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## STEWARDSHIP & OUTREACH REPORT

MAY 2024

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### **OVERVIEW**

Black-headed grosbeaks are singing, and Swainson's thrushes have started tuning up. Several Violet-green swallows have moved into the nest boxes provided on Coffelt Farm and North Shore preserves. Bat boxes, built by a Girl Scout and delivered by Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), are soon to be installed across many preserves. Coverboards set out to attract reptiles and amphibians have yielded another sighting of the elusive sharp-tailed snake.

Habitat enhancement projects are center stage this month, and some are stunningly scenic. For example, the lawn-to-meadow conversion at the office. There are chocolate lilies and chickweed, and several other native species that stewards and the community are admiring, in much greater extents, across Conservation Land Bank preserves. The submission of photos this month is a thumb-through beauty! Proposals for future restoration projects were recently submitted to the Salmon Recovery Funding Board (SRFB) by conservation partners, Department of Environmental Stewardship and Friends of the San Juans, to improve habitat and water quality at Richardson Marsh, Zylstra Lake and False Bay Creek. Amanda and Charlie hosted the field trips to these preserves and provided support.

We submitted our own proposal to SRFB, and Tyler and Erin led a tour of the potential acquisition on East Sound. Its undeveloped shoreline is also stunningly scenic but what makes this project a relatively easy sell, as compared to the restoration projects in the queue, is that it meets the County's top priority for salmon recovery: protection of intact habitat (Photos 1-3).

### **OUTREACH**

Staff: Tanja Williamson

Outreach has been a "buzz" with activity. The Great Islands Cleanup was well supported across all the islands, and volunteers collected plastic and marine debris from the preserve shorelines along Fisherman Bay Spit, Crescent Beach, Deadman Bay and Third Lagoon. Doug also helped coordinate a cleanup at the Department of Natural Resources property at Cattle Point!

Recent events held for Native Plant Appreciation, at the nursery and Driggs Park, were attended with enthusiasm. Other endeavors (prepare yourself for a list!) have included: hosting booths at the Farmers' Markets, supporting 'Screen Free Week' with a bug hunt at Lilac, Lemonade and Lacewing, leading a Bingo! family walk, and leading an excursion for the 2024 'Know Your Island' hiker series. And there's more on the horizon. On May 18<sup>th</sup> staff will host a booth at the Island Rec Children's Festival. On the 19<sup>th</sup> there will be a guided walk on Turtleback Mountain. Tanja and Mary are also working with a high school senior on Orcas to develop her community project which aims to install temporary kiosk(s), supply bags, and encourage beachcombers to collect microplastics and other marine trash at Crescent Beach Preserve, and potentially Eastsound Waterfront Park (Photos 4-7).

### **SALISH SEEDS PROJECT**

Staff: Eliza Habegger, Margo Thorp

Two consecutive tours of the nursery at Red Mill Farm allowed the general public a behind the scenes look at how native plants and seeds are grown and produced. Seeing the plants in bloom inspired many attendees to want to create wildflower habitat themselves. Jacob, Shauna, and Tyler joined for a day and powered through a number of projects, including digging up an electrical line for repairs (Photo 8).

### **DISTRICT 1**

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

**Beaverton Marsh:** Permits were received from the Town for trail construction, and the new trail is on-track to open this summer. Craig Green, a volunteer that has helped mow trails on SJI preserves over for years, will undergo back surgery and need to rest this season; he'll be greatly missed but we wish him an easy recovery! Tom Delaney, a descendant of homesteader Catherine Delaney, shared photos and family history from the north side of the Preserve (Photo 10).

The long-term agricultural lease is being developed and agricultural improvements are underway. A crew from the Washington Conservation Corps will assist staff with replacement of the perimeter fence. The Grange has begun to mow and cover with tarps approximately a quarter-acre. This will be the future garden area, and the tarps will be weighted down with cages to grow potatoes.

**Cady Mountain:** Doug led a trail building workshop which was well attended and ton of fun. The Island Conservation Corps (ICC) joined volunteers and staff to help re-route two sections of the trail to create a more sustainable course. This has involved hauling countless buckets of rocks and soil, cutting limbs, and sculpting tread. Development of an official trailhead is scheduled for mid-May, and the public opening is set for June 15<sup>th</sup> (Photos 11-13).

**Driggs Park:** The lawn-to-meadow demonstration area is having a glorious spring! It was the perfect backdrop for both of Eliza’s “Lawn Be Gone!” workshops. Two interpretive signs, which explain the benefits of converting lawn to native plantings, are nearly ready for fabrication. Members of the public have been cutting lilacs with enthusiasm. (Photo 1).

**Frazer Homestead:** Preparations for the long-term agricultural lease are underway. In the interim, the Shephard family has permission to mend fences for future rotational cattle grazing.

**Kellett Bluff:** A fishing vessel collided with Henry Island and sank. (Read press [HERE](#), in case you missed it.) Kathleen Foley-Lewis with SJPT is trained in oil-spill response and reported that there were no adverse impacts to wildlife. Work is currently underway to remove the vessel

**King Sisters:** Cattle numbers were decreased, and temporarily removed, to allow for regrowth in the pastures.

**Limekiln:** A bollard at the parking area which featured a WDFW regulatory sign regarding Northern Pike was cut and removed by vandals. The sheriff was notified. WDFW also broadcast ‘[a more muscular message](#)’ about the invasive species.

**Middlewood:** The ICC erected a solid deer fence to protect island marble butterfly habitat – not only the host plant, but the eggs and larvae thereon -- from browsing deer (Photo 14).

**Mount Grant:** Members of the ICC are erecting fence here as well. These exclosures will protect native vegetation within the LSR project area. Volunteers and representative from the Family Resource Center joined staff to load small diameter poles, a byproduct of the forest thinning project, and deliver this soon-to-be firewood to the Family Resource Center (Photo 15).

**Third Lagoon:** During the Great Islands Cleanup, neighbors voiced concern that the roadside parking is being used for personal, residential use. San Juan Surveying provided information that

helped determine that the parking area is within the road easement and under the jurisdiction of Public Works. The Sheriff's Department agreed to provide outreach and monitor.

**Westside:** Shauna led an interpretive walk on coastal prairies and indigenous management for the Whale Museum's Marine Naturalists Training Program.

**Zylstra Lake:** Hay season has arrived. Lessees Adam and Sarah and their team of local farmers and ranchers have begun to harvest. Shauna led a walk to the 'beaver dam analog (Photo 7).

## **DISTRICT 2**

Staff: Peter Guillozet, Tyler Goodman, Mary Gropp

**Coffelt Farm:** Reed canarygrass along the stream corridor is off to an early start too, and mowing season has begun. The crew from Blackcap Restoration spent a day weed whacking and gave the riparian vegetation, planted to support water quality, more growing room. Tyler installed a nesting box for Violet-green swallows by the office and there is daily occupancy, along with the others on the fence posts. Charlie met with the Lum's, SJI Conservation District staff, and an engineer to discuss potential 'heavy-use' additions to the cattle wintering area.

**Coho:** The SRFB visited an adjacent private property where Friends of the San Juans proposed riparian restoration to add shade to the brackish stretch of creek. Tyler joined this site visit as well as the East Orcas Island Water Rights tour, led by Buck Smith from Department of Ecology (Ecology). Jenny DeGroot was in attendance as were staff from Ecology, the Heath Department, and State Parks, and the group trekked from Mount Constitution down to Mountain Lake, then to the Doe Bay diversion, the Olga diversion, the Rosario diversion, and then finally to the Preserve where Cascade Creek outflows into Buck Bay. This group of people are critical players in the ongoing effort to release more water into Cascade Creek during time when salmon are at risk because of critically low flows.

**Deer Harbor:** Neighbor Steve Spence, who graciously mows the Preserve, reported that a tree that had been routinely dropping limbs through the winter is officially now dead and will need attention.

**Eastsound Waterfront Park:** Tyler conducted forage fish surveys with Friends of the San Juans staff, Katherine Dietzman, and observed the red algal bloom along the shoreline. Read more about the nontoxic bloom that occurred last week [HERE](#) (Photo 16).

**Fowler's Pond:** The “beaver deceiver” that Peter and Tyler built around the perimeter of the dock appears to be steadily holding off attempts by the resident beaver(s) to stuff the drainage pipe full of sticks and lily pad roots. (Sometimes ‘habitat enhancements’ involve helping wildlife stay out of trouble!)

**Judd Cove:** Planning has commenced for some trail grade improvements.

**North Shore:** The permit dance continues in Peter's absence. We are currently waiting for SEPA approval, which will then be followed by Ecology. Jacob and Shauna hopped islands and helped for a day in the orchard and to install a gate on the 2.2-acre deer exclosure. Members of the ICC worked the perimeter of the foundation and collected thousands of stray nails from the burning of the building. The crew also helped remove Italian arum in a forested patch between the future parking lot and the former inn and helped to rewild that stretch of forest by scattering rocks that once lined walkways and cleaning up remnants of old plastic and terra cotta pots. Christian Oldham, a herpetologist with Kwiaht, has funding to monitor amphibians in the pond and he has also installed a game camera in the vicinity. Katherine Dietzman from the Friends of the San Juans retrieved samples of the shoreline gravel to assess for forage fish eggs. Tours continue on a regular basis and there is *always* a resounding sense of amazement from the participants. This is going to be a very popular property once people experience the beauty and spread the word. The Preserve is already popular with the birds; Erin catalogued numerous species on a recent visit including Red crossbill and MacGillivray's warbler. A pair of Bald eagles has occupied a nest at the top of a fir tree along the edge of the bluff. Mary has been monitoring the Barn swallows and observing that there are a few curious about the new structure – one male was seen singing from a perch – but no nest building has yet occurred in the replacement structure. Several bat boxes will be installed on the garage to encourage the already existent population (Photos 17-19).

**Stonebridge-Terrill:** A local homeless woman has been observed camping along the birding trail on two occasions. She has a substantial bike trailer that's been converted into a covered tent. The sheriff was notified on each occasion.

**Turtleback Mountain:** Christian from Kwiaht has been monitoring various coverboards that have been set out on the Preserve and found another sharp-tailed snake! Tyler worked alongside crews from the ICC and Samish DNR for two days. Together, they crisscrossed the south slope (LSR project area) and the north slope and removed scotch broom, mullein, thistle, and blackberry. Tyler had previously mapped weedy clusters with a GPS and this aided in an efficient and extensive traverse of the mountain. They eliminated as many weedy plants as possible in the time window and admired many wildflowers in the process; Camas, death camas, sea blush, fawn lily, chocolate lily, lomatium, shooting-star, blue-eyed Mary, field mouse-ear and monkeyflower were observed in abundance. Mary, Tyler and all three founding members of Blackcap Restoration spent an additional day pulling and cutting scotch broom on the northern slopes, and in hotspots along neighbor property lines. Washington Trails Association (WTA) organized a weekend volunteer event to continue refinement of the Morning Ridge Trail. – And, at the Farmer’s Market this month, Tanja met a couple that had volunteered last year to help re-route the Morning Ridge Trail (Photos 20-23)!

### **DISTRICT 3**

Staff: Amanda Wedow, Cedar Charnley

**Channel:** Staff replaced the signpost at south boundary which was lost in the winter storms. Preserve signs were initially installed near the driftwood, and the new signpost was moved upland. Staff performed routine trail maintenance and the Preserve is in good condition; wildflowers that were planted by volunteers last winter such as sea thrift, buttercup, and lupine, are in bloom.

**FB Spit:** Amanda supported the Great Islands Cleanup and also tagged numerous creosote logs with the MyCoast.org app. Italian arum control is underway, with numerous methods being used. The fields were mowed one more time to suppress the plants and reduce the number of flowers and seeds (Photo 4).

**Hummel Lake:** Amanda joined a work party hosted by Kwiaht on WDFW’s adjacent property. Strong progress has been made to cut back and dig out blackberry and to manage other weeds. Future plans to revegetate with native shrubs are in place. Routine maintenance on the Land

Bank preserve occurred and included mowing the parking area, mowing and brushing the trail, and digging out poison hemlock.

**Lopez Hill:** Staff spent a day on the hill for basic maintenance and to work on the north addition. In the process a new, unauthorized trail that led to the top of a rocky bald was discovered, as well as a bench constructed from tree branches and rocks. This is in a sensitive area that has wildflowers -- camas, sea blush, and buttercup -- and an abundance of mosses and lichens. The bench was carefully deconstructed. Moss was replaced, and the trail was decommissioned. Signage will be posted soon. Along the new north trail connection, staff flush-cut some hazard “stubs” in the trail corridor and prepared for building a puncheon over the seasonal stream. Amanda and Cedar also weeded a small patch of herb Robert (class B noxious weed) located on the main trail; this has been an ongoing, annual task and there is noticeable improvement (Photo 24).

**Richardson Marsh:** Staff mowed, worked on refining the new trail, and began to layout the parking area. Friends of the San Juans submitted a proposal to the SRFB to analyze alternatives that aim to restore the salt marsh; Amanda joined for the tour and site discussion.

**Upright Head:** Amanda attended a virtual meeting with Friends of the San Juans focused on removing the shoreline armor.

**Watmough:** Staff hosted a work party to remove poison hemlock. Development of the long-term Stewardship and Management Plan is underway.

### Photos



Photo 1. A Girl Scout community service project will soon provide preserves with bat boxes.



Photo 2. Wildflowers in the lawn-to-meadow conversion project, Driggs Park.



Photo 3. Aerial view of an acquisition project that aims to protect 1,300-feet of shoreline on East Sound.





Photo 4. A Great Islands Cleanup volunteer, Fisherman Bay Spit.



Photo 5. Doug holds some trash collected during the Great Islands Cleanup at Third Lagoon.



Photo 6. Cynthia and Tanja prep for their children’s event on bugs, Driggs Park.



Photo 7. Shauna leads a Know Your Island Walk at Zylstra Lake Preserve.



Photo 8. A roadside planting of sea blush (*Plectritis congesta*) greets visitors to the Salish Seeds Project nursery.



Photo 9. A conservation easement owner stands among the camas on this forever-wild headland.



Photo 10. A historic photo of the homestead at Beaverton Marsh Preserve.



Photo 11. Doug discusses hand tools during a sustainable trail building workshop, Cady Mountain Preserve.



Photos 12-13. Evergreen violet (above) and Shooting stars (below) on Cady Mountain Preserve.





Photo 14. New fencing will protect island marble butterfly habitat from deer, Middlewood Preserve.



Photo 15. Volunteers collect firewood, a byproduct of forest health work, to donate to the Family Resource Center, Mount Grant Preserve.



Photo 16. A seasonal nontoxic algal bloom, Eastsound Waterfront Park.



Photo 17. Rough-skinned newts, North Shore Preserve



Photo 18. Anemones and limpets in tidepool, North Shore Preserve



Photo 19. Violet-green swallow, North Shore Preserve





Photos 20-22. Camas (above), Field Mouse-ear (left) and Sea blush (right), on Turtleback Mountain Preserve.





Photo 23. Washington Trails Association Volunteers visit San Juan Island



Photo 24. Our newest member of the team, Cedar Charnley, at Lopez Hill Preserve.