

Western Red Cedar by Rebecca Lexa

Of all the evergreen trees on the Refuge, perhaps none stands out as much as the western red cedar. This stately tree has stringy, reddish bark that peels off the trunk easily. Its needles are flat and scaly in appearance, unlike the pointier needle clusters of other conifers. Its cones are quite small, hard to miss if you don't look closely. Western red cedar isn't actually a true cedar at all; instead, it is a member of the cypress family. (As an aside, the eastern red cedar is also misnamed, being a juniper in fact.)

The land around Willapa Bay was once covered in ancient cedar forests. Logging reduced these to just a few old growth remnants. The easiest one to visit on the Refuge is at Teal Slough; the quarter mile long trail was one a logging road, and the short slope is graded for easier ascent. If you have a spare hour, or even twenty minutes, it's worth it to pull off highway 101 and visit the surviving giant trees that rival redwoods in girth. For those with a boating penchant, Long Island has a larger stand of old growth cedar, but you'll need to navigate the tides to get out to it.

Cedar is very important to Chinook and other northwest Native traditions, providing everything from wood for traditional houses to bark for baskets, and much more. It's also a crucial part of habitat for old growth forest wildlife like the marbled murrelet. With care and a few centuries, perhaps the hills will one day be covered in great ancient cedar forests again.