
STEWARDSHIP & OUTREACH REPORT

OCTOBER 2024

OVERVIEW

Staff have started annual monitoring of preserves and conservation easements. These walks in the woods and surrounding wetlands have provided some great glimpses of island amphibians. (Photos 1-2). And the treks along the protected shorelines of quiet bays resound with the call of loons (Photo 3).

OUTREACH

Staff: Tanja Williamson

Tanja managed online logistics for the fall plant sale, highlighted stewardship accomplishments via social media, and arranged a variety of fun in-person events this past month. RobRoy McGregor of SJPT, led a guided lichen walk at Fisherman Bay Spit on Lopez, and attendees learned basic lichen identification and morphology (Photo 4). Shauna summited Mount Grant with the Mullis Center and led participants in the Know Your Island walks among the mushrooms at Beaverton Marsh. Outstanding weather graced many of the outings, including the last BIG opening of the year. North Shore Preserve is now open to the public and staff have even met community members from other islands, braving the inter-island ferry, and going over to walk the new stretch of shoreline on Orcas. An all-island Community Conversations is scheduled for Oct 24, and the fall newsletter is in-the-works.

SALISH SEEDS NURSERY

Staff: Eliza Habegger, Margo Thorp

Our annual Fall Native Wildflower Sale went well with a few minor hiccups. As usual, demand for most species greatly exceeded what we're able to supply. Now that the sale is complete, nursery staff are working on assembling plugs, bulbs, and seed mixes for Land Bank preserves and filling special orders for other conservation land managers and outside parties. End-of-the season tasks are also in progress: testing, packaging, and storing the year's seed harvest;

weeding; and tidying up for the winter. Many volunteers helped with wildflower sale preparation in September, and we'll have our final 2024 volunteer day in October.

DISTRICT 1

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

Beaverton Marsh: Trail maintenance is ongoing, and a stretch of the Dragonfly Loop trail/road was ditched and graveled to improve access. Doug is working with Eliza and the Island Conservation Corps (ICC) to design a seven-acre forest health project in the uplands. The project area was formerly open agricultural land, but it is now a dense stand – with over 450 trees per acre – of young fir trees. Wet conditions greatly reduced the area that is typically mowed to support winter waterfowl and experimental bog maintenance. And in a worrying trend, Jacob drew the short straw (again) and dealt with some nasty material (a garbage can of putrefied animal parts) that was dumped in a pullout along the Beaverton Valley Road.

Farm developments continue. Activities are focused on providing access and parking and improving the water system and fencing. The Grange added temporary deer fencing around their initial garden space, which currently showcases a thriving cover crop and a row of fall crops.

Cady Mountain: The ICC worked for a day releasing oaks from competition (Photo 5). A directional sign was replaced after being torn out. The enduring assistance of volunteers enabled Doug to complete the puncheon crossing on the trail (Photo 6). Tad Reid deserves special mention for making three laps, equal to six miles, with a hand truck and backpack full of decking boards!

Deadman Bay: Driftwood forts were deconstructed. The restroom was scheduled for annual pump-out and internal cleaning protocols have been updated.

Frazer Homestead: Last year, the San Juan Islands Conservation District (SJICD) obtained funding for a second island marble butterfly habitat plot. This past month, Eliza worked with SJICD staff to prepare and seed areas for butterfly host plants as well as other native species. The Shephard's have re-fenced the pond to exclude cattle and are grazing a small herd in the northern pasture.

Kellett Bluff: Doug and Shauna boated over in a skiff, donated by Allen Rosenberg, and a new outboard. In addition to annual monitoring, they developed a workplan ahead of anticipated pile burning and planting at the end of the month with the ICC, Samish DNR, and potentially other partners.

King Sisters: OPALCO has requested to acquire a wider utility easement along San Juan Valley Road. The proposal relates to work planned in the near future and it is not feasible to alter the easement in such short time. Given this, they may proceed within the existing right-of-way, and this will involve removal of vegetation within the hedgerow for a considerable stretch. Staff are working to try to mitigate potential impacts.

Limekiln: Volunteer Sharon Massey assisted Doug in clearing a large madrona tree that had fallen into the trail. The tree was bucked and left trailside as a remarkable feature (Photo 7).

Middlewood: Staff maintained and seeded the island marble butterfly habitat plot.

Mount Grant: Roadside brushing occurred, and new signs were installed including a fancy new trail map. Public Works, acting as a contractor, completed repairs to the asphalt road. Volunteers with the “Future Forest Project” caged more than 60 clusters of acorns that they had planted last year. Hunting season is underway with relatively few visits at the reservation-only site, which is located at the western side of the Preserve.

Westside: Brushing, parking block maintenance, trash cleanup, and some whales! Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife continues to work on internal planning for Northern pike control options, and no further updates are available at this time.

Zylstra Lake: Seasonal signage was installed as the first of October to mark the closing of the eastern half of the trail. This is designed to reduce disturbance to migratory waterfowl. Staff reinforced the bridges on the lower dam with timbers; this is a short-term repair to facilitate access. Lower dam and road maintenance will be completed by a contractor who will also remove the defunct pumphouse, old fencing, scrap metal, and invasive brambles. Stop logs in the lower and upper dams were removed to allow for winter flows, and the siphon was drained. Upper dam maintenance and annual monitoring was also completed. Parker Lawson mowed areas with reed canary grass downstream of the lower dam in preparation for restoration plantings this winter, and staff have been coordinating with SJC Environmental Stewardship on

the riparian project design. Jacob, Shauna, and Eliza maintained and seeded the island marble butterfly habitat plot. Another new partnership with the SJICD, and a lessee, is beginning. A pasture prairie trial will seed native forbs into a small portion (100' x 40') of the northeast field this fall.

DISTRICT 2

Staff: Peter Guillozet, Tyler Goodman, Mary Groppe

Coffelt Farm: The Lums hosted a farm tour and attendance was good. Mary distributed native plants from the Salish Seeds Project to many eager Orcasonians.

Coho: Peter provided background information on his work to restore more flow to Cascade Creek to the local traditional foodways group. This group grew out of the Agricultural Summit, hosted a discussion about salmon recovery, and is collaborating with another group focused on advancing co-stewardship of local land with Coast Salish Tribes. Peter provided talking points, stressed the need to avoid alienating, or worrying water rights holders, and asked event coordinators to draw a clear distinction between views expressed at the event and the Land Bank's interest in engaging with willing partners in potential water rights purchases. He also toured the preserve with members of the traditional foodways group and Ecology (Photo 8).

Crescent Beach: Staff spent several hours ground-truthing forest types and conditions within a 70-acre thinning area, which will be the target of DNR grant funding. Staff will also host a forest walk for interested community members this winter after tree marking and other details are accomplished to solicit feedback. Project bidding and contracting is likely to begin in early 2025. (Photos 9-10).

Judd Cove: Peter submitted another required progress report to RCO as part of a successful one-year extension request for a \$104,000 shoreline restoration grant. This project will restore the artificially hardened shoreline near the limekiln. Planning for a separate but related stream restoration and culvert replacement project is ongoing.

North Shore: A seemingly happy crowd attended the opening on September 28th. Over the course of two-years, the project involved five consultants, 13 contractors and required eight permits to remove 13 structures and other infrastructure, restore wetlands and build parking. The Preserve is now open from sunrise to sunset with access controlled by an automated gate. Staff will maintain a strong presence to promote compliance with the *Day Use Only, No Campfires*,

and *Dogs on Leash* rules and to encourage beachgoers to remain within the posted preserve boundaries. Since the opening, the ICC crew, staff and volunteers planted roughly 4,500 wetland plants (Photos 11-13).

Turtleback Mountain: Tyler and Peter joined staff from the Washington Trails Association to refine the final alignment of the future south slope (pedestrian-only, no dogs allowed) trail that was described (and approved) in the 2023 Stewardship and Management Plan. They also improved a rough patch of existing trail near Ship Peak. Mary led a group of 4th graders on an outing to learn about the mountain and to plant a few Garry oak seedlings. Later this month, Tyler will lead the Samish DNR crew and Blackcap Restoration in two days of Garry oak release and conifer thinning. On Saturday, November 23, we'll mark the end of the *Seasons of Turtleback* walks with a tour of the work area and demonstration of pile burning and small-diameter forest thinning work.

DISTRICT 3

Staff: Amanda Wedow, Cedar Charnley

Channel: A dead seal was reported on the shoreline. Amanda contacted the Marine Mammal Stranding Network and, following their instructions, took photos and measurements for their record keeping. Staff completed annual monitoring and noted the Preserve to be in good condition. A neighborhood cat has been frequenting the parking lot and trail, and a preserve visitor reached out to the Lopez Animal Protection Society.

Hummel Lake: Kwiaht organized a naturalist walk which brought birders out early on Sunday morning to celebrate the Equinox.

Lopez Hill: One puncheon is completed and the second is underway. These puncheons provide safe crossing of wet areas on the new trail. Staff are monitoring during hunting season and making sure signage and vests are available (Photo 14).

Upright Head: Cedar replaced the gate rail at the preserve entrance.

Watmough: The draft Stewardship and Management Plan is out for public comment through October 15th, and very few comments have been received. Staff continue with site work. Amanda and Cedar installed split rail fencing at the new trail entrance. Cedar prepared materials for replacement of beach steps. Seed was collected for revegetation of the sport court area following its removal. A request for bids was sent out for the sport court removal through the small works roster, and staff received seven bids for the project. The final contract is awaiting signatures. Amanda anticipates that this project will be completed before the end of the year.

Weeks Wetland: Staff participated in the Great Islands Cleanup with a walk around the shoreline, and only a small amount of plastic marine debris was found.

Photos



Photo 1. Eliza finds an uncommon red-legged frog at Beaverton Marsh Preserve.



Photo 2. Tyler finds a long-toed salamander at North Shore Preserve.



Photo 3. A view from a conservation easement property on Lopez, where loons were calling.



Photo 4. RobRoy leads a lichen walk at FB Spit Preserve on Lopez.



Photo 4. The new cohort of the ICC performs a safety orientation, at Cady Mountain Preserve.



Photo 5. Gold-star volunteers, Elliot Burch and Tad Reid, finish a crossing at Cady Mountain Preserve.



Photo 6. Sharon Massey volunteered to help move an old madrone out of Limekiln-Deadman Bay trail.



Photo 7. Leanne Hansen (Ecology), Caitlin Leck and Jenny DeGroot (Speckled Trout) tour Cascade Creek.



Photos 8-9. Areas slated for forest health and wildfire risk reduction treatment at Crescent Beach Preserve.



Photo 10. Opening day enthusiasts at North shore Preserve.



Photos 11-12. The ICC helps to plant 4,500 plants in the wetlands at North Shore Preserve.



Photo 13. Lopezians gather to discuss hunting season at the Community Center.



Photo 14. A stream-crossing is complete at Lopez Hill Preserve.