



PADDLER'S PLAYGROUND

WILLAPA BAY, WA

BY TAMARA MULDOON

Paddling a boat can be as calming for the soul as it is stimulating for the body. Southwest Washington's Willapa Bay—the Northwest's second largest tidal estuary—is a paddler's playground. With more than 100 miles of shoreline and six tributary rivers, Willapa Bay offers a variety of locations to kayak or canoe, all in close proximity. You could easily spend a week there and have a different experience each day.

Protected from ocean waves by 28-mile-long Long Beach Peninsula, Willapa Bay and its tributary rivers and streams allow leisurely paddling amid coastal grasslands, marshes and forests populated by plentiful wildlife.

Bayside communities Raymond, South Bend and Bay Center, plus Long Beach Peninsula towns offer food, fuel and lodging. Willapa Paddle Adventures (WillapaPaddleAdventures.com) in Raymond provides equipment rental and guided tours by appointment. The shop is adjacent to a public kayak launch.

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When you go, pick up the brochure "Paddle and Discover Willapa Harbor" at the Visitor Center (willapaharbor.org), 415 Commercial St., Raymond. It includes river maps and other helpful information. Some launch locations require a Discover Pass parking permit.

Make paddling a breeze and avoid messy mudflats by timing your upriver excursions with the incoming tide and return on the ebb. You'll find area tide tables on the website saltwatertides.com.

Access both North River and Smith Creek from the same launch. North River is a substantial tributary where waterfowl and a small houseboat community provide visual interest. Smith Creek winds through wetland meadows and woodlands, great for birdwatching.

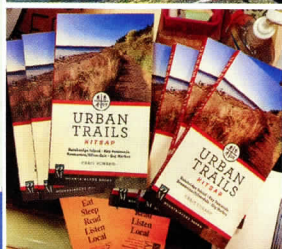
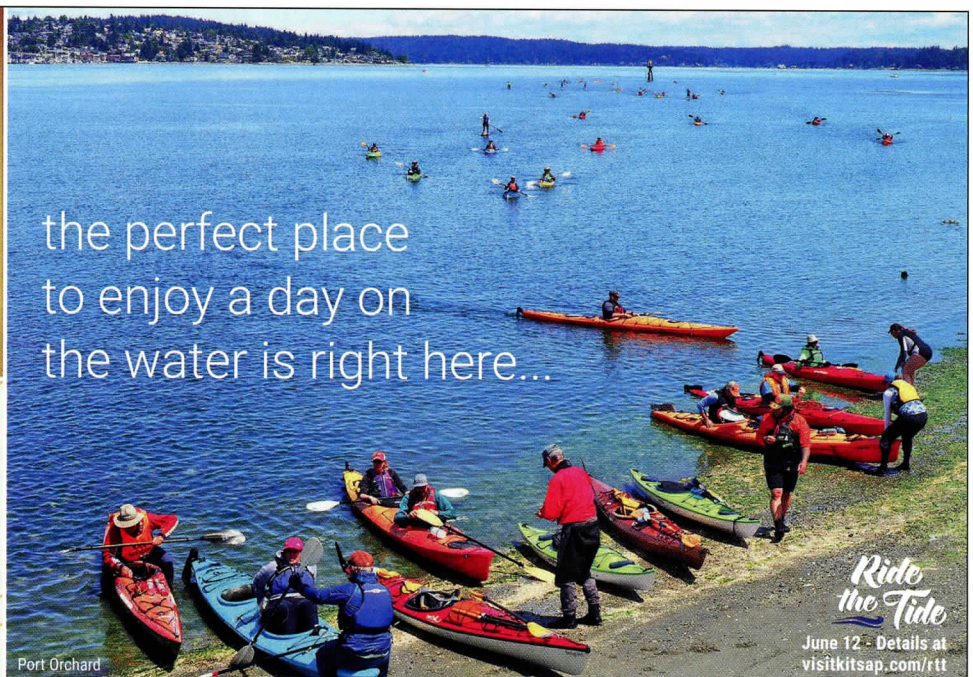
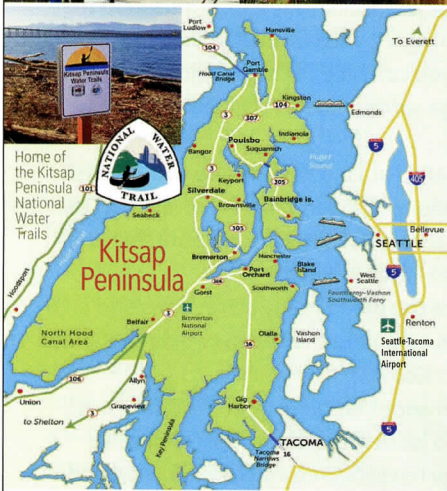
Explore the upper Willapa River's North and South forks from three launch points in Raymond. A kayak

launch dock and boat ramp in South Bend affords easy access to the lower Willapa River.

The Bone River, located in a Natural Area Preserve, is a premier location for wildlife viewing. Launch from the river bank. You'll see numerous species of birds and perhaps river otters on this leisurely paddle.

For the Niawiakum and Palix Rivers, use the Palix River Boat Ramp along Hwy. 101. Bay Center boat basin offers another choice but requires traversing the mouth of the Palix where power boats and wind-driven waves may cause hazards.

The mouth of the Naselle River has no launch point, so use the boat ramp in Naselle, one mile south on Hwy. 401. A boat ramp at Willapa National Wildlife Refuge Headquarters (fws.gov/refuge/willapa) gives access to Long Island, where hiking trails, old-growth cedars and wildlife await.



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- Comfort Inn on the Bay - Port Orchard | 360-895-2666 | tinyurl.com/h8ovrzw
- Guesthouse Inn & Suites - Poulsbo | 360-697-4400 | tinyurl.com/y313dyaz
- Oxford Suites - Silverdale Waterfront | 888-698-7848 | oxfordsuitessilverdale.com
- Poulsbo Inn & Suites - Little Norway | 800-597-5151 | poulsboinn.com
- Port Gamble Guest Houses | 360-447-8473 | portgambleguesthouses.com
- Red Lion Port Orchard | 360-895-7818 | tinyurl.com/y4d3jsu3
- Hampton Inn & Suites - Bremerton | 360-405-0200 | bremertonsuites.hamptoninn.com
- Bainbridge Island Lodging Association | DestinationBainbridge.com
- Airbnb - airbnb.com. Type in the name of town to find a place to stay on the Kitsap Peninsula.