place, please:

- Smoke only off park property
- Use the trails without dogs or cats along
- Leave bicycles with your vehicle or locked in bike rack
- Take out only what you take in
- Stay on designated trails
- Enjoy watching the birds and other animals without feeding them

- Self-guided Wetland Walk** **First Bridge Loop Trail (.5 mile)**
- Self-guided History Walk** **Outdoor Access Route (.5 mile one way)**  
**Second Bridge Loop Trail (1 mile)**
- Self-guided Forest Walk** **Hillside Loop Trail (.65 mile)**  
**Hillside Loop Extension (.25 mile)**  
**Viewpoint Loop (.15 mile)**  
**Meadow Loop (.2 mile)**

## Plants and Animals Found at The Tacoma Nature Center

### Trees

- Sitka Alder
- Oregon Ash
- Cascara Buckthorn
- Black Cottonwood
- Douglas Fir
- Pacific Madrone
- Scouler Willow
- Garry Oak

### Shrubs & Groundcovers

- Red Elderberry
- Clustered Wildrose
- Indian Plum
- Oceanspray
- Tall Oregon Grape
- Douglas Spirea
- Black Twinberry
- Evergreen Huckleberry
- Orange Honeysuckle
- Baldhip Rose
- Beaked Hazelnut
- Common Snowberry
- Red Huckleberry
- False Lily-of-the-valley
- Salal
- Trailing Blackberry
- Dwarf Oregon Grape
- Sword Fern
- Creeping Snowberry
- Bracken Fern

### Mammals

- Red fox
- Coyote
- Raccoon
- Virginia Opossum
- Eastern Cottontail
- Douglas Squirrel
- Eastern Gray Squirrel
- Townsend's Chipmunk
- Norway Rat
- Deer Mouse
- Vagrant Shrew
- Townsend's Mole
- Black-tailed Deer

### Amphibians/Reptiles

- Pacific Tree Frog (Chorus Frog)
- Bullfrog
- Long-toed Salamander
- Northwest Salamander
- Rough-skinned Newt
- Western Painted Turtle
- Common Garter Snake
- Northwestern Garter Snake
- Northern Alligator Lizard

### Birds

- Canada Goose
- Wood Duck
- Gadwall
- American Wigeon
- Mallard
- Northern Shoveler
- Bufflehead
- Common Goldeneye
- Hooded Merganser
- Pied-billed Grebe
- Great Blue Heron
- Osprey
- Bald Eagle
- Cooper's Hawk
- Sharp-shinned Hawk
- Red-tailed Hawk
- Glaucous-winged Gull
- Rock Pigeon
- Barn Owl
- Barred Owl
- Anna's Hummingbird
- Belted Kingfisher
- Downy Woodpecker
- Northern Flicker
- Olive-sided Flycatcher
- Western Wood-Pewee
- Pacific-slope Flycatcher
- Warbling Vireo
- Cassin's Vireo
- Hutton's Vireo
- Steller's Jay
- American Crow
- Common Raven
- Violet-green Swallow
- Barn Swallow
- Cliff Swallow
- Black-capped Chickadee
- Chestnut-backed Chickadee
- Bushtit
- Red-breasted Nuthatch
- Brown Creeper
- Bewick's Wren
- Pacific Wren
- Golden-crowned Kinglet
- Ruby-crowned Kinglet
- Swainson's Thrush
- Hermit Thrush
- American Robin
- Varied Thrush
- European Starling
- Cedar Waxwing
- Yellow-rumped Warbler
- Black-throated Gray Warbler
- Wilson's Warbler
- Yellow Warbler
- Spotted Towhee
- Fox Sparrow
- Song Sparrow
- White-crowned Sparrow
- Golden-crowned Sparrow
- Dark-eyed Junco
- Western Tanager
- Black-headed Grosbeak
- Red-winged Blackbird
- Brown-headed Cowbird
- Purple Finch
- House Finch
- Pine Siskin
- American Goldfinch
- House Sparrow

Let us know if you spot something not on this list.

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Please record your wildlife sightings on the daily nature observation chart located at the information desk inside the Nature Center to add to our knowledge of what species are using the park each month.



## The Tacoma Nature Center

is a 70-acre nature preserve encompassing Snake Lake and the surrounding wetlands and forest. Stroll nature trails to experience native birds, animals and plants. Join in exciting nature programs and summer day camps. Learn about landscaping with native plants and purchase them here May through September.

### Discover nature by joining in...

- School group programs
- Summer day camps
- Nature classes for all ages
- Homeschool science programs
- On-site Nature Preschool
- Scout adventures
- Birthday parties
- Special events
- Volunteer opportunities

### Visit the indoors...

- Gift shop
- Small animal displays
- Wetland & wildlife discovery exhibits
- Conference/meeting hall (available for rent)

### Explore outside...

- Nature Trails
- Discovery Pond play area



Make a difference in your own neighborhood! Protect wetlands and prevent pollution...

- Pick up pet poop, bag it, and place it in the trash
- Fix vehicle leaks
- Wash cars at a commercial car wash, or in the grass
- Minimize use of chemicals in your lawn and garden
- Plant trees
- Find out more at [www.PugetSoundStartsHere.org](http://www.PugetSoundStartsHere.org)

### Nature Center Hours

Monday through Saturday, 9 AM to 4 PM  
Trails open 8 AM to sunset year-round



Near Cheney Stadium off Hwy 16

[www.TacomaNatureCenter.org](http://www.TacomaNatureCenter.org)



1919 S. Tyler Street  
Tacoma, WA 98405  
253.591.6439

The Tacoma Nature Center is dedicated to enhancing our understanding and appreciation of the natural world through education and recreation.



Discover this wildlife oasis in the heart of Tacoma



253.591.6439 [www.TacomaNatureCenter.org](http://www.TacomaNatureCenter.org)

## Self-guided Wetland Walk

**1 What is a Wetland?** – A wetland is any place where the land is wet for a portion of the year, so the area is considered a wetland, even though it may not contain water year-round. Tree and shrub species such as willow and Douglas spiraea, thrive in these moist, poorly drained soils. These porous soils soak up rain water and release it slowly into the lake. What do you think would happen during the rainy months if this area were paved instead? All of the water in Snake Lake comes from the neighborhoods around the park. Small streams used to feed the lake but now all the water is channeled in through the storm drain system.

**2 Water Lovers** – It's no wonder explorers sought out these trees when they were thirsty. Cottonwoods love water, so the sight of one of these tall, majestic beauties is often a sign of a drink. These are common wetland trees, easily identified by their triangular, or deltoid, shaped leaves. Their root systems are shallow, however, so they can blow over in heavy storms, creating habitat and nutrients in the form of nurse logs!



**3 Duck Habitat** – Wetlands like this one provide important nesting and rearing habitat for a variety of waterfowl. Canada geese, mallards, shovelers, wood ducks, common goldeneyes, bufflehead and hooded mergansers have all been spotted here, and may use the wetland in different ways. Cavity nesters, like wood ducks and mergansers, benefit from the nesting boxes around the lake, while other ducks and geese build nests in the tall reeds and grasses along the shore. What time of year would be a good time to spot ducklings?

**4 Sounds of the Wetland** – Take a moment and just listen. Try cupping your hands around your ears and closing your eyes. Can you make out different bird songs and calls? What other sounds do you hear? A squirrel? A frog? Traffic? Good observation uses many of the senses, including hearing, and sounds can tell you a great deal about your surroundings. What could sounds tell you that sight cannot?

**5 Salal** – Few shrubs signify our region like salal. Commonly found in forests, it also thrives in wet conditions as seen here. Delicate white urn shaped flowers ripen to deep purple berries by late August and provide food for wildlife and people. Berries, both fresh and dried, were especially important for local Native American tribes. Where can you go to learn about wild edibles?

**6 Reptile Refuge** – If you are visiting on a warm sunny day, chances are you will spot a painted turtle sunning itself on a log. Like all cold blooded creatures, turtles get their warmth from the air around them rather than from their own bodies. These reptiles depend on wetlands like this for food and shelter, and will hibernate on the muddy bottom through the winter months. What other Washington animals hibernate?



*Painted turtle sunning on a log.*



*Young Nature Center volunteers helping to remove invasive plant species like English Ivy*



And it was – a glacier. Over 10,000 years ago, during the last ice age, the glacier that slowly moved through this area and carved the landscape picked up this rock, smoothed it out, and eventually deposited this glacial erratic here as evidence of the icy past. What other evidence of glaciers can you find here?

**11 Gentle Giants** – These majestic Douglas fir trees are over 100 years old. Douglas firs thrive in Pacific Northwest forests where their tight needle growth provides shade, allowing shade loving plants and trees to grow beneath. Stand under a Douglas fir on a rainy day and notice how dry you stay!

**12 Who Needs Wetlands?** – Wetlands are ecologically important areas because they provide nesting, spawning, rearing and resting habitat for many species. They also retain stormwater and provide storage for flood control. Did you know that wetlands also filter metals, chemicals, and other pollutants from the water? You can help, too. Keep toxins out of our wetlands and waterways by picking up your pet's poop, using minimal chemicals in your lawn and garden, fixing auto leaks and washing vehicles at a commercial car wash. Learn more at [www.PugetSoundStartsHere.org](http://www.PugetSoundStartsHere.org).

**7 Volunteer Bridge** – Step across this tiny foot bridge and thank the many volunteers who helped construct it and this new section of trail. Countless hours went in to planning, acquiring land, clearing trails and much more in order to gain access to this special habitat. Do you want to make a difference in your community? Volunteer!

**8 Nurse Stumps** – Two very different stumps can be seen in this area. One stump has a small salal plant growing out of it. We call this a nurse stump, because the nutrients in the decaying stump help nurse along seeds and young plants that fall and grow there. A little farther down the trail is another stump riddled with holes. This stump also provides nutrition, but for bugs and the birds that eat them. What would a forest be like without stumps?

**9 Red Headed Recyclers** – Can you see the formica ant hill above the trail? It takes thousands of ants working together to run a colony like this one. Most of the workers you see are searching for dead and decaying plants and animals to bring back to the hill for food. Ants are important recyclers of nutrients in the forest, and continue the cycle of life. Be careful, though. Their bite contains small amounts of formic acid, which can sting.

**10 Slow Movers** – Look at this huge stone at your feet. How did it get here? Something of this size and weight must have been carried by something strong.

## Self-guided History Walk

**1 Rock Wall** – This pile of rocks is evidence of the Tacoma Nature Center's long history and continuing tradition of habitat restoration and conservation. Rocks were piled here to serve as reptile habitat in order to encourage and increase the biodiversity of the preserve. How can you improve wildlife habitat in your yard or neighborhood?

**2 Historical Uses** – Imagine this area as it may have looked 200 years ago, when members of the Puyallup and Nisqually Tribes lived near here. Snake Lake and the surrounding area would have been a treasure trove of resources. Tall reeds and grasses were used to make mats to place on the ground and walls of their dwellings, Berries, bulbs and tender shoots were important food sources. How do humans continue to use wetland resources for food and shelter?



**3 Filling In** – In this area, the dominant plants are Douglas spiraea and willow. Douglas spiraea can be 5-8 feet tall with a fuzzy pink flower cluster. The willow is 6-40 feet tall with alternating elongated leaves 1-3 inches long. Willow branches were useful for native people for fashioning nets – perfect for catching fish living nearby! Douglas spiraea and willow grow in dense thickets and over time can fill in a wetland, helping it evolve from a wetland to a meadow or forest.

**4 Thin Ice** – As Tacoma became more settled, people living here sought out lakes as places of recreation. Snake Lake was a popular ice skating lake during the frozen winter months. Tragically, one mild winter day in 1908, two skaters lost their lives through thin ice.

**5 Freeway Bridge** – Imagine what would have happened if SR16 was built down here instead of up there- spring flooding, shifting soils and drainage problems. In 1972, our Department of Transportation built the bridge high above to minimize disturbance and aside from a few trees cut back, very little damage was done. And when the bridge was widened in 2005, careful planning and mitigation minimized damage to the wetland. How important is green space to you?

**6 Mighty Madrone** – Look down the trail and you will see reddish barked trees reaching across on either side. These are Pacific madrone trees, which typically grow no more than 50 miles from salt water. Their extremely hard wood is covered by a thin, papery bark that can be found in shreds along the trail. Small white flower clusters ripen into small orange-red berries, occasionally eaten by native tribes, but more commonly eaten by birds. Look at the madrone leaves- do they remind you of the Washington state flower? They are related!

**7 Thanks!** – This wetland and forest “green space” has been protected as a preserve for over 30 years, thanks to the vision of local conservationists and naturalists. In the early 1970's the Tahoma Audubon Society led the efforts of volunteers to have this area preserved, and in 1979 the park was dedicated. Buildings, programs and staff followed, leading to the vibrant and vital resource the Tacoma Nature Center is today. It all began with people who cared. How can you help preserve nature in your area?

**8 What Happened Here?** – Use the clues to figure out what happened here. Do you see the jagged snag? The fallen log? Throughout time, wind and weather play a part in shaping nature. Fallen trees create snags, stumps and logs which in turn provide food and shelter for plants and animals as they die and decompose. Imagine this log in 5 years- it may be full of holes, covered with moss, or have a tree growing out of it! History marches on.

**9 Railroad Line** – Have you noticed how straight and mostly flat this section of the trail is? That's because in 1890, the Tacoma-Lake City Railway ran along here. It carried people from the hill above Old Town (26th Street) to a resort on American Lake. In 1897, the business failed and tracks were removed. Can you imagine the scenery if that train ran today?

## Self-guided Forest Walk



**1 Shady Characters** – As you climb this small hill, notice all the changes around you- the temperature may be cooler, it may be a bit darker and maybe even dryer. That's because you are entering a predominately Douglas fir forest, with trees with densely growing needles creating lots of shade. This shade affects everything that grows here, encouraging some species and deterring others. What would happen over time if Douglas fir trees closed the canopy?

**2 “Litter” Critters** – Look down at the ground. It is covered with litter – leaf litter. This organic debris rots and decays and supports new life, including flowers, trees and fungi. Animals benefit from the insects, seeds and roots that spring from this cluttered ground. Some kinds of litter, however, are unwelcome and harmful to wildlife. Can you think of ways to encourage people not to litter?

**3 New Life from Old** – This dead standing tree is useless, right? Wrong. This is a snag, and snags like this one provide homes and food for wildlife, even though they are no longer living trees. Woodpeckers, squirrels, owls and insects all benefit from snags. How many snags can you count in this forest?

**4 Lonely Oaks** – Heading along the switchbacks, you will find two elongated Oregon white oaks, also called Garry oaks. This is the north end of what was a large oak prairie stretching miles to the south. These oak savannah habitats are becoming rare. How can we preserve these special habitats?



**5 Forest Shrubs** – At the top of the ridge, the canopy is a bit more open, allowing sunlight to nourish more shrubs. Look for oceanspray, with creamy white flower clusters, darkening to brown in the fall, or hazelnut with soft, fuzzy leaves. If you are visiting in spring, seek out sweet salmonberries, or salal berries ripe in late summer. The forest is abundant in nourishing and sheltering shrubs.

**6 Mixed Forest** – This side of the slope grows the majestic Douglas firs along with the red barked Pacific madrone trees. Over time, as the Douglas firs grow even taller and thicker, what do you think will happen to the madrones?

**7 Highway View** – From here you can see SR 16, the highway bridging over Snake Lake. Trees and shrubs buffer not only the view of the highway, but the sounds of the traffic as well. As the trees and shrubs continue to grow and fill in, sound will become more muffled. Can you think of how trees could buffer sound in your yard?

**8 Twisted Mystery** – Look at the strange shape of this tree. How did it grow in this shape? Think of your own ideas. Consider the effects of the sun and other trees. What do YOU think happened?



*East-side of the Second Bridge Loop Trail*