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## STEWARDSHIP & OUTREACH REPORT

MARCH 2026

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### **Overview**

Spring is officially in the air across the preserves. Early bloomers including red flowering currant, satin flower, and prairie saxifrage are showing off, bringing excitement for what is to come, peak wildflower season! Staff in all districts are gearing up for a busy season of field work and site projects.

### **Outreach**

Staff: Tanja Williamson, Margo Thorp

Guided birding events held in February were led by Amanda Wedow at Channel Preserve (Lopez) while Shona Aitken led at Zylstra Lake Preserve (SJI) in partnership Joyce L. Sobel Family Resource Center (Photos 1 and 2). Spring and summer outreach events are coming together. The Art on the Preserves series with Alchemy Art Center returns in April, as well as walks with seniors. Planning paid off for the March 4th Beaverton Marsh Trail Open House – approximately 70 community members attended – including coverage from the [Journal of the San Juans](#). Our next big event is the March Turtleback March “up and over” hike on March 21! Work continues in formatting the 2025 Annual Report.

Several staff participated in the annual Ag Summit Conference and workshops. A Land Bank outreach and information table was set-up at the conference.

Planning for the annual meeting of the Terrestrial Managers Group is well-underway. The event will include updates from 10 core land managers in the islands as well as guest speakers on forest health (DNR), funding programs ([Pacific Birds Habitat Joint Venture](#)) and more. A full agenda will be available soon.

### **Salish Seeds Nursery**

Staff: Eliza Habegger, Margo Thorp

Overwintered seeds are germinating. Perennial plants are emerging from roots and bulbs in the ground. Staff visit the nursery infrequently this time of year, although Margo managed to get in some much-needed weeding in March. Operations are scheduled to start up in earnest around April 1. Planning is underway for the construction of a greenhouse, funded mostly by private donations and with additional support from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The latter agency is also funding the purchase of seed processing screens and a seed storage refrigerator.

In the office, Eliza has been working on a revised costing analysis to inform a pricing update on plants and seeds offered for sale. There is a steady trickle of inquiries from the public looking to purchase seed, order plugs, or just get advice about growing native plants. Eliza has also been participating in the creation of the Washington Native Seed Plan, a multi-agency and non-profit effort which aims to increase the availability of native seed for habitat restoration.

### **District 1**

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

A scope of work for a District 1 forestlands assessment has been drafted and is being reviewed by Rainshadow Consulting. The scope and work product are based on those developed for assessments on Orcas and Lopez islands.

For the last two years, Doug and Shauna have been participating in the Co-Stewardship group, which was initiated as a subgroup of a subcommittee of the Stewardship Network of the San Juan Islands. Participants have included local, state, and federal employees, non-profits, and individuals. The group held their first in-person meeting in Anacortes last month to refine the group's purpose and identity. While additional work remains, some core themes emerged which include providing an opportunity for coordination and information sharing, continuing to seek out educational opportunities, and determining a focal project for collaborative work. The group also made the decision to separate its association and work independent of the Stewardship Network. Sharon Kinley from Northwest Indian College closed the meeting with a presentation and discussion on an initiative for a satellite campus based on Orcas Island. The group accepted an invitation to come to NWIC for one of the monthly meetings, most likely May.

**Beaverton Marsh:** Beaverton Marsh Trail: We had a SJC Council and CLB Commissioner trail walk on the east side of the project (Photo 6). On Tuesday, March 3, Jessica, Tillary, Peggy, Tim, Marilyn, and Chris joined staff for a dry and boisterous walk. We took everyone down the steep slope to the Marsh. While the public was invited, none showed. We had a west side walk on the next day with Chris and two of our consultants. Our first Open House that evening was a success. There were upwards of 70 people who visited and asked many questions. 95% of the questions and comments were positive. We will have the presentation boards, comments, and responses up on the website soon.

We are beginning preparations for our second open house in August. This will be just after release of the 90% design set. Please review your calendars as next month I will poll you for a date. I suggest the first week of the month as the second is Fair Week. Tuesday 4 August 4-6:30 pm is the suggestion. We plan on using the Mullis Center again.

Overmarsh Farm Commons hosted a Conservation District biochar demonstration burn. The 20 some participants will be able to rent the portable biochar kiln from the District. The firing created several cubic yards of biochar that will be incorporated in garden plots and compost.

The draft stewardship and management plan is open for public comment. Three people attended a public walk intended to provide opportunity to explore SMP themes. A public meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, March 18. Public comment period is open until March 25.

An exploratory meeting with WA State Dept of Ecology's Coastal Wetland Restoration fund manager and US Fish and Wildlife was held to explore potential future application for restoration. They emphasized interest in assisting in conservation projects in the islands with both acquisition and restoration funding availability.

**Cady Mountain:** Stewardship and Management Plan development has been initiated.

**Driggs Park:** The youth conservation corps shed has been removed from the property and staff are working on moving tools and equipment from a dilapidated shed into the storage trailer.

**False Bay Creek:** Researchers from Yale returned to collect soil and forage samples for the Basalt rock dust trial. They will report back with data and findings.

**Limekiln:** Staff and volunteers have noted a perceived improvement in water quality following the eradication of non-native fish last fall. It is likely the fish populations were cycling nutrients which contributed to dense algal blooms.

**Middlewood:** Board member Chris Guidotti visited the Preserve and subsequent conversations were had with Amy Trainer and Marilyn O’Conner to ensure major themes for a stewardship and management plan are consistent with Commission goals.

**Mount Ben:** Board members Amy Trainer and Chris Guidotti walked a portion of the proposed trail route extending from the Westside to the top of the Mount Ben Preserve.

**Mount Grant:** Staff are developing restoration plans for the Riparian Grant Fund project secured by the Conservation District.

**Third Lagoon:** Jacob is coordinating with WA Department of Natural Resources to discuss replacement of an old wooden gate.

**Westside:** Willamette Cultural Resources wrapped up the fieldwork portion of the cultural resource assessment for Westside, Mount Ben, Deadman and Limekiln preserves (Photo 9). They added features associated with the National Register of Historic Places at Limekiln and identified several cultural features. Still to come will be a virtual meeting to review potential Culturally Modified Trees with Tribal Historic Preservation Officers. They will be assembling information from field work as well as coalescing other cultural and historical information from the area into an assessment which will include management recommendations.

**Zylstra Lake:** Staff repaired bog bridge traction wire and documented what appear to be the final pair of swans in the lake before they head north for the summer! A friendly passerby expressed desire to hunt Canada geese at Zylstra.

## **District 2**

Staff: Peter Guillozet, Tyler Goodman

**Coho:** The Taylor property boundary survey is nearing completion, and we’ve executed a contract for cultural resources review related to planned drainage improvements. Peter is working on closing out flow restoration grants from Ecology and RCO. As part of planned collaboration on riparian planting with the Friends and the SJICD, Peter will join County Noxious Weeds Program Manager Jason Ontjes for a field-based overview of invasive vegetation management techniques for ICC crew members.

**Crescent Beach:** We’ve completed planting approximately 6,000 plants in recently thinned areas continues throughout the Preserve. Tyler led a day of trail maintenance with the ICC crew to address muddy areas where water accumulates. Peter and Tyler will provide a tour of the work area to TMG annual meeting participants.

**Dolphin Bay Property:** Staff met with property neighbors Teresa and Mike Geringer to provide an overview of plans for the future preserve (Photo 10). Tyler continues to refine potential trail alignments. Erin has begun marking small-diameter conifers to be removed from dense stands to improve forest health. Peter has begun planning beach access improvements. Eliza is preparing an ecological assessment of the property to inform the Stewardship and Management Plan. Next month, staff will lead a tour of the property for Earth Day.

**Eastsound Waterfront:** Discussions continue with Tina Whitman (Friends) and others on how to secure permission from owners of the private parcel adjacent to ESWP to proceed with the shoreline restoration project. A letter of intent for purchase of this shared lot was submitted to RCO as a placeholder to keep all options open.

**Judd Cove:** Erin led an effort to prepare two letters of interest for a grant to fund culvert replacement and other necessary actions to address ecological impairments caused by prior land uses at the preserve (Photo 12). Grant reviewers from the Estuary and Salmon Restoration Program visited the site to review the project proposal.

**North Shore:** Staff are preparing to install an interpretive sign that was required as mitigation for removal of the buildings in 2023/4. The sign, which is funded by the SJPT property acquisition grant, highlights the property's recent history as a private resort. Work is under way on a similar sign highlighting past and present Coast Salish culture in the islands.

**Turtleback Mountain:** Staff, ICC and Blackcap Restoration wrapped up several days of trail work and planting (Photos 13 and 14). In addition to continuing work on the future south slope pedestrian-only trail, we mulched and caged the recently planted Garry oaks throughout the South Entrance field. We installed these 3-4' oak 'whips' at a density typical of oak woodland based on anticipated mortality and the goal of establishing large trees at a density typical of oak savannas throughout the region. Planted in curving rows will enable us to continue mowing the field for several years until the trees are established.

### **District 3**

Staff: Amanda Wedow

The Seasonal Field Assistant position is advertised, and staff are working with HR to review applications.

**Channel:** Amanda led a bird walk as part of the Great Backyard Bird Count. The weather was gray and calm, and four attendees counted songbirds and seabirds. At the shore we distinguished goldeneyes and buffleheads and saw horned grebes and surf scoters. In the forest we saw chickadees, kinglets and brown creepers. To finish off the walk, a hermit thrush was spotted near the parking area. The bird count was posted on Cornell's E-bird website.

Shauna helped to clear fallen and leaning trees. A neighbor mentioned that the erosion to the south has been particularly bad this year. Staff reposted the no access sign at the south property line, which was temporarily down for the winter to prevent it being lost in storms.

**Hummel Lake:** Completed trail and tree work with Shauna. Worked on invasive holly removal with Andrew from Noxious Weeds.

**"Picnic Point":** A letter of interest, the first step in seeking grant funding, was submitted to SRFB for the purchase of a conservation easement. Staff met with the local Technical Advisory Group (TAG) to review the project overview, and their feedback will be shared in the weeks ahead.

**The Spit at Fisherman Bay Preserves:** Completed mower maintenance and first mow of field areas with Italian arum. The mowing does not eradicate arum but helps to prevent seed set and decrease vigor. Other treatment areas were dug and weed wacked.

**Upright Head:** County Parks assisted in clearing the large snag that fell over the trail. Reviewed shaded fuel break scope of work.

**Watmough:** Attended a Heritage Capital Program grant webinar to learn more about the process and grant funding. Our proposal would be to work with Historicorps to preserve and stabilize the Chadwick homestead house, shed and pumphouse. Historicorps provided a project scope and proposal. The Lopez Historical Museum will be invited to participate as a partner. The grant has an initial eligibility review to submit by April with a final proposal in June.

There is a Go Take a Hike on Saturday March 14<sup>th</sup> with the Lopez Community Trail Network from Watmough Bay to Watmough Head and Point Colville.



Photos 1 and 2. Great Backyard Bird Count walk at Zylstra Lake Preserve, led by Shona Aitken.



Photos 3 and 4. Early season blooms at the Salish Seeds Project including *Micranthes integrifolia* (prairie saxifrage) and *Olsynium douglasii* (satin flower).



**Photos 5.** Chris Guidotti showing off the impressive taproot on a young Garry oak, *Quercus garryana*.

**Photos 6.** Land Bank commissioners, County Council & Administration, and Island Rec joined staff for a tour of the Beaverton Trail project.



**Photos 7 and 8.** Cady Mtn trail downed tree, reported by volunteer Lars Sjolholm. Charlie and Rosco helped remove the tree. Rosco focused on the bark.



**Photo 9.** Archaeologists with Willamette Cultural Resources conduct an assessment at Westside Preserve, SJI.



**Photo 10.** Orcas staff met with neighbors of the new preserve off Dolphin Bay Road to share future management plan (it was a joyful discussion).



**Photo 11.** Tyler planting riparian trees at Dolphin Bay property.

**Photo 12.** Staff led a field trip to review a grant proposal to restore the stream and wetland at Judd Cove Preserve. One component of the application is to remedy this perched culvert which erodes the hillside below and delivers high energy flow into wetlands.



**Photo 13.** Gravel spread on muddy section of North Turtleback trail.

**Photo 14.** Caging newly planted oaks near Turtleback South Entrance.



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