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Swinomish Indian Tribal Community, State Parks Commission announce co-ownership of Kiket Island

*Tribe and state forge unique agreements
to jointly own and manage property for preservation and limited public use*

OLYMPIA – June 23, 2010 – The Swinomish Indian Tribal Community and the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission announced the signing of final intergovernmental agreements that cement the co-ownership and co-management of public parkland on Kiket Island on the Swinomish Reservation in Skagit County.

The purpose of the joint agreements between State Parks and the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community is to preserve the cultural and natural resources on the property in perpetuity, while providing for limited public day use in the future. The island was purchased on June 18. The property, which is not yet named, will be managed as a unit of Deception Pass State Park.

“I want to thank Brian Cladoosby and the Swinomish Tribe for collaborating with us on a truly groundbreaking agreement. As we continue our efforts to clean up Puget Sound, we must work to find creative ways to protect critical habitat,” said Gov. Chris Gregoire. “Getting this agreement done took a real partnership with the Swinomish Tribe and what we accomplished is an example of innovative solutions that benefit everyone and protects a treasured piece of Washington for generations.”

Kiket Island lies entirely within the boundaries of the Swinomish Reservation, as established by the Treaty of Point Elliott in 1855. The Swinomish Indian Tribal Community, the Commission and the Trust for Public Land accumulated grants and donation from several entities, including the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office, the Trust for Public Land and the Nature Conservancy, in order to purchase the property at an appraised value of \$14 million from a private property owner. The funds used for the purchase are restricted funds that may only be used for land acquisition that protects environmentally endangered lands, such as nationally declining coastal wetlands, for public use.

Kiket Island provides sweeping views toward Deception Pass and Whidbey Island and has a circumference of more than two miles of intact shoreline with native eelgrass that supports bio-diverse populations of shellfish, invertebrate fish and crustaceans. The property has a broad spectrum of habitats, including mixed deciduous and conifer forests, significant old-growth trees, and a “rocky bald” environment with fragile, thin soil that hosts a unique community of native plants.

“Kiket Island is a rare and beautiful place, and our work together ensures it remains a legacy for Washington families to visit for generations,” said Commission Chair Fred Olson. “It provides critical habitats for healthy marine life in Puget Sound.”

The property includes approximately 84 acres on Kiket and Flagstaff islands and approximately nine acres on Fidalgo Island. The property has been deemed by the Tribe and the Commission as excellent for research, habitat protection and limited recreation, as well as environmental education for the visiting public.

“For thousands of years, ancestors and members of the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community have used Kiket Island to hunt, fish, shellfish and gather and to engage in ceremonies of spiritual or cultural significance,” said Tribal Chairman Brian Cladoosby. “Our unique partnership with State Parks allows the tribe to continue our traditional life ways at Kiket Island and ensures permanent protection of this amazing natural and cultural resource.”

In the 1970s, the Tribe and other concerned groups and individuals successfully prevented construction of a nuclear power plant at Kiket Island. Since then, the Kiket Island upland parcels have been privately owned by a family who, for the most part, chose not to develop the property. As a result, the natural ecology and beauty of Kiket Island are largely undisturbed.

Staff from the Tribe and the Commission worked for two years on the details of co-ownership and co-management and to resolve complex legal issues related to the acquisition. Under the joint agreements, the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community and Washington State Parks will jointly manage the Kiket Island upland parcels, and State Parks and the public will receive the right to cross adjacent tribally owned tidelands for limited purposes related to park operations, as long as agreements remain in effect. Other involved parties included the Governor's Office, the state Department of Ecology and the state Attorney General's Office.

With the purchase completed, the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community and State Parks are starting work on a management plan that will include conservation activities as well as development of appropriate day-use public recreation opportunities consistent with the long-term protection of the property. When a management plan is in place and the property is open to the public, the public will be allowed to beach kayaks and canoes in designated areas. No motor boats or public hunting, fishing or shellfish harvesting will be allowed.

"I am personally honored to work with the Tribe on such a rare and wonderful opportunity," said State Parks Director Rex Derr. "I am also grateful to work with a group of people – and it's a long list – who had the vision and drive to make this happen," said Derr. "People were heart and guts behind this, and as far as we know, there's nothing like this co-ownership and co-management agreement in the country. The public is going to benefit."