Our Backyard

A NEWSLETTER ON THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IN SAANICH



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Saanich

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A newsletter about the natural environment in Saanich
Saanich Parks
E-Newsletter
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Fall into Winter for W̱SÁNEĆ 13 ŁK̓ÁLJ

Shared with permission by Dominique James



This illustration of the W̱SÁNEĆ calendar, SḴÁU ŁTE, by artist MENEŦIYE is located on S,DÁYES (South Pender Island). The illustration depicts the four seasons, the 13 moons and the culturally important plants, food, medicines, animals and marine life.

Dominique James is a member of the W̱SÁNEĆ Nation, currently residing on the W̱JOŁEŁP Nation of her maternal family home of the Sampson family with ties to the BOḰEĆEN Nation on her paternal side. Dominque has many skills and talents, from plant propagation to cultural knowledge and plant uses, and is always eager to share her knowledge. Dominque is a passionate SENĆOŦEN speaker, having worked at the LÁU,WEL,N̓EW̱ Tribal School in the SENĆOŦEN immersion program, then receiving education through UVic for Language Revitalization.

Around what is now called September/October, is traditionally known as ĆENQOLEW̱ – THE DOG SALMON RETURN TO THE EARTH. This moon marks the arrival of the Dog Salmon, the last of the salmon runs to return.

The rainy weather fully returns, with unpredictable winds, and the creeks and rivers rise enough for the Dog Salmon to spawn.

Economically, hunting for deer and grouse continues, while cod fishing thrives in these weather conditions. The Dog Salmon fishery is carried out at Goldstream, where the fish is dried or smoked and stored as the last of the preserves. The Langford area also provided excellent hunting for deer, elk, grouse, and berry picking.

Culturally, if the salmon run was delayed, the ŚNÁM (spiritual leader) would hold a ceremony to call the salmon and guide the family captains on the proper protocol to honour the Salmon People and ensure their return.

PEKELÁNEW̱ (moon) events 15 October – 14 November

This time of year, around the new moon in the month of October, is traditionally known as PEKELANEW – The Moon That Turns the Leaves White. This is the moon of the turning white season (frost). This moon brings the first frost. The leaves lose their colours and turn pale. Deer hunting is the activity during this moon. The earth is cooling down, and the people turn their efforts to hunting. The longer, cooler nights can lead to frost on the leaves and the ground in higher country.

Economic Activities

The W̱SÁNEĆ people began splitting the cedar logs they had felled in the Spring. The completion of the canoes was Winter work. They would rough out their canoes in the forest, making it easier to carry and move them to the villages.

Seals and Sea Lions were hunted in the San Juan Islands. Cod fishing tapered off toward the end of this moon and grouse hunting ceased. Preparations were made for the Fall hunt of the deer and elk. Deer were in their rutting season and easily fooled because they were not as cautious as normal.

Saanich Naturescaping Program Participant Feature: Growing a Wildlife Haven



Robin and Colin live in beautiful Cadboro Bay, next to Mystic Vale and Hobbs Creek. Over the past several years, they have transformed their yard using Naturescaping practices, creating a welcoming haven for native insects, birds, and other wildlife. Read on to learn more about their journey and what inspired them to bring nature closer to home.

What led you to use Naturescaping in your outdoor space?

When we first moved here, the yard was formal and traditional, and we quickly noticed something worrying—there were very few insects compared with the lively, buzzing yard we had come from. That absence motivated us to rethink the space and explore how it could better support biodiversity. We were inspired by the work of Dr. Dave Goulson and by a Meadowmakers course offered through Satinflower Nurseries, which introduced us to Dr. Doug Tallamy's ideas and the Homegrown National Park movement. Creating native habitat at home and linking it with neighbours through pollinator pathways and corridors made Naturescaping feel like a practical, hopeful way to help regenerate the local ecosystem.

What have you found to be the most rewarding or interesting part of Naturescaping?

We've found it very rewarding to document the changes we've made and see how they may support wildlife over time. We keep detailed logs of the native plants we've added, including their growth, bloom periods, and how well they thrive in different areas of the yard. We've also tracked bird activity for the past two years, which has been fascinating to compare year over year. Just as rewarding has been the opportunity to connect with neighbours through Saanich's Neighbour to Neighbour resilience initiative and work together to transform our boulevard space into something more resilient, biodiverse, and community-minded.

What has been a challenge with Naturescaping, and how did you address it?

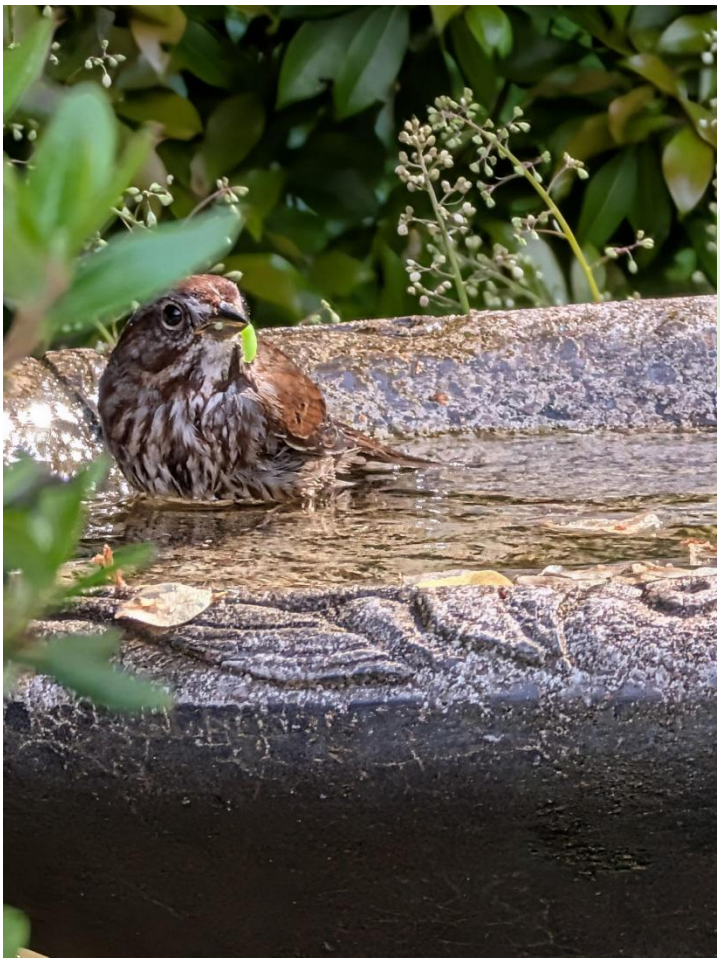
One of the biggest challenges has been learning how to help new native plants get established despite local pressures like rabbits, deer, and challenging soil conditions. Some young plants were quickly eaten, so we added fencing to protect the yard while they had a chance to grow. We also learned that "native" doesn't automatically mean effortless. Some plants needed compost, extra watering through irrigation or by hand, or even a move to a better-suited spot. Over time, the process has become one of observation and adaptation; getting to know each plant and discovering where it will truly thrive in the yard.

What advice would you have for someone just starting with Naturescaping?

Dive in and give it a try. It doesn't have to be perfect or overwhelming to make a difference. Start by putting a few native plants in the ground, or even just one in a pot, and observe what happens. You don't need to be a purist or convert your whole yard overnight; every small step can help create habitat and build your confidence. Starting small is still starting, and it can be surprisingly rewarding to watch even one plant attract new life to your outdoor space.

Final thoughts or words of wisdom?

Be patient. Naturescaping is a learning process, and the rewards often unfold over time. Connect with communities of people who are already involved in Naturescaping or nature based gardening and read about the topic to build your confidence and inspiration. The more you learn and observe, the more connected you'll feel to your outdoor space and the wildlife it supports. Give it a try, it just might grow on you!



Song sparrow with a caterpillar visiting the bird bath in Colin and Robin's yard. Photo credit: C.Pike

Interested in finding out more about this and other Neighbour to Neighbour Resilience project? Visit N2N Completed Projects | District of Saanich

Saanich Parks Volunteer Spotlight

Nancy is a full-time Island Health employee and a proud single parent of two grown daughters. Born and raised on the unceded territories of the Songhees and Kosapsum First Nations, she gives back to her community through her enthusiastic involvement as a Restoration Assistant in the Pulling Together program, a Park Ambassador, a Community Services Ambassador, and as a litter-cleanup volunteer.

What motivates you to volunteer with Saanich Parks?

I have a soft spot for volunteering for environmental causes and what better way than to give back to the district that I was raised in for most of my life?

What do you enjoy most about volunteering with Saanich Parks?

Interacting with the public by giving back to the community in the most meaningful ways possible with my spare time. Pulling away invasive species serves as a spiritual cleanse in the most tangible sense of land stewardship and reconnecting to nature.

Tell us about one of your most memorable volunteering experiences with Saanich Parks.

Walking along the beach in PKOLS on the beachside during low tide and being able to walk over to embrace that large boulder that is normally submerged in water at other times of the day.

Thank you, Nancy, for the energy, care, and dedication you bring to caring for Saanich's lands and waters. Your warm, positive spirit and willingness to take on any task make a meaningful difference and are deeply appreciated by Lead Stewards and fellow volunteers at every Pulling Together project you support.



Nancy first joined as a Pulling Together drop-in volunteer at a Peacock Hill Park event in fall 2025. Since then, she has become a regular contributor to the Rithet's Bog, Gorge, and Colquitz River/Copley East Pulling Together groups.

Cuthbert Holmes Park Grows a Greener Future



A major restoration project continues to bring new life to Cuthbert Holmes Park, creating healthier habitats for wildlife, improving conditions for salmon and trout, and giving residents more ways to connect with nature.

Building on restoration work completed in 2021 with Provincial support following berm construction along the Trans Canada highway, this project will continue to transform the area into a thriving, diverse ecosystem. It advances key actions in the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy by protecting and restoring freshwater habitat in natural parks, identifying and removing barriers to fish migration, increasing tree canopy, and restoring Garry Oak ecosystems on public lands.

Years of logging and agricultural use changed the landscape, allowing invasive plants such as English hawthorn, Himalayan blackberry and golden willow to take over. Parks staff are now replacing these invasive species with native trees, shrubs and habitat features that will help the ecosystem flourish.

Work completed so far includes an archaeological assessment to help protect culturally significant Indigenous sites, invasive-species removal, planting of hundreds of native plants, development of a new viewing trail, and construction of a new creek alcove to support fish and aquatic life.

Next, visitors can look forward to an interactive trail, viewing platform and interpretive signs that will make it easier to explore and learn about the park's transformation. Over 3,000 native trees and plants will be added, along with several community planting opportunities and ongoing stewardship to help the restored landscape thrive.

The Colquitz River is important habitat for coho salmon and coastal cutthroat trout. By restoring its surrounding forest, this project will strengthen the watershed, increase biodiversity and build climate resilience for the future.

Cuthbert Holmes Park is becoming a greener, healthier place for people, plants and wildlife and a living outdoor classroom for the whole community.



Excavation of new additional alcove to provide salmon habitat along the Colquitz River, summer 2026.

From Field to Flourishing Meadow: Restoring Nature at Outerbridge Park



Meadow area at Outerbridge Park after grass suppression before planting, directly after planting, and the first summer 2025.

Saanich Parks staff are continuing ecological restoration work at Outerbridge Park (see map below), transforming an invasive-dominated field in the park's northeast corner into a healthier, more diverse native meadow. The area has long been affected by invasive grass, Himalayan blackberry and thistles, but it also offers a valuable opportunity to create habitat for plants and wildlife that belong in our local landscape.

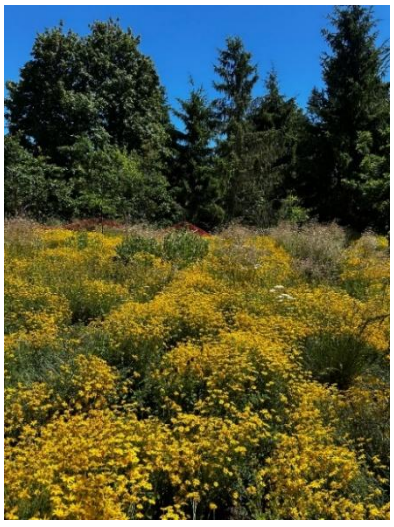


This season, the native Garry Oak meadow will be expanded and enhanced with additional native wildflowers, shrubs, and trees. This work supports the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy's priority action to protect and restore Garry Oak ecosystems on public lands.

Restoring the meadow's native understory will provide more food, shelter, and nesting habitat for pollinators, birds, reptiles, and insects. New bird boxes, insect habitat features, and large woody debris will further encourage a greater diversity of wildlife to make use of the site, helping bring Jo Ann Outerbridge's vision of a protected space for birds and wildlife to life.

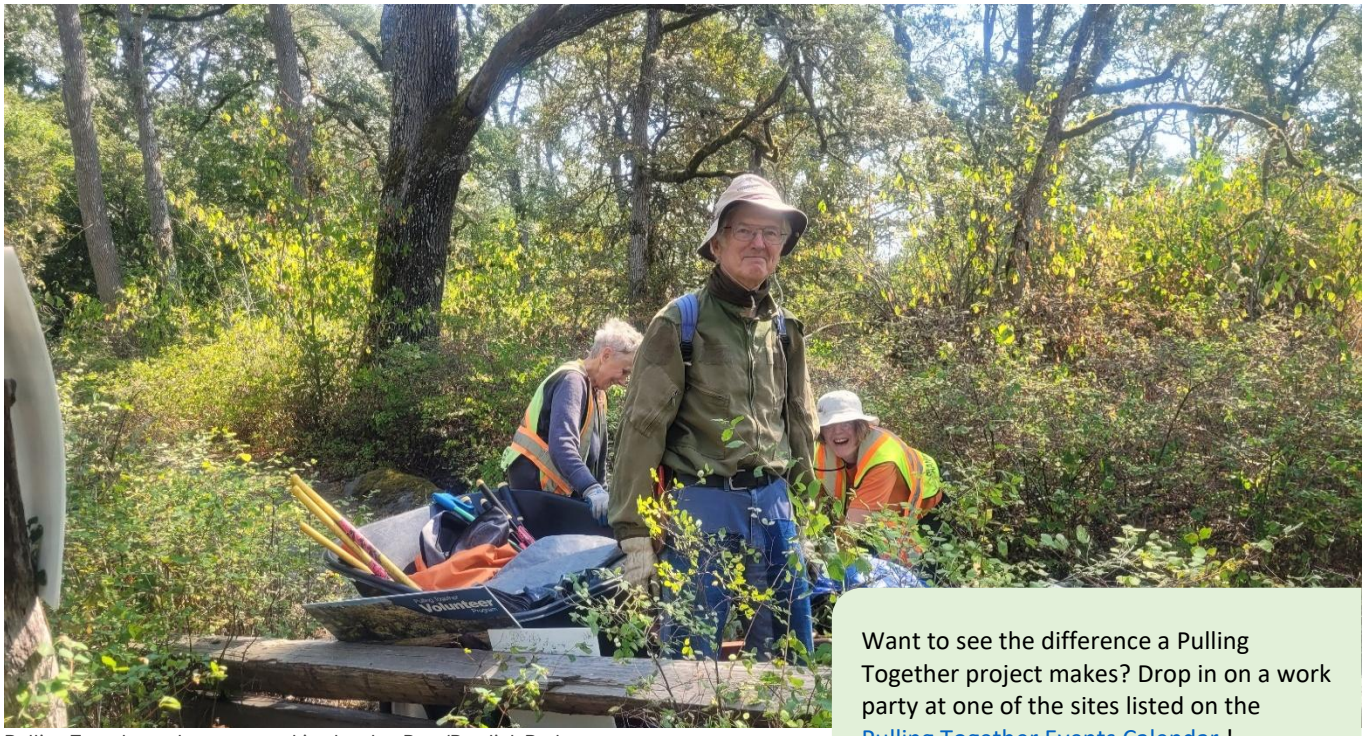
A new post-and-rope fence will help protect the restoration area while native plants become established. Visitors will still be able to enjoy and observe the meadow's progress, while giving young plants the space they need to grow. The project also supports the efforts of dedicated community volunteers and aligns with Saanich's Naturescape Program, which promotes the use of native plants and healthier, more resilient urban ecosystems.

Over time, this work will help reclaim a natural setting for both wildlife and park users—turning an underused field into a vibrant meadow that can be enjoyed for years to come.



Meadow in full bloom second summer after planting, 2026

Many Hands, Healthier Habitats: The Pulling Together Story



Pulling Together volunteers working hard at Bow/Brodick Park.

Want to see the difference a Pulling Together project makes? Drop in on a work party at one of the sites listed on the Pulling Together Events Calendar !

Pulling Together volunteers are at the heart of restoring and caring for Saanich's natural areas.

Since 1999, thousands of residents have rolled up their sleeves to remove invasive plants, plant native species, and create healthier habitat for birds, pollinators, and other wildlife. Their work makes a visible difference in parks and natural areas across the community helping ecosystems recover, supporting biodiversity, and strengthening resilience to a changing climate. Like all gardening, it is a work in progress, with the need for ongoing dedication from the community to keep our urban park spaces healthy.

Today, more than 200 registered volunteers and hundreds of drop-in participants work alongside Parks staff through the Pulling Together Program. Together, they contribute over 14,000 hours of hands-on stewardship each year in 48 parks and natural areas.

The program provides a way for people to learn, connect, and make a difference close to home. Volunteers gain practical knowledge about local ecosystems, meet neighbours who share an interest in nature, and see the direct results of their efforts over time. Pulling Together also welcomes school and community groups, providing meaningful hands-on learning opportunities each year for more than 1,000 participants.

By working together, volunteers and Parks staff are helping protect the natural places that support wildlife, provide space for people to enjoy nature, and make Saanich a greener, healthier community for generations to come.

We welcome volunteers who would like to try a single session or make a longer-term commitment to caring for a beloved park close to home - there is something for everyone!

EVENTS

Saanich Recreation Trails & Treks

https://www.saanich.ca/EN/main/parks-recreation-community/parks/events-in-park/trails-treks.html

Saanich Parks Volunteer Opportunities

Volunteer with the *Pulling Together* Team

Enjoy some fresh air, meet new people and help restore ecosystems by removing invasive species in Saanich parks and natural areas. Find a work party happening near you and get started today!

Tree Appreciation Day Planting Event

Saturday November 7 | 10:00am-12:00pm |Cuthbert Holmes Park

Join us to plant a tree or shrub in celebration of Tree Appreciation Day and help care for Saanich's urban forest while connecting with nature and your community. Details and registration information found in the Saanich calendar of events.

Cover photo: Braefoot Park natural area

Keep up to date on local community stewardship projects and environmental issues. Subscriptions to this quarterly newsletter are free and available in electronic or paper version. To subscribe, please send your contact information to the editor or visit saanich.ca/ourbackyard.

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