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Lily Point project could be lasting county legacy

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The Nature Conservancy has done the people of Whatcom County, and the local environment, a great service with its recent purchase of 146 acres of land on Point Roberts.

The conservation group bought the acreage from a development company for \$2.5 million and is now selling the land to Whatcom County. The transaction allows the conservancy to go out and apply for grants, which would reduce the price the county has to pay the conservancy for the land. The county is already seeking \$2 million in grants from state agencies to cover its costs.

The 146 acres includes tidelands where the southeast corner of Point Roberts juts out into Boundary Bay. The area is known as Lily Point.

The site joins one previously given to the county to create what will be known as the Lily Point Marine Reserve. The reserve will be managed by the Whatcom County Parks Department.

Last April, the Whatcom Land Trust bought 90 acres from the same development company to start the reserve. The Nature Conservancy's purchase includes 4,200 feet of shoreline and 94 acres of tidelands. It's that marine habitat that makes the reserve different, in that it helps protect a place officials say is teeming with sea life. And Nature Conservancy officials say the tide flats support more than 5 million migratory shorebirds and waterfowl, as well as eagles and great blue herons.

It is important that conservancy officials work as hard as they can to find grants, so the price the county must pay for the acreage is minimized. We would love it if the cost were \$0. But if the county must pay something, we hope that money comes from grants from other places. It would not be appropriate to spend county general fund money on this project.

County Parks officials say they will eventually add trails to tie the sections of the reserve together and to expose some of the history of the area. The Coast Salish people have gathered at Lily Point for generations for salmon fishing.

In the late 1800s, settlers joined in the fishing and the point was home to an Alaska Packers Association cannery from 1884 to 1917. You can still find some remnants of the cannery on the beach. Officials say they hope to remove those and some pilings from the cannery as well. Parks officials hope to someday offer people an interpretive kiosk or signs that explain the history of the point.