
STEWARDSHIP & OUTREACH REPORT

OCTOBER 2023

OVERVIEW

The transition into autumn has provided both subtle and overt changes across the archipelago. Sunset arrives an hour earlier. Loons have returned to overwinter on the saltwater. And among the woodlands, the winged seeds of the maple are alighting softly and silently while acorns drum down from the oaks in significant numbers.

It's a mast year within the region, and the abundance of acorns is attracting all kinds of attention. Band-tailed pigeons were repeatedly seen gorging on Turtleback Mountain, and volunteers set out across many Conservation Land Bank (Land Bank) preserves to collect hundreds, upon hundreds, of acorns for immediate and future planting (Photo 1). Garry oaks are notable for their drought tolerance and species-rich environments, and many nature lovers are eager to aid them – as well as other native plants! – in having an increased presence across the landscape.

The footprint available to flora and fauna also grew exponentially this past month. Ten buildings were removed, a 1,500-foot section of road was decommissioned, and a new area for the island marble butterfly was established. Hundreds of nursery-grown plants made their way to new homes. Staff traveled in between the islands to help with their dispersal, as well as to monitor conservation easements and support the wide array of recent public events (Photos 2-3).

OUTREACH

Staff: Tanja Williamson

Fall has become an exciting time of year for outreach. Press for [special meetings](#), [volunteer events](#), [guided walks](#), and [celebrating the opening](#) of Lopez Island's [Spencer Spit Preserve](#) kept Tanja busy generating content and posting the news. In addition, the [Fall 2023 newsletter](#) dropped and highlighted a few summer projects and new trails. This past month Tanja even donned a hard hat when she “assisted” Jacob in removing a dangling limb at the Westside Preserve (Photo 4). A productive month, indeed!

SALISH SEEDS NURSERY

Staff: Eliza Habegger, Margo Thorp

The Fall Native Wildflower Sale wrapped up (almost) on September 30th, with plant pick-up events on five islands. Staff formulated seed mixes for a variety of Land Bank projects, including the Large-Scale Restoration (LSR) unit on Mt. Grant, the LSR unit and the road removal area on Turtleback Mountain, and island marble butterfly plots at Frazer Homestead. Plugs, small container plants, potted shrubs, and bulbs are also ready to be planted at these and other sites. While the bulk of the plant materials produced are used on our preserves, many are also purchased by our conservation partners who depend on this supply of locally adapted plants. This year, plants and seeds are going to the WA Dept. of Natural Resources, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ecostudies Institute, the San Juan Preservation Trust (SJPT), San Juan Islands Conservation District (SJICD), and a number of private landowners and managers.

DISTRICT 1

Staff: Doug McCutchen, Charlie Behnke, Jacob Wagner, Shauna Barrows, Gabe Conway

Beaverton Marsh: The small lightning-ignited fire continues to slowly smolder in the uplands. Shauna continues to collaborate with the local fire department to monitor the burn, and a joint press release focused on the inter-agency cooperation and fire ecology will soon be drafted. Down in the marsh, Blackcap Restoration is working on an assessment of peatland areas to help inform future stewardship activities. Initial indications are that these areas were formally bogs but they've likely transitioned into a matrix of fen and shrub wetlands. Eliza and Doug collaborated with Parker Lawson to increase mowing within a portion of the peatland to survey the vegetative response and to see if rare plants persist even as shrubs and trees have increased in density. Although peatlands comprise a sliver of the globe's landcover (3%) their slow rate of decomposition enables them to hold a tremendous amount of soil carbon (30%). Over in the agricultural fields, mowing occurred to reduce thatch, control invasive plants, and stimulate spring growth. A request for proposals for a long-term lease will be released later this year. Permits from the Town were not received in time to complete the Linde Park portion of the trail this year, but the contractor is willing to honor the bid into second quarter of 2024.

Cady Mountain: Preserve neighbor Jessica Clark joined Shauna and SJPT's Ben Hallowell for a tour of their shared property lines. Jessica is excited to work collaboratively and initiate oak restoration on her private land.

Deadman Bay: An aluminum boat appeared on the beach, and staff are attempting to contact the owner.

False Bay Creek: Lessee John Wilson wrapped up his final grazing season. The SJICD has initiated an Individual Stewardship Plan process to help provide guidance for future agricultural activities on the Preserve and conducted site visit with John Wilson and Charlie to learn more about current and past management (Photo 5).

Frazer Homestead: The new island marble butterfly plot is being installed. This is a collaboration with US Fish and Wildlife and the SJICD. The ICC is helping to build a deer fence around the new site and prep the beds for planting. The agricultural fields that were not hayed this year were mowed and a request for proposals for a long-term agricultural lease will be released later this year.

King Sisters: Fencelines were mowed to reduce encroaching brush, and efforts to control hawthorn continues. Rob Waldron's Scottish Highland/ Red Devon cattle are enjoying the fall forage.

Mount Grant: Staff and ICC members reinitiated work -- thinning, burning and producing biochar -- at the LSR site (Photo 6). A Washington Conservation Corps crew was also hired to construct a segment of trail and connect the new parking area with the existing trail system.

Westside: In addition to removing a hazardous madrone limb, staff assisted a neighbor that had a fallen tree across their driveway and near the trail easement.

Zylstra Lake: Conveyance of water downstream for agricultural use stopped at the beginning of the month per our water rights. Staff is preparing for annual monitoring of the dams, and Doug is working with the State Office of Dam Safety (DSO) and local contractors to make repairs to the upper dam before the stormy season begins. Jacob caught sight of a bright sheen of blue-green algae while working on the Preserve (Photos 7-8). And many SJI staff members joined together to clean and organize fencing, signage, agricultural supplies, equipment and assorted implements, within the covered storage areas at the south end of the property.

DISTRICT 2

Staff: Peter Guillozet, Mary Gropp

Coffelt Farm: Staff and Commissioners teamed up to represent the Land Bank for the annual farm tour and over the beautiful fall weekend several hundred visitors came through (Photos 9-10). Peter distributed plants from the Salish Seeds Project plant sale. He also met with Meghan Howard from SJPT for her annual easement monitoring visit.

Coho: Consultant Jenny DeGroot noticed a silt in the creek in late September and asked for support in monitoring its extent. Fortunately, within a few days, the water ran clear again, and Coho salmon and cutthroat trout are enjoying the recent rains.

North Shore: The first phase of building demolition is complete!!!! Racing the rains, Peter worked with a mainland-based contractor to remove 10 buildings, including six shoreline cabins, three sheds and a small cottage behind the main house. Prior to demolition, a limited amount of usable building material was salvaged and a representative from the Orcas Historical Museum came to take photos of the old but decrepit buildings. San Juan Sanitation did a commendable job of circulating multiple drop boxes in quick succession and keep up with the debris. As a condition of the permit, the entire process was observed by an archaeologist. The contractor also completed extensive work on the beach access road to address multiple slope failures and to improve drainage. Following the completion of grading, staff seeded the work areas with a mix of native grasses and fast-growing sterile wheat to supplement the ‘best management practices (BMPs) for erosion control, i.e., coir fabric and straw (Photos 11-13). Although additional smaller scale slides are likely in the future, staff will monitor and address them as they occur. Planning and permitting efforts are ongoing for the demolition of the main house, for restoring the wetland areas, and for grading and constructing a parking lot in 2024.

Turtleback Mountain: Peter worked with a local contractor to decommission a highly erosive segment of road and to enhance two overlook areas. The overlooks were fashioned with four locally made benches, and native seed and wetland-grown straw was spread over disturbed areas to avoid introducing upland weeds. As that road-erasure project wrapped up, the Washington Trails Association (WTA) began re-routing the upper portion of the Morning Ridge Trail. An energetic crew, they completed approximately 1,200 feet of trail in several days. This new

alignment features several switchbacks for an improved grade and offers spectacular views to the west. The WTA will return this month to complete refinements to the rest of trail (Photos 14-17). In Peter's view, this project marks the end of major infrastructure work that has all been aimed at adapting the area for extreme rainfall events. With project dust still settling, the Land Bank and SJPT teamed up on a volunteer event to plant native plugs and acorns in the old road area. Over the next several weeks, staff and volunteers will plant many hundreds of acorns gathered on site, along with native plugs and several thousand onion and camas bulbs from the Salish Seeds Project. The ICC crew also kicked off a new season of forest work on the mountain. Peter is looking to expand the pace and the scale of forest thinning and collaborating with DNR staff to draft a proposal for additional funding in 2024. WHEW!

DISTRICT 3

Staff: Amanda Wedow

Channel: Several volunteers gathered to pick up litter along the beach during the fall Great Islands Cleanup.

Hummel Lake: Amanda attended Kwiaht's 'Raising of the Spirits' ceremony.

Lopez Hill: Acorn Trail Works visited an area along the new trail route that crosses a seasonal creek. They are working on a design for two crossings and considering using fallen cedar for the materials.

Richardson Marsh: Jacob brought "Kubie," the Kubota tractor, over to mow reed canary grass along the fence line. It worked like a charm. The augur also aided in digging five post holes to extend the fence. Amanda and volunteer Christa Wilkinson installed new posts, and Amanda is working to complete this section of fence. Scott Rozenbaum, a wetland ecologist, surveyed the marsh and noticed several saltwater tolerant plants growing within the Preserve. Staff met with a neighbor to discuss access along the north fence line, completed annual monitoring, and worked on the management plan.

Spencer Spit: The weather was unfavorable on National Public Lands Day, but several hikers attended the celebration and walked the new trail. Land Bank staff and a Commissioner enjoyed

the morning spent with conservation partners, State Park Ranger Mehgan Alexandra and BLM Recreation Planner Owen Ellis (Photo 18).

Watmough: At the addition property, a request for proposals was sent out for a cultural resource assessment, and a leaky well cap was replaced. Amanda is working on a JARPA application for renewal of the three buoys, which were installed in 2012.

Photos



Photo 1. A band-tailed pigeon feeds on acorns, at Turtleback Mountain Preserve.



Photo 2. Erin monitors a CE on Blakely, the SJPT Crowley Preserve



Photo 3: Eliza, Shauna, and Margo stand next to the load of native plants headed to Orcas for the native plant sale.



Photo 4. Jacob next to madrone limb that was hanging precariously over the trail moments before.



Photo 5: John Wilson with SJICD Farm Planners, False Bay Creek Preserve



Photo 6: The ICC learn rigging techniques for felling trees in tight canopies, Mt Grant Preserve.



Photo 7: Shauna “testing” out the newly installed bog bridge, Zylstra Lake Preserve



Photo 8. A late season blue-green algae bloom, Zylstra Lake Preserve.



Photo 9. Sheep shearing demonstration with Lum Farm tour, Coffelt Farm Preserve.



Photo 10. Charlie and Sandi tabling (Brian arrived later), Coffelt Farm Preserve.



Photo 11. Shoreline cabin removal with archaeological observation, North Shore Preserve.



Photo 12. Preliminary grading of the old road to remove slide material, North Shore Preserve.



Photo 13. Finishing up the road-to-trail conversion and establishing erosion control, North Shore Preserve.



Photo 14. There was a road there? It's no longer, Turtleback Mountain Preserve.



Photo 15. A crew from WTA realigns the upper Morning Ridge Trail, Turtleback Mountain Preserve.



Photo 16. Peter improves the upper overlook, Turtleback Mountain Preserve



Photo 17. The finished product features 'new and improved' benches.



Photo 18. National Public Lands Day at Spencer Spit Preserve.