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Totten, Eld watersheds gain new allies

JOHN DODGE; The Olympian

Capitol Land Trust has formed an alliance with the Griffin Neighborhood Association to preserve special natural areas in the Totten and Eld inlet watersheds.

Members of the neighborhood group, primarily residents of the Steamboat Island Peninsula, will be asked to donate \$15,000 a year for the next five years to support land trust efforts to secure shorelines, wetlands and other environmentally sensitive land in a rapidly developing area.

"There's a sense of urgency on the peninsula," resident David Shuett-Hames said. "A lot of the larger parcels have been broken up into developments. We need to get this going while opportunities to preserve land are still there."

A case in point is a 20-acre parcel on the eastern shoreline of Totten Inlet that features one-quarter mile of undeveloped beach and a small estuary that is home to migratory birds, forage fish, salmon and other fish and wildlife.

The dense forests, natural steep bluffs, wetlands and three streams on the property stand in sharp contrast to new homes under construction nearby on waterfront lots partially stripped of vegetation.

The Capitol Land Trust is in active negotiations with the property owners to preserve the estuary property, with support from the newly formed Steamboat Conservation Partnership, land trust executive director Eric Erler.

"What's really neat about this place is that it's a self-contained, fully functioning ecosystem," he said. "We've been aware of the conservation importance of this property for five years."

In fact, the Totten and Eld inlets were high interest areas for the land trust long before the partnership developed, Erler noted.

"We're not modifying our mission or priorities," Erler said. "We identified it as an area we'd focus on when we did our first strategic plan 10 years ago."

The nonprofit land trust, which was formed in 1986, uses donations, state and federal grants and other funding sources to buy property outright from willing sellers or preserve it through conservation easements with property owners.

To date, the group has protected some 3,200 acres and 10 miles of shoreline in Thurston, Mason and Grays Harbor counties, including 1,000 acres and six miles of shoreline in the Totten and Eld Inlet watersheds.

Griffin Neighborhood Association board member Chris Wickham said 50 members will be asked to pledge \$300 each.

The fund raising drive will kick off at the neighborhood association annual picnic 3 to 6 p.m. Saturday at the Prosperity Grange.

Money raised will be placed in a special account administered by the land trust and used solely for activities in the two South Sound watersheds.