ENJOYS LONG WALKS ON THE BEACH: WASHINGTON’S PUBLIC TRUST DOCTRINE AND THE RIGHT OF PEDESTRIAN PASSAGE OVER PRIVATE TIDELANDS

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Abstract: Under Washington’s public trust doctrine, the state retains a *jus publicum* interest in tidelands, regardless of ownership. This interest obligates the state to protect the public rights encompassed within the *jus publicum*: navigation, fishing, boating, swimming, water skiing, and corollary recreational activities. The state satisfies this duty so long as its actions do not circumscribe public access to those resources, including tidelands, traditionally protected by the public trust doctrine. The title to any tidelands property sold into private ownership is similarly burdened; a private tidelands owner may not utilize property in a way that would compromise the state’s *jus publicum* interest and public rights protected thereby. This Comment argues that Washington’s public trust doctrine encompasses a public right of pedestrian passage over unsubmerged private tidelands, at least where necessary to realize those *jus publicum* rights previously recognized by the judiciary. Judicial acknowledgment of such a right is a logical extension of the Washington State Supreme Court’s holding in *Caminiti v. Boyle* that private construction on state tidelands does not impair the *jus publicum* where the private property owner permits public pedestrian passage as necessary to effectuate public trust rights. Furthermore, recognition of a right of public access to private tidelands harmonizes Washington’s public trust doctrine with that of other states that also recognize the Institutes of Justinian as an ancient source of public trust principles. Finally, the state legislature’s repeated identification of a dearth of public recreational access to tidelands also supports this premise, as the scope of Washington’s public trust doctrine is shaped by the needs of the state’s citizens.

Two Washington residents decide to go fishing, one on foot and the other by boat.1 The first individual accesses state-owned tidelands within a state park, but then continues walking beyond the state park boundary until he reaches a promising location on unsubmerged, privately-owned tidelands from which to cast his line. The second individual launches his boat from the state park and then tries his luck while floating over the same private tidelands on which the first fisherman stands just a few feet away. The owner of the tidelands, incensed by the presence of these strangers on his property, calls the police. Both individuals inform the arriving officer that the public trust doctrine protects the public right of fishing from both tidelands and tidewaters, regardless of the tidelands’ private ownership. Yet, under the holding of a recent unpublished

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1. Hypothetical created by the author.
decision from the Washington State Court of Appeals,\(^2\) the officer would allow the second individual to continue fishing from his boat but arrest the first individual traveling on foot for trespass.

The majority of tidelands within Washington State are privately owned. Washington entered the Union with ownership of all tidelands within its borders up to and including the line of ordinary high tide, with the exception of those areas previously reserved by the federal government.\(^3\) The Washington Constitution, while establishing state ownership of the state’s 2337 miles of tidelands,\(^4\) provides no guidance as to their management. Intent on encouraging development, the state transferred sixty-one percent of its tidelands into private ownership between 1890 and 1979.\(^5\) A recent study estimates that approximately seventy-three percent of the Puget Sound coastline is currently in private ownership.\(^6\) Yet approximately two-thirds of Washington’s population lives in the counties bordering Puget Sound, with some eighty-five percent of this subpopulation residing within ten miles of the Puget Sound shoreline.\(^7\)

In 1987, the Supreme Court of Washington—perhaps responding to the extensive transfer of tidelands into private ownership during the previous century—declared in *Caminiti v. Boyle*\(^8\) “that the [public trust] doctrine has always existed in the State of Washington.”\(^9\) Regardless of actual ownership, Washington retains sovereignty and dominion over all

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3. WASH. CONST. art. XVII, §§ 1–2; see also infra notes 53–60 and accompanying text.


7. Id. at 10.


9. Id. at 670, 732 P.2d at 994.
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tidelands within its borders. This public property interest, known as the jus publicum, requires the state to protect public access to resources and activities encompassed by the public trust doctrine. Specifically, the state must protect “the right ‘of navigation, together with its incidental rights of fishing, boating, swimming, water skiing, and other related recreational purposes generally regarded as corollary to the right of navigation and the use of public waters.’” The state’s jus publicum interest in effect limits the property rights conveyed with the title to any Washington tidelands, preventing private owners from substantially impairing protected public rights in any way.

This Comment argues that the public trust doctrine in Washington encompasses public access to private tidelands, at least where pedestrian passage is necessary to effectuate currently protected jus publicum rights. The Supreme Court of Washington’s opinion in Caminiti strongly suggests that where private ownership obstructs public access to resources protected by the public trust doctrine, the jus publicum is impermissibly impaired if the owner does not in some way allow pedestrian passage across the impeding property. Judicial protection of public access to private tidelands is also consistent with the scope of the doctrine in states that, like Washington, recognize the Institutes of Justinian as a source of public trust principles. Furthermore, the courts have recognized that application of the Washington public trust doctrine must be responsive to the needs of its citizens. The Washington Legislature, the arbiter of public need, has enacted legislation to correct a perceived deficiency in recreational access to tidelands.

Part I of this Comment establishes that the public trust doctrine protects all tidelands within Washington State and examines the responsibilities this doctrine imposes upon both the state and private

10. Id. at 669, 732 P.2d at 994.
11. Id. at 668–70, 732 P.2d at 994.
14. See infra Parts I.A.3, IV.A.
15. See infra Part II.
17. See infra Part III for a discussion of the significance of the Shoreline Management Act (SMA), the Seashore Conservation Act (SCA), and the Aquatic Lands Act (ALA).
tidelands owners. Part II discusses the relationship between judicial recognition of public access to private tidelands and judicial recognition of the Institutes of Justinian as an ancient codification of public trust principles. Part III examines the role of the Washington Legislature in determining the scope of the public trust doctrine. Finally, Part IV argues that the public trust doctrine in Washington encompasses a public right to pedestrian passage over private tidelands, at least where such access is required to effectuate uses already judicially recognized as protected by the public trust.

I. THE PUBLIC TRUST DOCTRINE PROTECTS WASHINGTON’S TIDELANDS

Although vested with ownership of most tidelands within its borders upon entry into the Union, Washington has since sold the majority of this valuable property into private ownership. Under the public trust doctrine, the title to any tidelands consists of two separable interests— the *jus privatum* and the *jus publicum*. Although Washington may sell the *jus privatum* interest in the title into private ownership, the state retains a *jus publicum* interest in any such property, regardless of the identity of the titleholder. Federal case law—later adopted explicitly by the Washington State Supreme Court—suggests that a state may not cede all control of the *jus publicum*. Furthermore, under its own case law, the *jus publicum* interest obligates Washington State to protect the public rights encompassed within the public trust doctrine: “the right ‘of navigation, together with its incidental rights of fishing, boating, swimming, water skiing, and other related recreational purposes generally regarded as corollary to the right of navigation and the use of public waters.’” The state satisfies this duty so long as it either: (1) promotes the overall public interest in the *jus publicum*; or (2) does not substantially circumscribe public access to resources, including

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20. See id. at 670, 732 P.2d at 994–95; see also *infra* notes 62–66 and accompanying text.
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tidelands, protected under the *jus publicum*.\(^{23}\) Similarly, the public trust doctrine also burdens the title to tidelands transferred into private ownership.\(^{24}\) A private tidelands owner thus may not undertake any property usage that would substantially compromise the state’s *jus publicum* interest and public rights protected thereby.\(^{25}\)

A. Judicial Interpretation of the Public Trust Doctrine Prohibits the State of Washington from Ceding Control of Its *Jus Publicum* Interest in Tidelands

Each state holds in trust for the benefit of its people an interest in any property protected by the public trust doctrine.\(^{26}\) Although federal case law may prohibit a state from entirely ceding control of this trust,\(^{27}\) each state determines the scope of public rights protected thereby.\(^{28}\) Under Washington’s public trust doctrine, the state may not cede its *jus publicum* interest in any individual parcel unless doing so either promotes or does not substantially impair the public rights protected thereby:\(^{29}\) navigation, fishing, boating, swimming, water skiing, “and other related recreational purposes generally regarded as corollary to the right of navigation and the use of public waters.”\(^{30}\) Washington case law


\(^{25}\) See *Orion*, 109 Wash. 2d at 640, 747 P.2d at 1073 (holding under the public trust doctrine that a developer never possessed the right to fill and dredge navigable tidelands); see also Esplanade Props., LLC v. City of Seattle, 307 F.3d 978, 986–87 (9th Cir. 2002) (holding under Washington law that denial of a developer’s application to construct homes over Puget Sound tidelands did not constitute a regulatory taking because such construction was inconsistent with public trust principles); *Wilbour*, 77 Wash. 2d at 316, 462 P.2d at 239 (ordering the owners of littoral property to remove fills that prevented annual submergence of their shoreline and thus impeded their neighbors’ access to the adjoining lake).

\(^{26}\) *Ill. Cent.*, 146 U.S. at 435.

\(^{27}\) Id. at 452–53.

\(^{28}\) See *Phillips Petroleum Co. v. Mississippi*, 484 U.S. 469, 475 (1988) (noting that “it has been long established that the individual States have the authority to define the limits of the lands held in public trust and to recognize private rights in such lands as they see fit”); Shively v. Bowlby, 152 U.S. 1, 26 (1894) (“[E]ach State has dealt with the lands under the tide waters within its borders according to its own views of justice and policy . . . . Great caution, therefore, is necessary in applying precedents in one State to cases arising in another.”).


\(^{30}\) Id. at 669, 732 P.2d at 994 (quoting *Wilbour*, 77 Wash. 2d at 316, 462 P.2d at 239).
further establishes that so long as state regulation either promotes or does not circumscribe public access to protected resources, the state has not ceded control over the *jus publicum*.  

1. **Federal Case Law Suggests that No State May Cede All Control over its Tidelands, but that Individual Parcels May Sometimes Be Transferred into Private Ownership**

The United States inherited the public trust doctrine from English common law, whereby the Crown retained an interest in the nation’s ports, seas, and navigable rivers for the benefit of the people. Early U.S. Supreme Court decisions developing American public trust doctrine explicitly referred to Lord Hale’s treatises on the foreshore and adopted his concepts of the *jus privatum* and *jus publicum*. Discussing the Crown’s “right of propriety or ownership in the sea and soil thereof,” Lord Hale explained:

> But though the king is the owner of this great wast, and as a consequent of his propriety hath the primary right of fishing in the sea and the creeks and arms thereof; yet the common people of England have regularly a liberty of fishing in the sea or creeks or arms thereof . . . .

Although tidelands belonged prima facie to the Crown, they could also belong to a subject, as where transferred by the king through charter or grant. But even upon such transfer of title,
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the *jus privatum* of the owner or proprietor is charged with and subject to that *jus publicum* which belongs to the king’s subjects; as the soil of an highway is, which though in point of property it may be a private man’s freehold, yet it is charged with a publick interest of the people, which may not be prejudiced or damnified.38

The U.S. Supreme Court summarized the public trust doctrine under English common law in *Shively v. Bowlby*:39 (1) “the title, *jus privatum*, in [tidelands] . . . belongs to the King as the sovereign”; and (2) “the dominion thereof, *jus publicum*, is vested in him as the representative of the nation and for the public benefit.”40

American public trust doctrine at its most basic level constitutes “a title held in trust for the people of the State that they may enjoy the navigation of the waters, carry on commerce over them, and have liberty of fishing therein freed from the obstruction or interference of private parties.”41 Yet each state is otherwise free to individually determine the lands and rights protected under the *jus publicum*.42 Although the reach of the public trust doctrine must therefore be determined independently for each state, early federal case law reveals several overarching principles.43

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38. Id. at 404–05.
39. 152 U.S. 1 (1894).
40. Id. at 11.
42. See Phillips Petroleum Co. v. Mississippi, 484 U.S. 469, 475 (1988) (noting that “it has been long established that the individual States have the authority to define the limits of the lands held in public trust and to recognize private rights in such lands as they see fit”); *Shively*, 152 U.S. at 26 (“[E]ach State has dealt with the lands under the tide waters within its borders according to its own views of justice and policy . . . . Great caution, therefore, is necessary in applying precedents in one State to cases arising in another.”).

It is the *settled law of this country* that the ownership of and dominion and sovereignty over lands covered by tide waters, within the limits of the several States, belong to the respective
Most significantly, *Illinois Central Railroad Co. v. Illinois* suggests that no state may entirely cede control of the *jus publicum*. In this seminal public trust decision, the U.S. Supreme Court held that the Illinois Legislature lacked authority to grant to the railroad both “ownership and control” of the submerged lands underlying most of the Chicago waterfront on Lake Michigan. Although the terms of the sale prohibited the railroad from impairing the public right of navigation, the transfer nonetheless deprived the state of any meaningful control over development of this important harbor. The Court declared that

> [t]he State can no more abdicate its trust over property in which the whole people are interested, like navigable waters and soils under them, so as to leave them entirely under the use and control of private parties . . . than it can abdicate its police powers in the administration of government and the preservation of the peace.

In so holding, the Court enunciated the general rule that with respect to the lands beneath navigable waters, “control of the State for the purposes of the [public] trust can never be lost.” It further found exceptions to this general rule for only two property categories: (1) “such parcels as are used in promoting the interests of the public therein,” and (2) “such parcels as . . . can be disposed of without any substantial impairment of the public interest in the lands and waters remaining.” Thus, the *Illinois Central* opinion suggests that no state may transfer into private ownership individual tidelands parcels unless

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44. 146 U.S. 387 (1892).

45. See id. at 460.

46. Id. at 450–51.

47. Id. at 453.

48. Id. In discussing the public trust obligations of the states, the Court referred specifically to “lands under the navigable waters of an entire harbor or bay, or of a sea or lake.” Id. at 452–53.

49. Id. at 453.
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such transfer either promotes the public interest in that same property or does not substantially impair public interest in remaining public trust lands.\(^50\) Subsequent to its decision in \textit{Illinois Central}, the Court held that New York lost its authority to regulate navigation over two Hudson River lots sold under condition that the private owner construct bulkheads, wharves, and streets upon request.\(^51\) Similarly, the Court affirmed Oregon’s ability to sell tidelands into private ownership under conditions that encouraged expensive improvements necessary to prevent ongoing shore erosion and harbor shoaling.\(^52\)

2. \textit{Washington State Retains the Jus Publicum Interest in All Tidelands Property Transferred into Private Ownership}

Upon its admission into statehood in 1889, the equal footing doctrine vested Washington with title to its tidelands.\(^53\) Each state receives title to the tidelands within its borders upon entry into the Union.\(^54\) For states formed from the original thirteen colonies, such title can be traced to royal charters;\(^55\) the equal footing doctrine ensures that states subsequently admitted into the Union similarly receive title to the tidelands within their borders.\(^56\) The U.S. Supreme Court reaffirmed in its most recent public trust case that “all lands under waters subject to the ebb and flow of the tide”—regardless of actual navigability—became property of each respective State upon its entry into the Union.\(^57\)

\(^50\) \textit{Id.}.


\(^52\) Shively v. Bowby, 152 U.S. 1, 52–57 (1894). Oregon today recognizes, on the basis of both custom and usage, a public right to use not only tidelands, much of which are owned by the State of Oregon, but also any dry sand area—that portion of the beach between the tidelands and the visible line of vegetation. State \textit{ex rel.} Thornton v. Hay, 462 P.2d 671, 672–73, 675–77 (Or. 1969).

\(^53\) Act of Feb. 22, 1889, ch. 180, § 8, 25 Stat. 676, 678–79 (providing that upon compliance with all requirements therein, Washington “shall be deemed admitted by Congress into the Union under and by virtue of this act on an equal footing with the original States”); \textit{see also} Pollard’s Lessee v. Hagan, 44 U.S. 212, 230, 3 How. 238, 259 (1845).

\(^54\) Phillips Petroleum Co. v. Mississippi, 484 U.S. 469, 476 (1988); \textit{see also} Brace & Hergert Mill Co. v. State, 49 Wash. 326, 332, 95 P. 278, 281 (1908) (“This is founded on the principle that the shores and beds of all bodies of water, whether navigable or unnavigable, belong to the state on which they are situate . . . .”).

\(^55\) Shively, 152 U.S. at 48–49 (quoting Martin v. Waddell, 41 U.S. 367, 409–11, 16 Pet. 234, 262–64 (1842)).

\(^56\) \textit{See Pollard’s Lessee}, 44 U.S. at 230, 3 How. at 259.

\(^57\) Phillips, 484 U.S. at 476.
In addition, the Washington Constitution independently provides the state with title to tidelands as well as to the land beneath all navigable waters:

The state of Washington asserts its ownership to the beds and shores of all navigable waters in the state up to and including the line of ordinary high tide, in waters where the tide ebbs and flows, and up to and including the line of ordinary high water within the banks of all navigable rivers and lakes . . . .

Thus, with the exception of such lands previously reserved by the federal government, Washington entered the Union with ownership of all tidelands up to the line of ordinary high tide.

The Supreme Court of Washington, following extensive review of the state’s case law, declared in 1987 in *Caminiti* that “the [public trust] doctrine has always existed in the State of Washington” and explicitly adopted the test enunciated by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Illinois Central*. Washington’s title to tidelands and shorelands consists of both *jus privatum* and *jus publicum* interests; the public trust doctrine dictates that the state may transfer into private ownership only its interest in the *jus privatum*. Thus, “sovereignty and dominion over this state’s tidelands and shorelands, as distinguished from *title*, always remains [sic] in the State, and the State holds such dominion in trust for the public.” Following *Illinois Central*, Washington courts look to the

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58. WASH. CONST. art. XVII, § 1.
59. Id. § 2.
60. See Harkins v. Del Pozzi, 50 Wash. 2d 237, 240, 310 P.2d 532, 535 (1957); Brace & Hergert Mill Co. v. State, 49 Wash. 326, 331, 95 P. 278, 280 (1908) (collecting cases). The Supreme Court of Washington has since defined the line of ordinary high tide as “the average of all high tides during the tidal cycle.” Hughes v. State, 67 Wash. 2d 799, 810, 410 P.2d 20, 26 (1966), rev’d on other grounds, 389 U.S. 290 (1967).
63. Id. at 668–69, 732 P.2d at 993–94.
64. Id. at 669, 732 P.2d at 994 (emphasis in original).
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Following two factors in determining whether a legislative act violates the public trust doctrine: “(1) whether the State, by the questioned legislation, has given up its right of control over the jus publicum and (2) if so, whether by so doing the State (a) has promoted the interests of the public in the jus publicum, or (b) has not substantially impaired it.”66

Beyond the minimum established in *Illinois Central*, states may further define the characteristics of their own public trust doctrine; Washington explicitly protects not only the public’s interest in waters subject to tidal influence, but also to the lands beneath such waters. In *Caminiti*, the Supreme Court of Washington analyzed the public’s “overriding interest in navigable waterways and lands under them.”68 It has since referred to “public ownership interests in certain uses of navigable waters and underlying lands,”69 and to “a public property interest, the jus publicum, in tidelands and the waters flowing over them, despite the sale of these lands into private ownership.”70

3. Regulation of Public Trust Resources Does Not Cede the State’s Control Over the Jus Publicum if It Either Promotes or Does Not Circumscribe Public Access to the Regulated Resources

The State of Washington does not cede control over the *jus publicum* when it promotes public access to tidelands. The Washington State Supreme Court held in *Caminiti* that a provision of the Aquatic Lands Act71 eliminating fees for the installation and maintenance of private recreational docks on state tidelands did not violate the public trust doctrine.72 Enactment of this provision73 changed state practice by allowing owners of private residential property abutting state-owned

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65. See supra text accompanying notes 48–49.
67. See supra notes 41–43 and accompanying text.
68. *Caminiti*, 107 Wash. 2d at 668, 732 P.2d at 994 (emphasis added).
70. Id. (emphasis added).
71. The provision challenged in *Caminiti* was codified at the time of suit at WASH. REV. CODE § 79.90.105 (1983). The current version of this provision—amended to specify the abutting property owner’s rights in the event that the state desires to lease or sell the adjoining tidelands—was recodified at WASH. REV. CODE § 79.105.430(1) (2006). The Aquatic Lands Act (ALA) is now found at WASH. REV. CODE chs. 79.105–140 (2006).
tidelands to build private recreational docks on the adjacent state tidelands without paying compensation to the state. The provision does not convey title to any of the state-owned tidelands into private ownership, but merely confers a revocable license to construct and maintain a private dock. Use of any private docks so constructed is limited to recreational purposes, and is further subject to both state and local regulation. In holding that this statute does not violate but rather advances some of the interests of the public trust doctrine—“albeit to a limited degree”—the court observed that the docks would improve recreational access to tidal waters by these property owners and their guests. Private investment in such docks would thus contribute, at least to some extent, to increasing usage of tidal waters.

The state also does not cede control over the jus publicum where it acts to protect tidelands through restriction of particular uses, at least so long as public access to tidelands is not impaired. To the contrary, Washington courts generally find that such regulations increase, rather than decrease, state control of the jus publicum. Thus, San Juan County did not cede control of public trust waters by enacting an ordinance banning use of motorized personal watercraft. There, the court stressed that the regulated waters remained accessible to all individuals. Similarly, state regulation of commercial geoduck harvesting protects the public interest by ensuring continuation of geoduck resources. And while no judicial determination has yet squarely addressed whether the Washington public trust doctrine encompasses wildlife, state regulation of hunting and trapping practices increases state control over this potential public trust resource.

75. Id. at 672–73, 732 P.2d at 995–96.  
76. Id.  
77. See id. at 673–74, 732 P.2d at 996.  
78. See id.  
80. Id. at 699, 958 P.2d at 283–84 (“Although the Ordinance prohibits a particular form of recreation, the waters are open to access by the entire public, including owners of [personal watercraft] who utilize some other method of recreation.”).  
81. Wash. State Geoduck Harvest Ass’n v. Wash. State Dep’t of Natural Res., 124 Wash. App. 441, 452, 101 P.3d 891, 897 (2004) (“The public trust doctrine . . . protects the public right to recreation, commerce, and commercial fishing, all of which are bolstered by the state’s system of facilitating sustainable geoduck harvesting and natural regeneration of the resource.”).  
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B. The Public Trust Doctrine Burdens the Title to Tidelands Transferred into Private Ownership

The Supreme Court of Washington has compared the \textit{jus publicum} to “a covenant running with the land . . . for the benefit of the public.”\footnote{83} This limitation on the rights conveyed with titles of Washington tidelands bars their private owners from undertaking activities that compromise the \textit{jus publicum}. In fact, even prior to officially recognizing the public trust doctrine, the court had indicated that the property rights accompanying land covered by navigable water were circumscribed.\footnote{84} In \textit{Wilbour v. Gallagher},\footnote{85} the court required littoral property owners to remove fills that prevented submergence of their shoreline and thus impeded their neighbors’ access to the adjoining lake.\footnote{86} The property at issue bordered Lake Chelan, whose level is raised and lowered annually to allow generation of hydroelectric power.\footnote{87} Neighbors had long used the waters that, at peak levels, covered the defendants’ property for such recreational activities as fishing, boating, and swimming.\footnote{88} Attempting to prevent the annual submergence of their property that allowed such use, the defendants erected fills to a height five feet above the maximum lake level.\footnote{89} Comparing the situation to that of a naturally fluctuating lake, the court held that “the public has the right to go where the navigable waters go, even though the navigable waters lie over privately owned lands.”\footnote{90} The court thus ordered the fills removed because they obstructed public navigation.\footnote{91}


\footnote{84. Wilbour v. Gallagher, 77 Wash. 2d 306, 315, 462 P.2d 232, 238 (1969) (“As the level [of the water] rises, . . . the rights of the landowners decrease since they cannot use their property in such a manner as to interfere with the expanded public rights.”). Although \textit{Wilbour} predates judicial recognition of the public trust doctrine in Washington, the scope of activities declared protected by the \textit{jus publicum} in \textit{Caminiti} is in fact taken from \textit{Wilbour}. See \textit{Caminiti} v. Boyle, 107 Wash. 2d 662, 669, 732 P.2d 989, 994 (1987).}

\footnote{85. 77 Wash. 2d 306, 462 P.2d 232 (1969).}

\footnote{86. Id. at 316, 462 P.2d at 239.}

\footnote{87. For information about the Lake Chelan hydroelectric project, see http://www.chelanpud.org/lake-chelan-hydro-project.html (last visited Oct. 10, 2006). For information about Lake Chelan levels, see http://www.chelanpud.org/lake-chelan-lake-levels.html (last visited Oct. 10, 2006).}

\footnote{88. Wilbour, 77 Wash. 2d at 312, 462 P.2d at 236.}

\footnote{89. Id. at 309, 462 P.2d at 234–35.}

\footnote{90. Id. at 315–16, 462 P.2d at 238. The court went on to state that the property owners were nonetheless “entitled to keep trespassers off their land” during the months the lake was lowered. Id.}
The Washington State Supreme Court has since explicitly affirmed that the property rights of private tidelands owners are limited by the public trust doctrine. In *Orion Corp. v. State*, the court held that a developer never possessed the right to dredge and fill navigable tidelands in Padilla Bay. *Orion Corporation*, the purchaser of 5600 acres of tidelands in this Puget Sound estuary, sued the state for inverse condemnation after regulations enacted pursuant to the Shoreline Management Act allegedly prevented both its planned construction of a Venetian-style development and reclamation of the land for farming.

The court held that Orion’s purchase of the Padilla Bay tidelands was subject to the public trust. As a consequence, Orion could not use its property in any way that would “substantially impair” public trust rights. The regulations thus did not effect a taking so long as they only denied uses barred by the public trust doctrine. In particular, the court held that dredging and filling of privately owned tidelands was inconsistent with public trust principles because navigation, fishing, and associated public trust rights would be substantially impaired.

Conversely, private construction on state tidelands does not impair the *jus publicum* where the private property owner permits public pedestrian

Note that if the public trust doctrine in fact encompasses a public right to walk across unsubmerged private tidelands and shorelands, then an individual indulging in such activity would not in fact be trespassing. Furthermore, the Supreme Court of Washington recently reserved as open the question of “whether and under what circumstances the public has a right to enter upon or cross over private tidelands on foot,” indicating that its decision in *Wilbour* does not provide an answer to this question. *State v. Longshore*, 141 Wash. 2d 414, 429 n.9, 5 P.3d 1256, 1263 n.9 (2000).

91. *Wilbour*, 77 Wash. 2d at 318, 462 P.2d at 237.
96. *Id.* at 659, 747 P.2d at 1082–83.
97. *Id.* at 641, 747 P.2d at 1073.
98. *See id.* at 660, 747 P.2d at 1083.
99. *Id.* at 641, 747 P.2d at 1073; *accord* Esplanade Props., LLC *v. City of Seattle*, 307 F.3d 978, 986–87 (9th Cir. 2002) (holding under Washington law that denial of a developer’s application to construct homes over Puget Sound tidelands below Magnolia bluff did not constitute a regulatory taking because such construction was inconsistent with public trust principles).

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passage necessary for the purpose of effectuating public trust rights. Specifically, the Supreme Court of Washington held in *Caminiti* that a provision of the Aquatic Lands Act eliminating fees for construction and maintenance of private docks on state tidelands did not violate the public trust doctrine. In finding that the *jus publicum* was not substantially impaired, the court specifically cited to a state administrative regulation requiring that the owners of such docks provide public pedestrian access over, under, or around these structures. The court’s opinion thus suggests that private docks on state tidelands do not run afoul of the public trust doctrine where they do not impair public access to state tidelands.

The scope of permissible public activity on private tidelands is not, however, limitless. Specifically, the Washington State Supreme Court has held one activity—the taking of shellfish from private tidelands—to be outside the scope of the *jus publicum*. In *State v. Longshore*, the defendant removed naturally occurring clams from privately owned tidelands. On appeal from a conviction for second-degree theft, the defendant asserted that such clams constitute a public trust resource and thus could not be privately owned. The court rejected this argument, holding that the unauthorized taking of naturally occurring clams from private tideland property constitutes theft.

The Supreme Court of Washington has yet to squarely address the existence of a public right of passage over unsubmerged private tidelands. That the *jus publicum* in Washington does not encompass

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101. Id. at 675, 732 P.2d at 997; see supra text accompanying notes 72–78.
102. Wash. Admin. Code 332-30-144(4)(d) (2005) provides: “Owners of docks located on state-owned tidelands or shorelands must provide a safe, convenient, and clearly available means of pedestrian access over, around, or under the dock at all tide levels.”
103. *Caminiti*, 107 Wash. 2d at 674, 732 P.2d at 996 (“[T]he public must be able to get around, under or over [the private docks].” (emphasis added)).
104. See id.
106. Id. at 417–18, 5 P.3d at 1258.
107. Id. at 419–20, 427, 5 P.3d at 1259, 1262.
108. Id. at 429, 5 P.3d at 1263.
109. Note that recognition and enforcement under the public trust doctrine of a public right of access to private tidelands would not constitute a taking under either state or federal law. The right to exclude others is admittedly a “fundamental attribute of property ownership.” Guimont v. Clarke, 121 Wash. 2d 586, 602, 854 P.2d 1, 10 (1993). But where a property right is denied, the state can
the right to take shellfish from private tidelands, however, has no bearing on this issue. Although the court held in *Longshore* that an unauthorized taking of naturally occurring clams from private property constitutes theft, it explicitly noted that its decision did not reach the question of public access to private tidelands. Furthermore, the court’s decision rested in large part on the state legislature’s specific exemption of shellfish from the definition of wildlife in RCW 77.08.010(16).

Washington case law in fact strongly suggests that both wild and seeded shellfish, at least if slow-moving, constitute either real or personal property. The Washington public trust doctrine, while burdening tidelands with the right of public access for fishing, navigation, and recreational activities, has never sanctioned a taking of tangible private property.


The public trust doctrine burdens the title to any privately owned tidelands in Washington, and thus bars such a property owner from engaging in any property use that substantially impairs public rights within the scope of the *jus publicum*. See *supra* text accompanying notes 84–99. Accordingly, courts have twice held under Washington law that the title possessed by a private tidelands owner simply does not encompass the right to dredge and fill the property, and that regulations prohibiting such a right do not effect a taking. See *supra* note 99 and accompanying text. Similarly, if the public trust doctrine encompasses a public right of access to private tidelands, then the title possessed by a private tidelands owner never included the right to exclude individuals from such property; a right of exclusion would substantially impair the *jus publicum*.

111. *Longshore*, 141 Wash. 2d at 429, 5 P.3d at 1263.
112. *Id.* at 429 n.9, 5 P.3d at 1263 n.9 (“[W]e need not determine whether and under what circumstances the public has a right to enter upon or cross over private tidelands on foot.”).
113. See *id.* at 425–26, 5 P.3d at 1261–62.
114. See *id.* at 426, 5 P.3d at 1262; see also Sequim Bay Canning Co. v. Bugge, 49 Wash. 127, 131, 94 P. 922, 923 (1908) (“[Clams,] therefore, in a very material sense, belong with the land. When taken they must be wrenched from their beds, made well down in the soil itself.”).
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explicitly refused to recognize a public right of passage over unsubmerged private tidelands in a 2005 unpublished opinion.115 The court based its decision on the Supreme Court of Washington’s takings analysis in Orion.116 Specifically, the Washington State Supreme Court held in Orion that a state regulatory scheme that prohibited a developer’s plan to dredge and fill Padilla Bay tidelands did not effect an inverse condemnation.117 In so holding, the court observed that “[the developer’s] right to dispose of its property and to exclude others . . . remain[ed] unaffected” under the offending regulations.118 Division II interpreted this reference to an unaffected right of exclusion as “suggest[ing] that [the Washington State] Supreme Court did not contemplate pedestrian passage over tidelands.”119 But in so reasoning, the appellate court mistakenly construed the Orion court’s statement regarding the developer’s right to exclude others. Specifically, the appellate court interpreted that statement by comparing the developer’s property to property not burdened by the public trust, on which the right to exclude would admittedly be near absolute.120 This interpretation,
however, ignores the *Orion* court’s earlier holding that the developer purchased its estuarine property subject to the public trust.121

In sum, Washington’s public trust doctrine bars both the state and private tidelands owners from substantially circumscribing public rights protected by the state’s *jus publicum* interest. Federal law may prevent any state from ceding all of its *jus publicum* interest. Washington’s public trust doctrine further prevents this state from ceding its *jus publicum* interest in any individual parcel unless such action either promotes or does not substantially impair public rights protected therein.

II. STATES RECOGNIZING JUSTINIAN *JUS PUBLICUM* PRINCIPLES ALLOW AT LEAST LIMITED PUBLIC ACCESS TO PRIVATELY OWNED TIDELANDS

The Institutes of Justinian, an ancient Roman text, ensured public access to all tidelands by declaring that tidelands simply could not be subject to ownership.122 The judiciaries of ten states,123 including Washington, recognize the Institutes as an ancient codification of the public trust doctrine. Of the three judiciaries in these ten states that have addressed the issue of public passage over privately owned tidelands, all have affirmed the existence of such a right, at least where necessary to effectuate more widely recognized public trust activities.124

A. The Institutes of Justinian Assert Common Ownership of Tidelands

Numerous scholars trace the roots of the public trust doctrine to ancient Roman legal principles.125 The Institutes of Justinian, a textbook

121. *Orion*, 109 Wash. 2d at 641, 747 P.2d at 1073; see supra Part I.C.
125. See Note, The Public Trust in Tidal Areas: A Sometime Submerged Traditional Doctrine, 79
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of Roman law written some 1500 years ago, asserts that certain natural resources cannot pass into private ownership:

Things common to mankind by the law of nature, are the air, running water, the sea, and consequently the shores of the sea; no man therefore is prohibited from approaching any part of the seashore, whilst he abstains from damaging farms, monuments, edifices, etc. which are not in common as the sea is. 126

By declaring that no individual could hold title to the seashore, Roman law thus explicitly assured public access not only to the sea but also to the underlying tidelands:

The use of the sea-shore, as well as of the sea, is also public by the law of nations; and therefore any person may erect a cottage upon it, to which he may resort to dry his nets, and haul them from the water; for the shores are not understood to be property in any man, but are compared to the sea itself, and to the sand or ground which is under the sea. 127

This expansive understanding of the public’s right to use the seashore stands in marked contrast to the scope of the *jus publicum* in any state today. Yet judicial recognition of the Institutes of Justinian as an ancient codification of the public trust doctrine correlates with an understanding of the *jus publicum* that encompasses a right of public access to private tidelands.

B. States That Recognize the Institutes of Justinian at a Minimum Allow Public Access to Private Tidelands for Effectuation of Public Trust Rights

In *Caminiti*, the Supreme Court of Washington explicitly recognized not only the existence of the public trust doctrine but also the ancient codification of this legal principle in the Institutes of Justinian. 128 Several states in addition to Washington recognize the origins of the public trust doctrine in the Institutes of Justinian. 129 Three of these

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126. J. INST. 2.1.1 in *COOPER*, supra note 122, at 67.
127. J. INST. 2.1.5 in *COOPER*, supra note 122, at 68.
128. *Caminiti*, 107 Wash. 2d at 668–69 & n.12, 732 P.2d at 994 & n.12 (“The principle that the public has an overriding interest in navigable waterways and lands under them is at least as old as the Code of Justinian . . . .” (citing to J. INST.)); see also Rettkowski v. Dep’t of Ecology, 122 Wash. 2d 219, 239, 858 P.2d 232, 243 (1993) (Guy J., dissenting).
129. The case law of three additional states—Montana, New Hampshire, and New York—refers
states—Massachusetts, Michigan, and New Jersey—have directly addressed the issue of public access to private tidelands and at a minimum affirm such access for the purpose of effectuating traditional public trust rights.

Although otherwise narrow in its scope, the *jus publicum* in Massachusetts encompasses a public right to walk across private tidelands in order to effectuate traditional public trust rights. The Massachusetts judiciary has generally interpreted the public trust doctrine strictly in response to colonial legislation. Specifically, the Colonial Ordinance of 1641–1647 granted title of tidelands to all


130. See Boston Waterfront Dev. Corp. v. Commonwealth, 393 N.E.2d 356, 358 (Mass. 1979) (“At Roman law, all citizens held and had access to the seashore as a resource in common; in the words of Justinian . . . .” (quoting J. INST. 2.1.1–2.1.6)).

131. See Glass v. Goeckel, 703 N.W.2d 58, 63–64 (Mich. 2005) (“This obligation traces back to the Roman Emperor Justinian, whose Institutes provided . . . .” (quoting J. INST. 2.1.1)).

132. See Matthews v. Bay Head Improvement Ass’n, 471 A.2d 355, 360 (N.J. 1984) (“The genesis of this principle is found in Roman jurisprudence, which held . . . .” (quoting J. INST. 2.1.1)).

133. One state—California—has also created through constitutional amendment a right of public access to private tidelands “whenever it is required for any public purpose.” CAL. CONST. art. X, § 4; see also Nollan v. Cal. Coastal Comm’n, 483 U.S. 825, 847–48 (1987) (observing with respect to article X, section 4 of the California Constitution that “the State [of California] has sought to protect public expectations of access from disruption by private land use”); City of Berkeley v. Superior Court, 26 Cal. 3d 515, 522–23 (1980) (recounting the history leading to adoption of article X, section 4 of the California Constitution). Because this protection is not judicially created, it will not be addressed here further. The remaining states—Hawaii, Iowa, Maryland, Rhode Island, and Vermont—have not directly addressed the question of public access to private tidelands under the public trust doctrine, and thus will also not be addressed further.

The opinion of the Court of Appeals of Maryland in *Department of Natural Resources v. Mayor & Council of Ocean City* arguably suggests, contrary to the thesis proposed here, that private property rights are not circumscribed by the public trust doctrine. See 332 A.2d 630, 634 (Md. Ct. App. 1975). While recognizing the traditional public trust rights of navigation and fishing, the court observed that “[t]he notion that the rights of the owner of the littoral must be exercised in subordination to the paramount rights of the public is no longer applicable, since rights of fishing, boating, hunting, bathing, taking shellfish and seaweed and of passing and repassing have been pro tanto extinguished by the prior grant.” *Id.* (citing Town of Orange v. Resnick, 109 A. 864 (Conn. 1920)). This statement is mere dicta, however, because the issue actually considered by the court concerned the right of a property owner to build landward of the high water mark. See *id.* at 632.


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private coastal owners, subject only to the enumerated public rights of fishing, fowling, and navigation. Although the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts decided that “the right of passage over dry land at periods of low tide cannot be reasonably included as one of the traditional rights of navigation,” it nevertheless recognized a right to walk across otherwise private tidelands in order to fish from a public jetty.  

The public trust doctrine in Massachusetts thus appears to encompass public access to private tidelands where necessary to effect enumerated public trust rights, but not for the purpose of allowing general recreation. Similarly, the Supreme Court of Michigan recently held that the public possesses a right of pedestrian passage over all shorelands of the Great Lakes, regardless of ownership. While the boundary of a private landowner’s fee title extends to the low water mark of the Great Lakes, the jus publicum extends to the high water mark and thus overlaps with the jus privatum between these two boundaries. Michigan had previously recognized protection under the public trust doctrine for the traditional rights of “fishing, hunting, and navigation for commerce or pleasure.” But the court acknowledged that it could only protect these traditional rights if it also protected the activities inherent to their exercise. Pedestrian passage constitutes such an activity because the waters of the Great Lakes cannot otherwise be accessed for fishing,
hunting, and boating; effectuation of these traditional public trust rights thus requires a right of public pedestrian passage over the lakeshore.144

The Supreme Court of New Jersey also recently affirmed the importance of public access to private tidelands.145 The court had already suggested more than thirty years earlier that the title to tidelands conveyed by the state into private ownership might be burdened with a public right of access to ocean waters.146 In holding that a private club could not restrict public use of the dry sand area within its oceanfront lots, the court in Raleigh Avenue Beach Ass’n v. Atlantis Beach Club148 returned in part to this question.149 The court held that “the public must be given both access to and use of privately-owned dry sand areas as reasonably necessary.”150 This limitation on private property rights was required to afford the public not only “a suitable area for recreation on the dry sand” but also “reasonable access to the foreshore.”151 Under the court’s ruling, therefore, public access to private tidelands tracks public access to private dry sand areas.152

As in Massachusetts and Michigan, the Supreme Court of New Jersey’s holding in Raleigh appears to be motivated by desire to protect jus publicum rights. The Supreme Court of New Jersey has repeatedly stressed the flexibility of the public trust doctrine in responding to public

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144. Id.
147. The dry sand area is that part of the beach between the high water mark and either the vegetation line or a man-made boundary such as a seawall or boardwalk, and thus lies adjacent to but landward of the tidelands. See Matthews v. Bay Head Improvement Ass’n, 471 A.2d 355, 358 n.1 (N.J. 1984).
149. See id. at 120–21.
150. Id. at 121. Necessity is determined on the basis of four specific criteria: (1) location of the dry sand area with respect to the tidelands, (2) availability and size of publicly-owned dry sand areas, (3) nature and scope of public demand for beach access, and (4) the private owner’s usage of the dry sand area. Id. at 121–22 (citing Matthews, 471 A.2d at 365).
151. Id. at 121; see also Matthews, 471 A.2d at 366. Note that New Jersey refers to its tidelands as the foreshore. See Spiegle v. Borough of Beach Haven, 218 A.2d 129, 133 (N.J. 1966) (“Foreshore: The part of the shore, lying between the crest of the seaward berm and the ordinary low water mark, that is ordinarily traversed by the uprush and backrush of the waves.”).
152. The existence of a right of reasonable public access to tidelands appears to have been conceded during oral argument, perhaps explaining why this issue was not directly addressed by the court. Raleigh, 879 A.2d at 127 (Wallace, Jr., J., dissenting) (noting that the “defendant concedes . . . that the public has the right to use its property ‘at and below the mean high water line’”).

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need. Even prior to Raleigh, it thus had “no difficulty” finding that the activities encompassed by the jus publicum “are not limited to the ancient prerogatives of navigation and fishing, but extend as well to recreational uses, including bathing, swimming and other shore activities.” In defining the public trust doctrine so expansively, of particular concern to the court was that activities such as bathing and swimming could not be enjoyed without periods of rest on the shore.

In sum, the Washington judiciary recognizes the Institutes of Justinian as an ancient codification of public trust principles. A survey of state case law reveals that such affirmative judicial appreciation of the public trust doctrine’s historical roots correlates with judicial recognition of a public right of pedestrian passage over privately owned tidelands. This public right of access may, however, apply only where necessary to effectuate activities protected by the jus publicum.

III. THE WASHINGTON LEGISLATURE RECOGNIZES A PUBLIC NEED FOR RECREATIONAL TIDELANDS ACCESS

The scope of Washington’s public trust doctrine is shaped by the needs of its citizens. The police power of the state vests the Washington Legislature with authority to identify and enact legislation to protect public welfare and safety interests. Because recreational opportunities constitute a concern of the public welfare, the public trust doctrine should respond to the legislature’s identification of a need for public recreational access to tidelands.

153. See Borough of Neptune City v. Borough of Avon-By-The-Sea, 294 A.2d 47, 54 (N.J. 1972) (“The public trust doctrine . . . should not be considered fixed or static, but should be molded and extended to meet changing conditions and needs of the public it was created to benefit.”); Raleigh, 879 A.2d at 121 (“recognizing . . . the dynamic nature of the public trust doctrine” (quoting Matthews, 471 A.2d at 365)).

154. Neptune City, 294 A.2d at 54 (emphasis added).

155. Matthews, 471 A.2d at 365 (“The unavailability of the physical situs for such rest and relaxation would seriously curtail and in many situations eliminate the right to the recreational use of the ocean.”); see also Raleigh, 879 A.2d at 120. Note that the Raleigh court even made the specific analogy between such recreational use and the reference in the Institutes of Justinian to fisherman drying their nets on the seashore. Id.


159. See generally WASH. REV. CODE ch. 90.58 (2006); id. §§ 79A.05.600–695; id. chs. 79.105–140.
A. The Scope of the Washington Public Trust Doctrine Is Elastic and Defined by Public Need

The scope of the public trust doctrine in Washington is elastic and ultimately determined by the needs of the people.160 In Orion, the Supreme Court of Washington declared that “[t]he trust’s relationship to navigable waters and shorelands resulted not from a limitation, but rather from a recognition of where the public need lay.”161 Even upon first announcing the existence of the public trust doctrine in Washington, the court explicitly refused to limit protected public rights to the narrow confines of navigation and fishing.162 To the contrary, the court stated that the jus publicum interest encompasses “the right ‘of navigation, together with its incidental rights of fishing, boating, swimming, water skiing, and other related recreational purposes generally regarded as corollary to the right of navigation and the use of public waters.”163

The Supreme Court of Washington has in recent years repeatedly affirmed the wide swath of public rights protected by the public trust doctrine, attesting to the latter’s continued breadth.164 To this day, the court has held only one activity—the taking of shellfish from private tidelands—to be outside the scope of the jus publicum,165 and has hinted that the public trust doctrine may even extend to environmental protection.166 But the court has otherwise failed to explicitly elaborate on what activities might constitute “other related recreational purposes generally regarded as corollary to the right of navigation and the use of public waters.”167 And in particular, it has yet to delineate protected land-based activities.

160 Orion, 109 Wash. 2d at 640–41, 747 P.2d at 1073.
161 Id.; see also Rettkowski v. Dep’t of Ecology, 122 Wash. 2d 219, 242, 858 P.2d 232, 244 (1993) (Guy, J., dissenting) (observing that “at its most basic level, the scope of the public trust doctrine is defined by the public’s needs in those natural resources necessary for social stability”).
163 Id. (quoting Wilbour v. Gallagher, 77 Wash. 2d 306, 316, 462 P.2d 232, 239 (1969)).
165 Longshore, 141 Wash. 2d at 429, 5 P.3d at 1263.
166 See Weden, 135 Wash. 2d at 698, 958 P.2d at 283 (“The doctrine protects ‘public ownership interests in certain uses of navigable waters and underlying lands, including . . . environmental quality.’”) (quoting Johnson, supra note 18, at 524).
167 Caminiti, 107 Wash. 2d at 669, 732 P.2d at 994 (citing Wilbour, 77 Wash. 2d at 316, 462 P.2d at 239). A corollary is defined as “[a] proposition that follows from a proven proposition with little or no additional proof” or “something that naturally follows.” BLACK’S LAW DICTIONARY 363
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B. The Police Power of the State Vests the Washington Legislature with Discretion to Determine Public Need

In discussing the constitutional reach of the state’s police power, the Supreme Court of Washington has repeatedly affirmed the role of the legislature in determining public needs. Police power is the unwritten authority possessed by a state’s legislature to enact statutes promoting public welfare and security:168 “[h]owever difficult it may be to give a precise or satisfactory definition of ‘police power,’ there is no doubt that the state, in the exercise of such power, may prescribe laws tending to promote the health, peace, morals, education, good order and welfare of the people.”169 Included amongst the concerns encompassed by the police power is recreation and resource protection.170 The Washington Legislature is vested with extensive discretion to determine current requirements of the public interest.171 In the context of the public trust doctrine, the Washington State Supreme Court has specifically opined that “the use of police power by government allows the Legislature to enact laws in the interest of the people.”172


169. Markham, 73 Wash. 2d at 421–22, 439 P.2d at 258 (quoting Shea v. Olson, 185 Wash. 143, 153, 53 P.2d 615, 619 (1936)); see also McDermott v. State, 197 Wash. 79, 84, 84 P.2d 372, 374 (1938) (noting that the police power authorizes the legislature to enact “regulations designed to promote the public convenience, the general welfare, the general prosperity, and extends to all great public needs, as well as regulations designed to promote the public health, the public morals, or the public safety” (quoting State v. Pitney, 79 Wash. 608, 611, 140 P. 918, 919 (1914) (emphasis added))).

170. Markham, 73 Wash. 2d at 424, 439 P.2d at 260 (“The public welfare embraces healthful recreation and the protection of our national resources.”).

171. Ford, 144 Wash. at 112, 257 P. 243 at 244 (“[A] large discretion is necessarily vested in the legislature to determine . . . what the interests of the public require.” (quoting Lawton, 152 U.S. at 136)); see also Weden, 135 Wash. 2d at 691, 958 P.2d at 280 (quoting same passage); McDermott, 197 Wash. at 83, 84 P.2d at 374 (“In the exercise of police power, the legislature is vested with a wide discretion . . . to determine what the public interest requires . . . .”); Markham, 73 Wash. 2d at 422, 439 P.2d at 259 (“[W]hen the legislature has spoken, the public interest has been declared in terms well-nigh conclusive. In such cases the legislature, not the judiciary, is the main guardian of the public needs to be served by social legislation . . . .” (quoting Berman v. Parker, 348 U.S. 26, 32 (1954))).

172. Weden, 135 Wash. 2d at 691, 958 P.2d at 279. Note that a takings challenge would almost certainly be mounted were the Washington Legislature to enact a law restricting the right of private individuals to exclude the public from privately owned tidelands, thus necessitating that the courts examine whether a right of public access to private tidelands is encompassed by the public trust
The Washington Legislature recognizes recreational access to tidelands as a public need.

The Washington Legislature’s understanding of public need with respect to tidelands may be inferred from three statutes: the Shoreline Management Act (SMA),173 the Seashore Conservation Act (SCA),174 and the Aquatic Lands Act (ALA).175 The SCA’s Declaration of Principles eloquently summarizes the importance of tidelands access to the public, particularly with respect to recreational opportunities:

The beaches bounding the Pacific Ocean from the Straits of Juan de Fuca to Cape Disappointment at the mouth of the Columbia River constitute some of the last unspoiled seashore remaining in the United States. They provide the public with almost unlimited opportunities for recreational activities, like swimming, surfing and hiking; for outdoor sports, like hunting, fishing, clamming, and boating; for the observation of nature as it existed for hundreds of years before the arrival of white men; and for relaxation away from the pressures and tensions of modern life. In past years, these recreational activities have been enjoyed by countless Washington citizens, as well as by tourists from other states and countries. The number of people wishing to participate in such recreational activities grows annually.176

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174. WASH. REV. CODE §§ 79A.05.600–95.

175. Id. chs. 79.105–45. More generally, Prof. Ralph Johnson, in his seminal article regarding the public trust doctrine in Washington, analyzed several statutes and in summarizing observed: “Congruence between public trust values and several statutes governing use of the state’s natural resources is common. These statutes have become increasingly important resource management tools, and the extent to which they embody or reflect public trust values has increased over time.” Johnson, supra note 18, at 542–48.

176. WASH. REV. CODE § 79A.05.600 (emphasis added). Furthermore, the Legislature explicitly provides in a later provision that the SCA is to be administered “in harmony with the broad principles set forth in RCW 79A.05.600.” Id. § 79A.05.615. This approach is consistent with the role given to declarations of policy and statements of purpose by the courts. Specifically, the Washington State Supreme Court has noted that “[d]eclarations of policy in an act, although without operative force in and of themselves, serve as an important guide in determining the intended effect
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In addition to noting in the SCA the increasing number of people seeking recreational access to tidelands, the legislature in the SMA expressed concern that a large portion of the state’s tidelands and shorelands had been transferred into private ownership. Seeking to preserve public recreational access to tidelands and shorelands, the legislature ordered the state Department of Ecology to give preference to several uses for “shorelines of statewide significance,” including, regardless of ownership, the tidelands of the Pacific coastline and much of Puget Sound and the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Among these preferred uses the legislature included “[i]ncreas[ing] recreational opportunities for the public in the shoreline.” The legislature also emphasized the importance of increasing public access to state-owned tidelands in the ALA and established the Washington State Seashore Conservation Area under the SCA to provide public recreational access to state-owned tidelands. The Department of Ecology includes opportunity to reach the water’s edge—tidelands—in the definition of “public access.”

In sum, the public trust doctrine responds to public need. Public need, in turn, is determined by the Washington Legislature. The legislature’s identification of a need for increased public recreational access to...
tidelands may be inferred from its repeated statutory attempts to address this issue.

IV. WASHINGTON’S PUBLIC TRUST DOCTRINE INCLUDES PEDESTRIAN PASSAGE OVER PRIVATE TIDELANDS

Although the Supreme Court of Washington recently denied the petition for review of the public trust claim rejected by the Washington State Court of Appeals, Division II, in its unpublished decision in *City of Bainbridge Island v. Brennan*,184 both legal and historical analyses indicate that the public trust doctrine in Washington encompasses public pedestrian passage over private tidelands, at least where necessary to effectuate currently protected *jus publicum* rights. This outcome is a logical extension of the court’s narrow interpretation in *Caminiti* of private property rights burdened by the *jus publicum*.185 Furthermore, judicial espousal of at least limited public access to private tidelands both harmonizes the public trust doctrine of this state with others that recognize the Institutes of Justinian as a source of public trust rights,186 and responds to the Washington Legislature’s identification of a need for increased public recreational access to tidelands generally.187

A. Establishing a Public Right of Pedestrian Passage over Private Tidelands Allows both Private Tidelands Owners and the State to Fulfill Their Public Trust Doctrine Obligations

Where private property ownership obstructs public access to resources protected by the public trust doctrine, *Caminiti* strongly suggests that the *jus publicum* is impermissibly impaired if the private owner does not in some way allow public pedestrian passage across the impeding property.188 There, the court found that private docks on state tidelands did not circumscribe the *jus publicum* because state administrative regulations required that dock owners allow the public to walk over, under, or around such structures.189 The court’s explicit

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185. See supra text accompanying notes 100–104.
186. See supra Part II.
187. See supra Part III.
189. Id.
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condonation of activity that would normally constitute a trespass on private property was not motivated by concern for public access to state property per se. Rather, this judicial sanctioning of public passage over private docks situated on state tidelands constitutes a primary basis for the court’s conclusion that the statutory provision at issue does not substantially impair the *jus publicum*.190 The *jus publicum*, in turn, is comprised not of the actual land protected under the public trust doctrine, but of the interest always retained by the state in land protected by the public trust doctrine.191 This interest—the public trust doctrine rights to which the public is entitled and which the state must always protect—is identical regardless of whether the protected tidelands are in state or in private ownership.192 Because the *Caminiti* court made its conclusion with respect to the *jus publicum*, rather than mere public access to state tidelands, its holding applies with equal force to all tidelands, regardless of state or private ownership.

The public trust doctrine effectively limits the title to private tidelands insofar as the owner of such property cannot undertake any property usage that substantially impairs the *jus publicum*.193 A property owner substantially impairs the *jus publicum* wherever public access to private tidelands is barred, whether the private owner dredges and fills the tidelands194 or, more simply, excludes all entry by members of the public. At least where no other tidelands access is reasonably available and the private tidelands owner excludes the public, conveyance of tidelands property into private ownership also violates the state’s obligation not to substantially impair the *jus publicum*.195 No such impairment occurs, however, so long as the private tidelands owner allows public pedestrian passage where necessary to effectuate public trust rights such as navigation, fishing, and swimming.196 Thus, neither the state nor private property owners can satisfy their public trust obligations unless the *jus publicum* encompasses a right of pedestrian passage across private tidelands for members of the public attempting to engage in protected activities.

190. *Id.* ("In any event, nothing in the statute substantially impairs the *jus publicum.*").
191. See *id.* at 668–69, 732 P.2d at 994; *supra* Part I.A.1.
192. See *Caminiti*, 107 Wash. 2d at 669–70, 732 P.2d at 994; *supra* Part I.A.1.
193. See *supra* Part I.B.
194. See *supra* Part I.B.
196. See *Caminiti*, 107 Wash. 2d at 674, 732 P.2d at 996.
B. Broad Construction of Washington’s Public Trust Doctrine Is Consistent with Judicial Recognition of the Institutes of Justinian as a Codification of Public Trust Rights

The Institutes of Justinian declare that tidelands could be owned by no one, consequently establishing a universal right of tidelands access.\footnote{197}{See \textit{supra} Part II.A.} Many scholars thus identify this ancient Roman text as one of the earliest codifications of public trust principles.\footnote{198}{See \textit{supra} Part II.A.} The public trust doctrine as we know it today, however, has evolved tremendously from its communal beginnings. Because of this country’s inheritance of property law by way of England,\footnote{199}{See \textit{supra} Part I.A.1.} title to all tidelands in the United States resides in the possession of either a state, the federal government, an Indian nation, or a private party. Furthermore, federal jurisprudence declares that, beyond certain minimum requirements, each state is free to individually determine the public rights protected under its \textit{jus publicum} interest in all tidelands within its borders.\footnote{200}{See \textit{Shively v. Bowlby}, 152 U.S. 1, 26 (1894).} Ten state judiciaries nonetheless specifically recognize Emperor Justinian’s codification of public trust principles and thus choose to continue in his tradition, albeit within the confines imposed by tidelands ownership.\footnote{201}{See \textit{supra} Part II.B.}

Of the three such judiciaries that have addressed the issue of public passage over privately owned tidelands, all have affirmed the existence of such a right, at least where necessary to effectuate more widely recognized public trust activities.\footnote{202}{See \textit{supra} Part II.B.} Massachusetts does not protect pedestrian passage over tidelands for its own sake,\footnote{203}{Opinion of the Justices, 313 N.E.2d 561, 567 (Mass. 1974).} but protects this activity when in aid of the enumerated public trust right of fishing.\footnote{204}{Barry v. Grela, 361 N.E.2d 1251, 1251–52 (Mass. 1977).} Similarly, the public trust doctrine in Michigan encompasses walking along private property on the shoreline of the Great Lakes, as members of the public would not otherwise be able to effectuate their traditionally protected activities of fishing, hunting, and navigation.\footnote{205}{Glass v. Goeckel, 703 N.W.2d 58, 74 (Mich. 2005).} The New Jersey public trust doctrine guarantees “reasonable access” to coastal
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beaches for recreational use by allowing pedestrian passage even over private dry sand areas.206

The Supreme Court of Washington also looks to the Institutes of Justinian as an ancient codification of public trust principles.207 Judicial protection of public pedestrian passage over private tidelands would therefore harmonize Washington’s public trust doctrine with that of states that adopt a similarly broad view. Such harmonization may only require public recreational access to private tidelands where necessary to effect activities protected by the \textit{jus publicum}.

C. \textit{The Washington Legislature’s Identification of a Public Need for Increased Recreational Access to Tidelands Further Validates this Construction of the Public Trust Doctrine}

The Washington State Supreme Court explicitly declared soon after confirming the existence of the public trust doctrine that the doctrine’s scope derives not from navigable waters per se but rather from public need.208 This underpinning in public need in turn caused the court to recognize that the \textit{jus publicum} interest encompasses not only the traditional rights of navigation and fishing, but also recreational activities such as boating, swimming, and water skiing.209 In fact, the court has thus far found only one activity—the taking of shellfish from private tidelands—to fall outside the scope of the public trust doctrine.210

By focusing on public need, the judiciary created an indirect role for the Washington Legislature in defining the scope of the public trust doctrine.211 The legislature determines public need with respect to welfare and security under its inherent police powers;212 public welfare includes recreational opportunities.213 The legislature has expressed concern for public recreational access to tidelands214 in response to its

211. \textit{See supra} Part III.A–B.
212. \textit{See supra} Part III.B.
214. \textit{See supra} Part III.C.
prior conveyance of more than sixty percent of Washington tidelands into private ownership. Furthermore, the legislature has specifically established as a goal “[i]ncreas[ing] recreational opportunities for the public in the shoreline,” including in the latter term both state-owned and privately owned tidelands. The courts should now respond to the legislature’s repeated calls and recognize as protected by the *jus publicum* a public right of pedestrian passage across private tidelands, at least where necessary to effectuate recreational activities also protected thereby.

V. CONCLUSION

Although the Supreme Court of Washington has yet to squarely address a right of public pedestrian passage over private tidelands, the Washington public trust doctrine logically encompasses such a right, at least where necessary to effectuate those water-based activities already judicially recognized as protected by the *jus publicum*. Neither the state nor private property owners can otherwise satisfy their obligations under the public trust doctrine. Recognition of a right of public access to private tidelands would also harmonize *jus publicum* rights among those states that recognize the Institutes of Justinian as a source of public trust principles. Furthermore, the public trust doctrine responds to public need, which the Shoreline Management Act, the Seashore Conservation Act, and the Aquatic Lands Act all strongly suggest includes increased public recreational access to tidelands.

217. *Id.* § 90.58.030(2)(d).