Almost any season, a walk around Waughop Lake will flush out a few birds from the shore or above in the canopy of trees that overhangs much of the lake walkway. The lake has been the center of controversy as it has been a catch-all basin for sewage and animal carcass in its long history.

In this the bustling City of Lakewood, however, the forests, the meadows, the open fields and the view from the small hill behind the lake provide a retreat into natural beauty that is rare in a metropolitan area.
A faulty sewer pipe created an algae bloom in the lake for a few years, then after the pipe was repaired, the lake started to recover. Hikers, who visited the lake many days of the week, began to look into the water quality issues and discovered that at an earlier period, the lake was a dumping area for animal bones and pieces.

This was back a few years when the barns were full of animals for slaughter and the lovely yellow fields of summer were used as pastures. No easy feat to drain the lake, dredge the bottom and find an agency to pay for the removal of the sludge from the city park.

Initially the land belonged to the Hudson Bay Company, which used the fields as a farm to supply the company's traders and trappers roaming from their post in Fort Vancouver on the Columbia River, north to the Yukon Territory. Western State Mental Hospital used the barns and fields for some decades, then turned over the lake, fields and forests to the county for use as a park.
When Lakewood incorporated, the city park people realized the park's potential by removing English Ivy and blackberries from the fields and forests. They added a dog park, repaved the road around the lake and did their best to solve the water quality problem in the lake.

Not everyone who walked the park was happy with the city's solution to use alum treatment. A few of these people asked the city to let them re-examine the cost of dredging and other solutions in the interim, while everyone waits to see if alum treatment has reduced the algae without harming too many fish, and if the birds return in abundance.

The park also has soccer fields and a variety of gravel paths to accommodate mountain bikes, runners and hikers. A year ago, the park was the scene of a Mountain Bike and Cyclocross event.
It's called the Discovery Trail for good reason. Everyone is welcome to recreate here. And still the park is large enough to provide plenty of quiet places to retreat from the bustle of city and college life that awaits at the far end of the lake.

Fort Steilacoom Park is located on the West End of Steilacoom Blvd, just up the hill from the Town of Steilacoom.