

Hiking idea: CHEHALIS RIVER SURGE PLAIN NATURAL AREA PRESERVE TRAIL from the Olympian

Hike description:

This easy trail is a converted railroad grade that follows a route along the edge of the “surge plain” of the Chehalis River, which is the place where the tide mixes with the fresh water. As you walk along the trail, you will find yourself puzzling over how the mix of saltwater and fresh water seems to work well in some habitats and not in others. Where is the line drawn, or the tipping point reached, that the salinity of the water is no longer hospitable for certain plants and trees? This 2,643-acre preserve contains the largest and best quality tidal surge plain wetland in the state. The site protects sloughs that wind through the site, providing important shelter for young salmon and other fish.

In the summer of 2009, a 6-foot-wide, compacted-gravel surface was completed for the entire length of the trail. The trail passes through a variety of low-elevation, river-bottom habitat, with some large trees, including Sitka spruce and western red cedar. There are parking lots at each end, 3 1/2 miles apart, with informal fishing access at the end of Preacher’s Slough Road.

Directions: In Montesano, take Highway 107. Turn right on Preacher Slough Road, 3 1/2 miles from Montesano. Cross the trail and turn into the parking lot on the left. The trail crosses a slough on a bridge and continues 3.5 miles west to a smaller lot off Blue Slough Road.

Difficulty rating: 1 (1 is easiest, 5 is most difficult)

Miles round-trip: 7

Elevation: Minimal

Best time of year: Year-round

Pass: None needed

Also: On all outdoor excursions, carry the 10 essentials and clothing appropriate and adequate to the conditions you might encounter. Montesano has restaurants for an after-hike meal or snack.

Dept of Natural Resources

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This Hike of the Week is presented by Hiking/Backpacking Committees of the Olympia and Tacoma branches of The Mountaineers.