Over the Narrows and To the Woods

This varied-habitat public park has something for every interest in all seasons. Right now, banks of wild foxglove spikes are reaching for the sky and the colorful buds are beginning to open. Fall mushroom spotting is an education in unfamiliar species. A dusting of Winter snow transforms the understory fern hillsides to something out of Grimm’s Fairy Tales. And all summer long are the birds: nut-brown Pacific wrens busy in the leaf litter, barred owls discussing the news at dusk in the Eastern Wing, and pileated woodpeckers occasionally bursting from tree stands like small dinosaurs. Warblers also abound, providing the best audio accompaniment for your hike. Leave the earbuds at home.

In 2009, collaboration between Pierce County Planning and Land Services, Pierce County Parks and Recreation, and the local Key Peninsula Metropolitan Park District culminated in the 50 year lease of 360 Trails from Washington DNR. Since then, hiking trails and bike jump lines have been carved into the woods, taking advantage of existing land characteristics.
The adjacent 39 acre property was acquired in 2012 to create Gateway Park, with Key Pen Parks capital and a matching grant from the State of Washington Recreation and Conservation Office.

Staged additions to Gateway are still underway, with completed recreational areas, a large picnic pavilion, and an enclosed off-leash dog park. The splash pad adjoining the existing playground is currently under construction, with an amphitheater and other features planned for future stages. The joint public park complex of 360 and Gateway was envisioned beginning with the 2004 formation of the Key Peninsula Metropolitan Park District, and identified as part of the Pierce County Comprehensive Plan.
Different areas of the park complex draw different folks looking for different experiences. Serious birders will find quiet spots to view wetland inhabitants on the East side and less frequented forest trails to the North. Birds and other wildlife are most visible in the early morning and before dusk, when the fewest humans are about. Some trails are dedicated to bikes and a few to equestrians, but most are shared by hikers of all skill levels. The main circuit path is wide gravel and accommodates a group of birders, raft of bikers, or a walking party of friends or family with strollers. There is plenty of room for everyone.

When you need some nature time but can’t swing a longer journey, head across the Narrows Bridge and turn left at Purdy Spit. Only 5 minutes from there to Gateway Park, and ¼ mile further to the 360 Trail head.

Tahoma Audubon Society Conservation efforts support green space projects and wildlife corridor preservation by Pierce and surrounding counties. Find out more at https://www.tahomaaudubon.org/committee