

# Navy pays \$4.92 million for easement fees in Jefferson County

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(Photo: Navy Region Northwest Public Affairs)

The Navy has partnered with conservation organizations to preserve more than 3,310 acres in Jefferson County in areas near ongoing naval operations.

The Navy paid land easement fees of \$4.92 million to obtain usage rights for the acreage that spans from the east side of the Puget Sound from the Hood Canal Bridge up north toward Naval Magazine Indian Island. The partnership set aside 854 acres in the Chimacum Ridge, 154 acres of the historic Yarr Farm and two sections of land near Mats Mats Bay of 817 acres and 1,485 acres.

The Navy's conservation partnerships were formed through the Department of Defense's Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration program, known by the acronym of REPI. Through the program, the military can form what Department of Defense calls "win-win partnerships" with conservation groups or state and local governments to share acquisition costs for land that sits where the Navy has an operational interest.

"We work with our partners to identify areas with common interests and protect working forest, agricultural lands and high-value habitat," said Lynn Wall, Naval Base Kitsap Community Planning Liaison Officer. "In the Chimacum Valley, our partnership supports agricultural lands and helps further and develop agribusiness, while protecting the watershed and the Navy mission."

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While the partnership allows the Navy to limit potential training and testing interruptions near military installations by restricting use of the land, the program allows conservation groups to protect land that could otherwise be developed.

"Our partnership is like a big jigsaw puzzle with many intricate pieces," said Sarah Spaeth, conservation and strategic partnerships director of the Jefferson Land Trust. "But when it all comes together, it's a beautiful thing."

Conservation work in the Chimacum Creek watershed has been an ongoing project for the Jefferson Land Trust, outreach director Caroline Robertson said in a press release.

"This has been a big focus of our work for decades now, starting from salmon habitat protection in the lower reaches of the creek," Robertson said. "Farmland protection, including salmon habitat zones in Chimacum's farmland, has been very powerful for our community, and the watershed of the upland forests of Oak Bay ridge, including Mats Mats and Chimacum Ridge are iconic parts of our landscape and heritage."

The acres set aside on the Chimacum Ridge are located entirely within the Chimacum Creek watershed, with tributaries feeding into Chimacum Creek. The creek serves as a main waterway for several species of salmon in addition to Pacific lamprey, steelhead and cutthroat trout.

In the long-run, conservation groups hope to keep the land open for public access.

"Our aim is to maintain this land as a community forest, which will be locally owned and managed for the benefit of the community," said Richard Corff, project manager for the Trust for Public Land.

Corff said the area will likely have trail upkeep, public access, and possibly on-site environmental education classes hosted for local elementary schools.

The Navy purchased the land-use rights for acreage near Mats Mats Bay from Pope Resources, a land and timber company out of Poulsbo.

While the agreement will allow the company to continue using the land as a working forest, "the Navy owns the restrictive easement. The easement extinguishes further development rights forever," Corff said.

The land will be open to non-motorized public access.

"We're talking mostly mountain bikes, hiking, and bird-watching," Corff said.

For the acquired land rights in the Chimacum Ridge and Mats Mats Bay, Wall said the Navy sought out the owners and worked out restrictive use agreements. Deals such as those can take years to form, she said.

With the Yarr Farm property, the Navy decided to purchase the rights when the land came on the market.

The previous landowners had plans to develop the land into mini ranches, Navy Region Northwest spokesman Phil Guerrero said. However, the conservation groups were able to find a farming family that wanted to work the property as a whole with a conservation easement that ensured the property would remain undivided.

The new owners want to build an organic farm and restore Chimacum Creek, which runs through the property, according to a Navy press release.

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To date, the Navy and its partners have protected more than 11,600 acres in the region at a cost of more than \$23 million, Wall said.

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Previous partnerships have been focused on riparian corridor protections along the Hood Canal. ([http://archive.kitsapsun.com/northwest-navy-life/navy-proposes-new-easement-on-hood-canal-ep-492293026-355869031.html?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=youbet](http://archive.kitsapsun.com/northwest-navy-life/navy-proposes-new-easement-on-hood-canal-ep-492293026-355869031.html?utm_medium=email&utm_source=youbet)) including 2,677 acres along the Duckabush River and 3,594 acres along the Dosewallips River. The Navy has also set aside 549 acres in the Dabob Bay Natural Area. (<http://www.kitsapsun.com/story/news/local/2017/10/14/navy-sets-aside-more-th-acres-chimacum-valley-conservation-use-prevent-encroachment-nbk-installation/725730001/>)

Wall said NBK's successes with REPI in Washington state can be traced back to community support for conservation work in the area.

"Hood Canal and the habitation here is really important at both the state and national level. There's lots of focus on protection of that area," Wall said. "It's just a special area to a lot of people and by coming together, we can leverage those various efforts and make everyone's various funds go further."

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