

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Conservation Deal Protects Critical Shoreline on Tarboo Bay – Critical step in a larger conservation effort for the estuary

Pope Resources has agreed to delay timber harvest on 120 acres of steep forested slopes along Tarboo Bay to allow conservation groups time to secure funds to permanently protect the area. “This is the first big step in working cooperatively with landowners to secure long-term protection for one of the finest shellfish bays and salt marsh estuaries in Puget Sound,” said Peter Bahls, Director of Northwest Watershed Institute (NWI), a non-profit science-based conservation organization based in Port Townsend.

“We are pleased to continue our working relationship with the Northwest Watershed Institute and support their efforts to promote a balanced solution for the protection of the unique watershed of Tarboo Creek and Dabob Bay,” said David Nunes, President and CEO of Pope Resources. “We hope this transaction encourages and supports future efforts to protect this area.”

The conservation agreement temporarily secures a key parcel of private land that was scheduled to be clear-cut and is located immediately up the slope from a state-owned Natural Area Preserve and commercial shellfish tidelands owned by Rock Point Oyster Company on the east side of Tarboo Bay.

In February of 2005, Jefferson County commissioners, shellfish companies and NWI urged Pope Resources to hold off on logging to allow conservation groups a chance to purchase a conservation easement. “To their credit, Pope Resources held off on the cutting and we’ve reached a clear agreement” Bahls said.

Pope Resources and NWI signed a legally binding option agreement last week that gives NWI up to two years to seek grant funding and purchase a conservation easement that would permanently protect the forested slopes. The plan is for the conservation easement to be transferred to the Jefferson Land Trust, one of the key partners on the project.

Tarboo-Dabob Bay is one of the largest and least impacted saltmarsh estuaries remaining in Puget Sound, and supports shellfish, fish and wildlife resources of

statewide importance, said Bahls. Fish sampling in 2003 conducted by the NWI, with funding from Jefferson County Marine Resources Committee and assistance from volunteers with the Port Townsend Marine Science Center, documented that the bay was important nursery grounds for young Hood Canal summer chum salmon and Chinook salmon, both listed as threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. The bay is also considered one of the top oyster growing areas in the state. The forested shorelines protect the bay's water quality and provide nest sites for bald eagles, osprey, and great blue heron rookeries.

Parts of the conservation puzzle are already in place. The existing Dabob Natural Area Preserve owned by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is located on both sides of the bay and protects near-pristine saltmarsh spits. A 160-acre Critical Habitat Preserve previously sold by Pope Resources to the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife protects the lower mile of Tarboo Creek and surrounding older forest at the head of the bay.

A coalition of organizations is now urging to expand the preserve to include the bay's critical contributing areas – the forested slopes, shorelines, and feeder streams - to maintain the long-term health of this important estuary in the face of increasing development pressure, including road building, logging, shoreline armoring, and residential development.

Conservation groups, landowners, and elected representatives are urging DNR to expand the boundaries of the existing Natural Area Preserve (NAP) or form a new Natural Resource Conservation Area (NRCA) that will provide long-term, comprehensive protection to Tarboo-Dabob Bay. An expanded NAP, or new NRCA, is not a regulatory measure, but gives DNR the go-ahead to seek funding and work with willing landowners to purchase land or conservation easements within the approved boundaries.

The coalition is also urging DNR to transfer management of some steep, unstable slopes and high quality forest habitats along Tarboo-Dabob Bay from the timber to natural area programs as part of the expanded preserve.

Bahls said that letters of support for the project have been sent to DNR by the Jefferson County Commissioners, Jefferson County Marine Resources Committee, Jefferson Land Trust, Rock Point Oyster Company, Taylor United (a shellfish company that has a shellfish hatchery on Dabob Bay), the Hood Canal Environmental Council, The Nature Conservancy, Representative Norm Dicks and some landowners along Tarboo Bay and Tarboo Creek.

(Photo attached below)



Figure 1. Pope Resources has agreed to hold off on logging 120 acres of steep forested slopes above Tarboo Bay, Rock Point Oyster tidelands and a DNR Natural Area Preserve along the shoreline to allow conservation groups time to raise funds to add the area to the existing Preserve.