



## National Recognition Could Be Coming to Gig Harbor and WA State

**Washington could be the first state in the country to be designated a National Maritime Historic Area.**

By Charlee Glock-Jackson (Gig Harbor Life)

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GIG HARBOR — Gig Harbor has long been identified with its maritime history.

In fact, the City of Gig Harbor bills itself as “The Maritime City” in its official correspondence and promotional materials.

But Gig Harbor is just a small dot along Washington’s vast saltwater coastline.

According to the Washington State Department of Tourism, when you take into account the state’s many bays and tidal inlets, the perimeters of its coastal islands, the San Juan Islands and the islands of Puget Sound, and then add the shorelines of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, Admiralty Inlet, Hood Canal and Puget Sound (including Gig Harbor), Washington has an astounding 3,036 miles of saltwater coastline.

Put another way, if you stretched out the state’s meandering coastline into one straight line, it would reach from Seattle to well-beyond Washington, D.C.

The State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation thinks nearly all of Washington’s salt-water coastline deserves to be recognized nationally with a special designation.

“We’re proposing that our saltwater coastline – from the Canadian boarder to Gray’s Harbor – should be designated a National Maritime Heritage Area (NMHA),” said Dr. Allison Brooks, the department’s historic preservation officer. “Our maritime heritage defines us as a region, and it’s a story of national importance.”

Lita Dawn Stanton, Gig Harbor’s historic preservation coordinator and a life-long Harbor resident, agreed.

“Gig Harbor’s heritage includes boatbuilding, commercial fishing, ferries, the Mosquito Fleet, lighthouses,” Stanton said. “We have an abundance of heritage stories waiting to be told.”

Brooks and her staff are visiting the state's coastal towns, ports and tribal areas as part of a feasibility study to be used in applying for the NMHA designation.

Earlier this month, Brooks discussed the benefits of NMHA designation at an open house at the Harbor History Museum and at a meeting of the Gig Harbor City Council.

"Washington would be the first place in the entire U.S. to be solely designated a 'maritime' heritage area," Brooks said. "Several other states have heritage areas, and the entire state of Tennessee is a Civil War Heritage Area. But there aren't any other maritime heritage areas in the whole country. We'd be the first."

NMHA designation would recognize the state's maritime history from the coastal tribes' cedar canoes to old ship building sites and lighthouses to modern day seaports.

Both Brooks and Stanton said there are definite advantages to having national heritage designation.

"It would help our small businesses by promoting Gig Harbor as a cultural and historic tourism site," Stanton said. "Tourism visits translate into dollars. It could also encourage private investment here."

Brooks added that NMHA designation could encourage funding for maritime preservation and other maritime activities, as well.

"We could market ourselves as a cohesive unit as a National Heritage Area," she said. "We could all link together to tell our stories and that might be helpful in getting grants – for example for the Harbor History Museum."

It would also help coastal communities find ways to recognize and protect historic sites and structures, like boat building facilities, net sheds, shipyards and working waterfronts.

Brooks emphasized that, even though National Heritage Areas are federally designated, the designation would have no imposition on private property rights.

"Designation as a National Heritage Area does not increase federal regulation of the area," Brooks said, adding that also it doesn't affect local control over land use.

"Our state's waterways have always been marine highways," Brooks said. "Our history is filled with explorers and lighthouses and ports. Our shorelines are where the human history of Washington started – from 12,000 years ago right up to today."

"I think it's really a win-win-win kind of thing for everybody," Stanton said. "It could help tourism, historic preservation and our local businesses."

For information on the designation process for National Heritage areas, an overview of

the Department of Archaeology's feasibility study and an opportunity to participate in a survey about Washington's proposed National Marine Heritage Area visit, [maritimeheritage.net](http://maritimeheritage.net).

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