Any meeting of a river and a sea is a place of change... It will be proof of our ability to survive...

if we learn to respect wild places like the Nisqually Delta, to trust them for their naturalness, and to love them for their power to move us.

Victor B. Scheffer, Scholar and Author

Nisqually River as seen from the River Overlook
Photo: Sheila McCartan USFWS
As surrounding wildlife habitat is lost to development, Nisqually Refuge has become an increasingly important place for wildlife, especially migratory birds. Birds on their migrations north and south use the Refuge as a stopover to feed and rest before continuing their migration. For others, including thousands of ducks and geese, it’s the end of their seasonal journey and a place to spend the winter. Songbirds arriving in the spring find places to nest and raise their young. For resident birds, Nisqually Refuge is a year-round home.

Over 300 species of birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, and amphibians inhabit Nisqually NWR. A variety of hawks, owls, and other raptors hunt in the fields and marshes. Woodpeckers, warblers, and small mammals are found in the woodlands. Shorebird flocks search for food in the mudflats while harbor seals rest in the salt marshes nearby. Freshwater ponds provide habitat for otters, ducks, and herons. Mixed conifer forests on the bluffs above the Delta provide perches for bald eagles. Salmon and steelhead use the estuary for passage to upriver areas and transition to the Sound.

The Nisqually River Delta, a biologically rich and diverse area at the southern end of Puget Sound, supports a variety of habitats. Here, the freshwater of the Nisqually River combines with the saltwater of Puget Sound to form an estuary rich in nutrients and detritus. These nutrients support a web of sea life – the benefits which extend throughout Puget Sound and beyond.

While most major estuaries in the state have been filled, dredged, or developed, Nisqually River’s has been set aside for wildlife. In 1974, Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge was established to protect the delta and its diversity of fish and wildlife habitats. The Nisqually estuary was restored in 2009, by removing dikes and reconnecting 762 acres with the tides of Puget Sound. This is the largest estuary restoration project in the Pacific Northwest and an important step in the recovery of Puget Sound.
Sanctuary - closed to all access including boats
Research Natural Area
Closed to all consumptive uses. Closed to boats October 1 to March 31.
Riparian Forest
Overlook
Nisqually River
Overlook
46th Ave.
Meridian Rd.
Nisqually
Reach
Nature
Center
Luhr Beach
Boat Ramp
Exit 114
Exit 114
D'Milluhr Rd.
Meridian Rd.
Environmental
Education Center
Refuge Entrance
Visitor Center
McAllister Creek
Nisqually River
Red Salmon Creek
To Tacoma
To Olympia
Twin Barns
Observation
Platform
Shannon Slough Blind
McAllister Creek Viewing Platform
Observation Tower
Nisqually River
Overlook
Riparian Forest
Overlook
Visitor Center
McAllister Creek
Visitor Center
Environmental
Education Center
Exit 114
Refuge Entrance
Puget Sound
McNeil Street
Mounts Rd.
5
Kilometers 1/2
N
Nisqually Refuge provides abundant opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreation. Hiking, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, fishing, and environmental education all allow visitors to learn more about the natural world and the importance of places rich in beauty and biological diversity.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages national wildlife refuges and national fish hatcheries throughout the country for the continued conservation, protection, and enhancement of our fish and wildlife resources and their habitats.
The Refuge is located 8 miles east of Olympia, Washington. From Interstate 5, take exit 114 and follow the signs to the Refuge.

The Refuge and trails are open daily from sunrise to sunset. The office is open Monday through Friday 7:30 am to 4:00 pm. The Visitor Center and Nature Shop are open Wednesday through Sunday 9:00 am to 4:00 pm.

Daily fee is $3.00 per four adults. Valid Federal Duck Stamp, Interagency Annual, Military Annual, Refuge Annual, Senior, and Access Passes admit four adults. Children 16 and under enter free.

The Refuge has 4 miles of trails. The 1-mile accessible Twin Barns Loop Trail is open year round. The Nisqually Estuary Trail is 4-miles round trip from the Visitor Center. A portion of this trail is closed seasonally during the waterfowl hunting season. The trails provide views of wildlife habitats and access to observation platforms, a tower, and blind. Please stay on the trails.

Visitor Center exhibits describe the Nisqually Watershed and Pacific Flyway to orient visitors to the area. Knowledgeable volunteers are available to answer questions and a good collection of educational items can be found in the Nature Shop. Visitors are welcome to view a freshwater wetland and take in the latest wildlife art exhibit.

The Refuge has indoor and outdoor programming for schools and other education groups. The Education Center houses classroom space and exhibits about the Refuge. It is open weekdays to school and other educational groups by reservation only.

The Refuge has 191 acres of tideflats in the Nisqually estuary open to boat access waterfowl hunting. Hunting is permitted seven days a week during State waterfowl hunting season dates. State hunting license requirements apply and no additional Refuge permit is necessary.

Boating is permitted in waters outside the Sanctuary Area and seasonally in the Research Natural Area. Canoeists, kayakers, and small boaters should beware of hazardous tides, shallow waters, wind, and weather conditions around the Nisqually Delta. The nearest public boat ramp is at Luhr Beach.

Fishing from boats is permitted in waters outside the Sanctuary Area and Research Natural Area. There is no bank fishing access along the Nisqually River or McAllister Creek. Washington State regulations apply.

Jogging, pets, bicycling, camping, and fires are prohibited on the Refuge. Please stay on trails.
Great Blue Herons
© Michael Wolf