
STEWARDSHIP & OUTREACH REPORT

NOVEMBER 2023

OVERVIEW

It is the season for gratitude and gathering, and at a recent meeting Conservation Land Bank staff concurred: we are grateful for all our volunteers (Photo 1). This autumn so many of our projects on preserves have received wide-ranging and awe-inspiring support. Planting parties to cast seed and to bury bulbs, acorns, and plugs, have occurred across the isles. An enthusiastic group on San Juan Island, “The Future Forest Acorn Project,” is helping to increase the distribution of Garry oaks and approximately 1,500 acorns were planted around four different preserves. Others gathered on Lopez to assist in developing habitat for the island marble butterfly, and one Orcas resident donated 30 healthy, home-grown Garry oaks to Turtleback Mountain (Photos 2-3).

Many other community members are donating their time and insights into our strategic planning process. Doug recently conversed with staff from SJC Community Health about potential opportunities and pathways for Tribes and First Nations to access Land Bank preserves. Their discussion revolved around developing policy, similar efforts underway within the region, and a commitment to keep the conversation moving forward. In a related effort, Doug intends to coordinate a meeting with the [Martin Conservation Decision Lab](#) and regional land managers to learn about related efforts in British Columbia. Eliza gave presentations to the Orcas Garden Club (in person, September) and the SJC Master Gardeners Foundation Fall Gardening Workshop (webinar, October) about making native wildflower meadows and other landscaping with native plants.

We’re all looking forward to welcoming a new member to the Land Bank team. The new Orcas field assistant, Tyler Goodman, starts this week. He topped the list of 43 applicants and will bring a gentle demeanor, solid equipment skills, an academic background in ecology, and a demonstrated service ethic.

OUTREACH

Staff: Tanja Williamson

The cooler weather is bringing a close to this year's outdoor events, though there are still a few fun volunteer days in the forecast. Tanja is working to update the Land Bank's website content, and also reviewing previous outreach calendars in preparation for making a schedule for 2024. She will be reaching out to stewards and Commissioners for ideas and aims to keep the annual favorites -- think spring native wildflower walks! -- as well as brainstorm new events.

SALISH SEEDS NURSERY

Staff: Eliza Habegger, Margo Thorp

Seasonal tasks around the nursery involve weeding, mulching, weeding, and otherwise tidying up for the winter. Staff is sowing many *thousands* of plugs with species whose seed requires extended periods (weeks or months) of cold, wet conditions in order to germinate.

This fall there's been a few records surrounding seed: the nursery produced a record quantity of over 26 pounds of seed as well as receiving a record number of orders for seed. Purchasers of seed include various landowners, non-profits, and other government entities. Plugs are still being picked up and planted. And a majority of nursery stock -- seeds, plugs, and bulbs -- that was produced this year is being utilized on Land Bank preserves including, but not limited to: Fisherman Bay Spit, Mount Grant, Cady Mountain, Westside, Turtleback Mountain, North Shore, and Frazer Homestead.

DISTRICT 1

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

Beaverton Marsh: The lightning-ignited fire appears to be extinguished. Jacob used an infrared camera provided by the Fire Department and no "hot spots" or areas with heat were observed. Staff worked beside some rockstar volunteers to spread gravel on the new Redtail Trail, which will ultimately connect to Linde Community Park (Photo 4). Contractor Blackcap Restoration completed soil and vegetation analyses within the peatlands, and preliminary data indicates that the current area(s) of interest previously occupied a larger area, and likely consisted of a "treed bog" or "poor fen." These wetland distinctions will be considered in any future restoration plans.

Cady Mountain: The Island Conservation Corps (ICC) joined staff to release oaks within the newest addition. Blackcap Restoration and Shauna followed with seeding and planting of grasses and forbs from the nursery.

Frazer Homestead: The new habitat area for the island marble butterfly has been completely fenced, and the plot was tilled, raked, and then seeded with field mustard as well as a variety of native wildflowers and grasses.

Kellett Bluff: Annual monitoring, seeding, and planting of acorns occurred. Ben Halloway with SJPT connected staff with a nearby neighbor who generously offered use of his dock during the summer. (The float is removed in winter.) The mooring buoy agreement with Suquamish was recorded and permitting is expected to restart soon. Doug conversed with faculty at the University of Victoria, Darcy Mathews, and graduate student, Maddi Tolmie, about researching the Preserve's ethnoecology. Darcy has positive connections with the WSANEC First Nation members who have ancestral connections to the site.

Limekiln: SJC Parks and Fair staff assisted with the cleanup of some household items that were dumped in parking area. After leaving notice for ten days, Land Bank staff removed an abandoned boat, and arranged for future attempts to locate the owner to be coordinated with SJC Sheriff's Office.

Middlewood: The habitat area for the island marble butterfly was maintained and seeded.

Mount Grant: Staff cleared fallen trees from across the trail. The Washington Conservation Crew constructed a trail which links the new parking area to the existing network, and volunteers assisted with developing turn pikes and a short puncheon (Photo 5). Woodchips, generated from clearing for the parking lot, will be donated to SJC Environmental Stewardship to mulch plantings at the County's new Operations Center. The ICC continues to thin trees and burn slash piles in the LSR unit. One burn pile flared back up and continues to smolder but is being monitored by staff from the Land Bank and Fire Department. Colorful fungi within the burn pile areas captured attention, and has been tentatively identified as [*pyronema omphalodes*](#), a relatively common, [fire-associated fungus](#). Another of the LSR's project partners, the Samish Indian Nation, will soon assist with planting and deer fencing.

Zylstra Lake: The habitat area for the island marble butterfly was maintained and seeded. A local contractor repaired rodent damage to the earthen dam and helped to discover a network of tunnels that are estimated to extend more than 30' long, and seven feet into the dam. While onsite, the contractor also assisted with the removing old siphons, grading and filling surfaces, and seeding and mulching disturbed areas (Photo 6). The rental port-a-potty was removed by the contractor after the fourth occurrence of vandalism in the past year. Staff are researching other options.

DISTRICT 2

Staff: Peter Guillozet, Mary Gropp

Coffelt Farm: A utility easement area now extends north from the parking area to serve the neighboring property, and a crew from OPALCO recently installed the new power line. Plans are underway to replace several segments of field fencing along the western and southern boundaries. Blackcap Restoration completed fall maintenance of riparian plantings.

Coho: Former Orcas field assistant Eric Nelson visited several preserves (Coho and Judd Cove) during a recent visit. He went to survey the riparian plantings he helped to establish in 2020, and in response he shared, "It is so inspiring to see how well everything has grown!"

Crescent Beach: Mary helped coordinate students from the Orcas Island School District, and they have now begun to have regular stewardship-focused outings on the Preserve. Erin and Peter are working on updating the Preserve's management plan in preparation for forest thinning projects and considered submitting a (second) grant application to help fund the work. The first application, which was submitted in collaboration with Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is currently under review. In the meantime, trees continue to fall across the trail every time the wind blows...

Fowlers Pond: Beaver continue their efforts to plug the outlet of the pond, and most recently constructed their own small dam in the stream, below the larger dam. It is both exciting to see the apparent expansion of beaver on Orcas, except that beavers and culverts don't often peacefully coexist.

North Shore: Land Bank staff gathered in the garage for the monthly staff meeting, and later joined Peter for a tour of the demolition area. Now that the road-to-trail work and building removal has occurred, Peter has shifted to preparing to plant approximately 10,000 trees and shrubs this winter. The first step is to install temporary deer fencing, and materials are being sourced from an old project at Stonebridge-Terril. Junk and noxious weed removal continues. Trailers of buried tires and other debris have been hauled away. The Orcas Island Exchange removed another round of building materials from the main house. Jason Ontjes from the Noxious Weed Board continues to assist with removing holly, and the ICC was recently onsite burning slash piles of already-removed holly, hawthorn, and broom.

Stonebridge-Terrill: Peter worked with a local contractor, the Chihuahua Team, to complete the removal of approximately 2,500 feet of deer fencing. The fencing originally surrounded the Public Works wetland mitigation area. It had collapsed in places and was no longer needed as the mitigation plantings are established enough to sufficiently tolerate deer browse (Photo 7).

Turtleback Mountain: Feedback from partners and members of the public on the new segment of Morning Ridge trail – even though it remains unfinished --- has been positive. The Washington Trail Association (WTA) cancelled their second work party due to crew leader illness. Now, a smaller WTA crew is planned to return on November 20th. Peter attended a coordination meeting for the LSR grant project to help define partner roles for the coming year. As the end nears for major work within Turtleback's current 50-acre project area, staff are looking to expand the thinning work to the north and west with additional LSR funds. The ICC crew has burned over half of the 350 piles from recent thinning work and has begun creating new piles for next year. Orcas resident Jeff Bossler donated 30 healthy Garry oaks that he grew from small seedlings. They will be planted on the Preserve this winter. Mary organized a couple of volunteer events to plant plugs, bulbs and acorns in the decommissioned road segment. And another former Orcas field assistant traveled to take part in the restoration; Kayla Seaforth joined for one of the volunteer outings (Photo 8).

DISTRICT 3

Staff: Amanda Wedow

FB Spit: Amanda performed general site maintenance, including annual monitoring and noted that the high level of rabbit activity has reduced vegetation. Several volunteers gathered to plant field mustard within the island marble butterfly plots and installed chicken wire around the plantings to help protect them from rabbit herbivory (Photo 2).

Lopez Hill: Hunting season ended on Halloween, and an estimated 60 hunters inquired for written permission this year. Neon vests were removed from the trailhead and signs were updated. Acorn Trail Works completed their design for the stream crossing and are now preparing to implement the project.

Richardson Marsh: The upland area around the well, which is primarily reed canary grass, was mowed (Photo 9). Staff completed fencing along the field. This area will likely become part of the future trail route, and Amanda continues to work on an overall design for the site, generating maps, and drafting a long-term management plan.

Upright Head: During annual monitoring of this preserve, it was also noted that rabbits have moved into the area.

Weeks Wetland: Staff performed annual monitoring and general trail maintenance such as mowing and brushing.

Watmough: Attendance has been sparse during recent guided tours, and opportunities to tour the site will be put on pause until spring. The consultant, Caldera Archeology, was hired to perform a Cultural Resources Assessment of the property. San Juan Surveying was hired to locate property boundaries and to prepare a description of the buildings area, which is necessary to proceed with the grant agreements.

Photos



Photo 1. Land Bank staff gather for a monthly meeting, North Shore Preserve.



Photo 2. Volunteers seeded areas set aside from the island marble butterfly and erected chicken wire to keep the rabbits out, Fisherman Bay Spit Preserve.



Photo 3. Orcas resident Jeff Bossler hands off 30 home-grown oaks for planting on Turtleback Mountain Preserve.



Photo 4. Jacob discovered a soft spot in the trail during a recent trail building day, Beaverton Marsh Preserve.



Photo 5. WCC crew and Gabe built a new puncheon, Mount Grant Preserve.



Photo 6. Contractors filled in animal burrows and smoothed the face of the upper dam, Zylstra Lake Preserve.



Photo 7. Deer fencing materials removed from Stonebridge-Terrill Preserve are staged for re-installation at North Shore property prior to planting this winter.



Photo 8. Former Orcas field assistant Kayla Seaforth joins Erin for a planting work party, Turtleback Mountain Preserve.



Photo 9. A freshly mowed field and some new fencing, Richardson Marsh Preserve.