

Birch Bay Shoreline Ecology Self Guided Tour

#1 Point Whitehorn Marine Reserve—Point Whitehorn Marine Reserve provides easy access to forest, bluffs and beach, with a 3/4 mile fully accessible trail to spectacular viewpoints. A switchback path descends from the bluff to the cobble beach. **Sorry but no pets are allowed in this park.**

Points of interest

- View coastal feeder bluffs that provide sediment (sand and rocks) for Birch Bay. **Please respect private tidelands when walking on the beach.**
- The tidelands of this park are within the Cherry Point Aquatic Reserve, with critical herring spawning habitat, kelp forests, eelgrass beds, migratory habitat for juvenile salmon, and foraging areas for marine seabirds and migratory waterfowl populations.

#2 Birch Bay State Park—Birch Bay State Park offers access to public beaches, clam beds, trails, day use and camping facilities, and interpretive programs.

Points of interest

- Experience natural shorelines without artificial armoring like bulkheads or sea walls.
- Search for small crabs and marine life in the tidelands making use of this important habitat.
- Walk through remnants of the native forest that covered the Birch Bay watershed prior to clearing for agriculture and development.
- See the Terrell Creek estuary and salt marsh. Note how the path of Terrell Creek is confined behind Birch Bay Drive which is built on the natural beach berm. Without the road and buildings, the path of Terrell Creek would change over time cutting different channels through the berm to the bay.

#3 Mouth of Terrell Creek—You can see the mouth of Terrell Creek just north of Lora Lane while taking a walk along Birch Bay Drive. **There is no public parking at this location.**

Points of interest

- What's that smell? During the summer, longer days and with more sunshine cause increased algae growth. This algae accumulates in the lower sections of Terrell Creek where it decomposes and creates an unpleasant smell. This algae is an important food source for insects which in turn feed birds and juvenile fish like salmon.
- Look for the tide gate under Birch Bay Drive (it's covered with a metal grate) that limits the flow of salt water into the stream at Lora Lane. These areas behind Birch Bay Drive are natural coastal wetlands.

#4 Birch Bay Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center (7900 Birch Bay Drive)—Park at the Chamber, learn more about services at Birch Bay, and walk to the beach.

Points of interest

- Note the artificially armored (protected) shoreline with sea walls to the north and groins (concrete structures sticking out into the beach perpendicular to the shoreline) built to slow the natural process of erosion.
- Large, concrete pipes carry stormwater into the bay replacing original natural stream channels.
- Look across the Bay at the coastal feeder bluffs on Canada's Gulf Islands. Can you find Point Roberts?

#5 Cottonwood Beach Public Access—Whatcom County Parks and Recreation public beach access to the north part of Birch Bay.

Points of interest

- This portion of Birch Bay is an accumulation zone where currents push logs, sediment (sand and rocks), and aquatic vegetation building up the natural beach berm and adding material to the shoreline.

