Channel Preserve
Trail and Recreation Assessment

The purpose of this assessment is to inform the Channel Preserve Management Plan about existing site conditions, considerations, and opportunities for trails and recreation. The Channel Preserve is roughly 10 acres on the western edge of Lopez and is composed of forested uplands with a grassy road that gradually slopes down to 467 feet of beach. Additionally, the property abuts 1.5 miles of public tidelands. The Preserve is valued for its scenic, environmental, and low-impact recreational values. The plan for recreational opportunities is to provide for public access and enjoyment of the property in a way that does not detract from the environmental and scenic resources.

Trails are designed to enable access to the most scenic areas of the property while utilizing existing development. Signage is kept to a minimum and recommended where it is most needed to communicate allowable and restricted uses and provide interpretation.

Existing Site Infrastructure
“Swale Trail” - photo
A grassy driveway extends from Eagle’s Roost Lane to the beach, with a fork off to Meadow Lane. The Port of Lopez holds an easement over most this driveway and a drainage swale. The east ~100 feet of this is owned by the Port of Lopez, a gate blocks the entrance from Eagle’s Roost, with no allowed access to the Land Bank property. Where the roadway continues on the preserve, it slopes gradually down the beach. The road has excellent potential for being a primary trail; it is an existing impact on the site and it can be maintained by mowing.
Where the roadway ends and opens up at the beach is the northern property boundary. The area is flat and wide and encroaches slightly onto the neighboring property. A smaller pathway (photo) cuts onto the beach slightly further south where the slope and shrubby vegetation ends. This smaller trail may be considered a better access point because it directs ‘traffic’ into the preserve rather than at the property line. The roadway could be blocked off at the intersection with split rail fencing to direct visitors through the narrow trail.

Meadow Lane/ Easement Trail -photo
Neighbors on Meadow and Ivy Lane hold an easement to access the shore from Meadow Lane over the Land Bank parcels, and they use an old driveway from Meadow Lane that intersects the grassy road. This trail does not align with the easement locations. This trail could also be developed into the driveway access to the neighboring southern (Triangle C) parcel and was intended to be the driveway for parcel “b”. Installation of a gate and signage is recommended to discourage public use of the Meadow Lane trail and direct visitors onto the Land Bank trails.

Building sites
On the north western side of the roadway is an overgrown clearing that was considered as a building site. As a trail destination there are peekaboo views (framed by Usnea lichen, photo) but no substantial scenic expanses.

Other Infrastructure
A well exists on the northern edge of the swale. The southern abutting property has a well sited within 100 feet of the boundary line. Utilities are installed on the southwestern edge and south of the swale.
Existing Uses
Neighbors use the Meadow Lane trail to access the beach. Existing uses are walking with the beach as a destination, launching boats, and either picnicking or wildlife viewing on the beach or walking north on the tidelands.

Demographics are based on footprints or occasional encounters. Sometimes individuals or pairs and occasionally a dog. In the summer, one family group (2 adults, 2 children) were encountered exploring the tidelands. Installed trail counters (TrafX) logged an average of 3 visits per day on the Meadow Lane trail, and less than one on the “upper trail.”

Site Features
Wetlands- A wetland reconnaissance identified five Category IV wetlands. From a regulatory perspective, footpath/trail construction within these wetlands are allowed (Rozewood 2018). The wetlands are small and could likely be avoided. Wetland “D” is already bisected by the trail that leads to the “overlook” and a trail crossing or puncheon-style crossing would be beneficial for surface flow.

Hazards-The shoreline bluffs are categorized as unstable. Within the property, there are steep slopes that are subject to erosion. To the north and south along the shoreline, there are feeder bluffs. To the south, some of these are considered “excellent” (Department of Ecology) and have had erosion events in recent years. Visitors should be discouraged from accessing the southern shoreline with signage.

Considerations
Establishment of positive and negative control points influence how public access affects the site. Positive control points where we want to lead people, and negative control points are areas to avoid.

The primary zone or main destination is the 467 feet of beach owned by the Land Bank where visitors can sit on driftwood, picnic, and watch wildlife. The secondary area of interest is the abutting public tidelands; the tidelands to the north provide walking up to Rock Point.

Several areas may be considered “negative control points.” These are: Meadow Lane beyond property boundary and the easement trail. The tidelands south of the Land Bank property for several reasons. The upland slopes are unstable, the cobbles increase in size and are more difficult to walk on, and the distance to Shark Reef National wildlife refuge.
The uplands and driftwood along the northern tidelands are private property. Possibly the “overlook” zone, because there are limited views visitors may try to find a viewpoint and cause bluff erosion. Management actions in these areas include signage, fencing, and gates.

Recreation
Trail Concept
A preliminary trail concept proposed building two trails parallel to the swale to the north and south. Additionally, it included a loop trail to the overlook. This would create a significant “build-out” feel to the site. The preserve is relatively narrow, at several places 100 feet wide, and trail users would be visible to each other along each route. Vehicle traffic from Meadow Lane can be heard and sometimes seen in the winter. To the north, the neighbor’s pond, clearing and house can be seen in places.

Recommendations
With the shoreline as the primary destination, one pedestrian walking route is proposed on the existing swale trail/road that gently slopes down to the beach. This grassy route can be mowed for a single footpath or wider for walking side by side. By utilizing existing site features, disturbance to the site can be minimized.

Beach
This western facing beach provides excellent opportunities for low-impact recreation including walking, wildlife viewing, and picnicking. Small human-powered boat launching, paddleboarding, or kayaking could be a secondary use. The property abuts public tidelands that extends north and south. An interpretive sign installed near the beach entrance indicating the “sections of beach” could describe the feeder bluffs, upper shore, mid-shore and low-shore habitats, while delineating which areas can be accessed by visitors. Upper shore boundary corners should have signage. The southern boundary of the property should be signed as closed.
Parking

Currently there is no parking area. A graveled parking area of 4-5 cars is proposed at the south eastern corner of the property. The entry would be accessed via Meadow Lane off Shark Reef Road. Trees will need to be cleared for construction of the parking lot. The area under consideration contains primarily small Douglas-fir, pine, willow (photo).

Interpretation and Signage

Signage is used in a limited capacity to orient visitors, direct flow, and provide information on allowable uses and restrictions. A more detailed signage plan should be developed as site plans are formalized.

Directional signage
Roadside directional signage is sometimes used for Land Bank Preserves to orient visitors to the site. (photo example from FBS). Due to feedback in the acquisition, no roadside directional signage is proposed on Shark Reef Road.

Preserve Sign
A large preserve sign may be placed at the preserve entry from Meadow Lane. (photo example from Upright Head)

Additional signs with a preserve map and allowable uses and/or restrictions are proposed.