

Greenway trails expand: Hood Canal, Sound linked

By Annie Tietje

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HANSVILLE — For the past couple of decades, the Hansville Greenway Association has hoped to provide walkers, runners, hikers, horseback riders and bicyclists with the opportunity to travel from one side of the north end of the peninsula to the other. The goal to stretch public trails from Puget Sound to Hood Canal became a reality last month.

Olympic Property Group, Kitsap County and the HGA teamed up to acquire 92 acres, plus two miles of trail easements donated by OPG, for the trail preservation group.

The county paid \$500,000 and received a matching grant, purchasing the acreage for a grand total of \$1.1 million. The property purchase was announced Dec. 17, though county officials are still finalizing the deal.

"We've already flagged some trails, we've surveyed them," said HGA President Ken Shawcroft. "The conservation easement is the only one that's usable right now... (HGA member) Sid Knutson's vision of walking from downtown Hansville to Hood Canal is finally being realized. First we have to get the trail done all the way through and we'll be able to accomplish that."

OPG has been working on the land purchase and donation since approximately 2001, said OPG President Jon Rose. Several attempts were made to use funding to purchase the property in the past, and with the grant the county was finally able to acquire it. The new acreage will further

expand Buck Lake Park, along Buck Lake Road, which also houses one of the major entrances to the Greenway trail system.

"This is really a win for everybody," Rose said. "The deal went through some changes in the last few days, but it's still looking good... The trail donation is two miles, and everybody wins. This is a really motivated group bent on having it. For the Greenway folks, crossing the peninsula in a route from Hood Canal to Hansville is a big deal."

The one downside to the acquisition was the amount of land purchased, originally supposed to be 21 acres more than the 92 acres, said Kitsap County Commissioner Steve Bauer. Because of a Washington state tax law, if acreage is zoned wooded/rural no taxes are due on the property, but if the area is rezoned, back taxes are due on it. In this case, the property was rezoned to open space, Bauer said. Instead of using the funding to purchase all of the property, \$75,000 was withdrawn to pay taxes instead and 21 acres was subtracted to stay within budget.

"The statute has specific exemptions, like King County and nature preserves," Bauer said. "We haven't had to pay back taxes on open space, and at the last minute we found out the amount for 10 years of back taxes."

He said he would like to work to have such a requirement reversed because the land is not being used for development but for trails and open space. If it was, however, Bauer said it was unlikely the county would pursue the final 21 acres because of overall budget constraints.

Shawcroft said the property the HGA does have will be converted into trails beginning the spring, with a completion date sometime in the summer. Members and volunteers have already been bushwhacking in the area, scoping out the land for the new trails.