

Our Backyard

A NEWSLETTER ON THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IN SAANICH



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In This Issue:

[Environmental Services transitions to Parks Division](#) | [Connecting Classroom](#) | [Saanich Private Land Knotweed Treatment Program](#) | [Nature at Your Fingertips](#) | [Pulling Together Volunteer Profile](#) | [Ephemeral Ponds](#) | [Exciting Community Partnership to Revitalize Doris Page Park](#) | [People, Pets and Park Strategy](#) | [Events](#)





Environmental Services transitions to Parks Division

By Eva Riccius, District of Saanich, Senior Manager of Parks

As of April 25, 2022, the Parks Division welcomed staff from the [Environmental Services Section](#) of the Planning Department as the two groups join forces.

This reorganization creates a logical and stronger alignment of the District's services and programs related to the protection, preservation and stewardship of Saanich's natural environment. This change creates efficiencies in service delivery and workflows and increases opportunities for growth in how Saanich cares for the environment in parks and, in partnership with landowners, on private lands. And, what is cool, is that the experts who were working with you on a file or issue before the change will continue to work with after – just with a larger team.

Biodiversity and environmental issues and opportunities don't recognize fence lines. What happens on one side of the fence continues on the other side. We are excited by the many new opportunities and collaborations that will be able to occur. For example, we will be able to streamline our delivery of invasive species programs. Until recently, the small team in Environmental Services was responsible for all aspects of invasive species management on private lands. In joining together, the right work will land with the right people. Our field staff will take on treatment, while technical staff will be able to focus on managing and expanding the program. This more strategic approach on

managing invasive species is just one small example of how we can grow Saanich's environmental stewardship programs.

Parks staff is made up of highly qualified experts with experience in managing a wide variety of public lands and Saanich's urban forest. The Parks Division has expertise in the environmental areas of conservation biology, forest ecology, natural areas restoration including stream restoration, forestry operations, tree health care, nature education and interpretation, stewardship leadership, horticulture, pollinator stewardship, storm water planning and management, environmental planning, design and management, and invasive species management.

These expertise and skills are complemented by the Environmental Services expertise in the areas of fisheries biology, stream ecology, natural areas restoration and ecosystem restoration, species at risk, invasive species management, conservation biology, nature education and interpretation, private land stewardship, environmental planning and management and GIS services.

These changes allow the District to better address organizational objectives related to the environment, continue to deliver high levels of service to our residents, and achieve Council's and the community's Strategic Plan goals.

Connecting classroom



By Gillian Petrini (Teacher, SD 61) and Katie Turner (Park Stewardship Coordinator, Saanich Parks)

Saanich Parks recently collaborated with the Salish Seas Environmental Educators Provincial Specialist Association teachers, the SD 61 Indigenous Education Department and the Friends of Mount Douglas Park Society to offer a workshop at the annual Tapestry Conference. The Tapestry Conference brings together Southern Vancouver Island K-12 educators for informative workshops on a wide range of topics.

Our goals for the workshop were to engage educators in an experiential outdoor experience providing opportunities to network and build relationships through place and community. Place-based education uses the community and environment for curriculum learning, strengthening community bonds, appreciation for the natural world, and a commitment to citizen engagement.

* PKOLS [pqáls], meaning “White Head” in the SENĆOŦEN dialect, refers to this culturally significant gathering and meeting place of the SENĆOŦEN and Lekwungen peoples, a site for ceremonies and sharing important news. It has had other names, including Mount Douglas.

Our workshop in PKOLS* inspired teachers to generate resources and knowledge that could easily be transferred to the classroom. John Harris, the Elders and Indigenous Knowledge Facilitator at SD 61, offered an Indigenous perspective including a welcome, opening circle and teachings throughout the day. Walking gently through the park to the restoration site beside Douglas Creek gave participants an opportunity to connect to place. Saanich Parks staff were on site to provide guidance on how and where to plant more than 50 western redcedar trees. Darrell Wick from the Friends of Mount Douglas Park also attended and was able to share personal stories about the site.

The opportunity for collaboration between teachers, community members, and Parks staff emphasized the power of community engagement in Saanich Parks. Saanich Parks continues to work closely with local schools to provide a wide range of opportunities to remove invasive species, plant resilient native species, and restore habitat.

Please visit our website to learn more about community stewardship, what we do, and how to help care for your parks.



Saanich Private Land Knotweed Treatment Program

By Ann Klein, Environmental Technician,
Saanich Environmental Services



Saanich has been helping private property owners tackle Knotweed infestations since 2010 through the free Saanich Private Land Knotweed Treatment Program. This destructive, bamboo-like plant is one of the world's most invasive species and a 'top ten' to eradicate in BC. Its dense stands and pervasive rhizomes outcompete other vegetation and is a threat to ecosystems and biodiversity. It is also extremely difficult to eradicate, and right here in Saanich we have examples of it damaging infrastructure such as by penetrating through pavement and other materials, and tipping over retaining walls. Herbicide treatment is the most effective means for controlling and eliminating this species.

Over the last 12 years, 277 knotweed sites on private land have been recorded in Saanich. Knotweed infestations often straddle two or more properties, as the original plants tend to have been planted along fencelines. This means that while Saanich has 277 properties with knotweed, the number of infestations is actually about a hundred less. In 2021, 117 Knotweed sites were actively growing and required treatment. This represents just 42% of the cumulative total knotweed sites since 2010.

While additional Knotweed sites are typically reported each year, the number of active (growing) sites on private land compared to the total number of sites continues to decline. Between 2017 - 2021, the percentage of sites requiring treatment compared to the total number of Knotweed sites decreased by 20%. This shows that our efforts through treating are working!

Saanich Parks also continues to monitor and treat Knotweed on public land, and the number and size of these infestations has also continued to decline.

Residents are largely supportive and grateful for this free treatment program, particularly those who have seen how large and impactful their Knotweed was prior to treatment. It helps to eliminate this destructive plant from their private properties, and address what can sometimes be a considerable source of stress and concern. If you suspect you have seen knotweed in Saanich, please contact Saanich Environmental Services for treatment options.

Check out Saanich's Alert Sheet for more information:
<https://www.saanich.ca/assets/Community/Documents/knotweed-alert-web.pdf>



Nature at Your Fingertips

An Entry-Level Nature App for Canada's Western Provinces



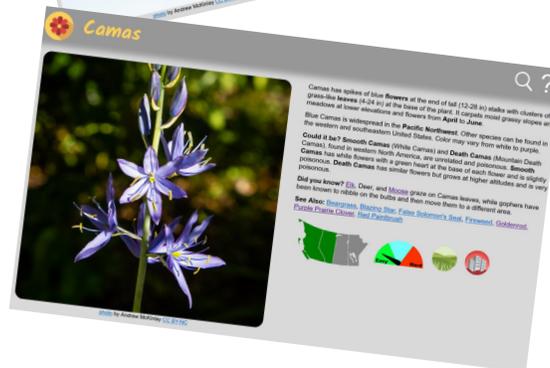
Nature Companion
Western Canada

By Penny McKinlay, co-founder, EcoFriendly West*

There is a wealth of great nature guides and apps. But for kids, someone who is new to birding and plant identification, or a newcomer to British Columbia, it can feel like information overload. Instead, what they'll be looking for is a simple illustrated guide to the most common species, all wrapped up in one simple package that is readily available on their phone, whether or not they have internet.

My brother Andrew is a computer programmer and photographer and I'm a writer. We combined our skills to prepare an app that would address the interests of curious observers, people who are just beginning to take an interest in nature. Nature Companion (<https://www.naturecompanion.ca>) is a free (no ads, no sign-up) app/website introducing many of the plants and animals found in Canada's four western provinces. In just one app, you will find basic information about more than 300 common plants, trees, birds, animals, insects, reptiles, and amphibians. We just moved to Greater Victoria so we have been making use of it to identify local species!

The illustrated index page and search feature make it easy to scan the options. The descriptions avoid overly technical terms and we made sure to include interesting facts about each species as well as a clear photograph. Our goal is to get people hooked on nature, to join local nature societies, to speak out on behalf of endangered species, and to protect their local parks. If they move on to more detailed guides, we'll have accomplished our goal.



* EcoFriendly West (<https://ecofriendlywest.ca>) encourages environmental initiatives in Western Canada through an online publication. Recent articles have covered Pacific Coast seaweeds, bat research and education, and Vancouver Island marmot conservation initiatives.

Pulling Together Volunteer Profile: Lori James Derry (Whitehead Park)



Volunteer: Lori James Derry

By Katie Turner, Park
Stewardship Coordinator,
District of Saanich

Whitehead Park is a riparian ecosystem situated where Prospect Lake forms the headwaters of Tod Creek. The Lead Steward, Lori James Derry, and the Whitehead Park volunteers truly embody the community spirit of the *Pulling Together* Volunteer Program, they collaborate with a common goal; to care for and restore the park.

Since May 2010, *Pulling Together* volunteers, and the Friends of Tod Creek Watershed have removed invasive plants, built trails and planted native trees and vegetation in the park. Lori photographs their progress every Monday when the group meets, and another long-time volunteer, Mary Haig-Brown, documents their efforts and observations. This park, and other protected areas in the watershed, are profiled on the Friends of Tod Creek website: <https://www.todcreekwatershed.ca>.

After retirement from a nursing career, Lori was looking for something “neat to do” in the community. Living on 10 acres of woodland and completing Master Gardener’s course inspired her to learn about native plants and grow her own “environmental thinking”. A caregiver at heart, Lori sees her volunteering as another means to give back to the community in a way that really matters, a life-enhancing endeavour for all those involved. The tradition of gathering every Monday, posing for the daily group photo by the dock, laughing, working, and planning together sustains the health of the park and each other.



One of Lori’s favourite plants: Hardhack or Rose Spirea (*Spiraea douglasii*) is beautiful in all seasons, but especially when in bloom. In the fall and winter the cinnamon-coloured stems are its second best feature.



Volunteers: Kitty Lloyd, Audrey Barnes, Mary Haig-Brown, Lori Lori James Derry

Lori has spent countless hours on her hands and knees in the dirt, but also values an educational approach to environmental restoration and protection. She created a park map, plant identification manual, plant labels and she volunteers at annual bat counts and fund-raising initiatives. Along with Winona Pugh, she co-authored the “Tod Creek Watershed: Connections” book detailing the remarkable work of the group. Lori is an exceptional steward in the work she has done for her community in addition to offering learning tools that can be used by others.

The Whitehead Park volunteers love to see visitors walking and enjoying the park. Diverse native plants such as Western Trillium, Skunk Cabbage and Lori’s favorite, Hardhack (beautiful in all seasons) now thrive where once the land was choked by invasive Himalayan Blackberry, Yellow Flag Iris and Reed Canary Grass. This warm group of Pulling Together volunteers invite the community to help to care for this “very happy place” on Monday mornings.

Our warmest thanks to Lori and the team of Pulling Together volunteers at Whitehead Park for their stewardship.

Ephemeral Ponds: Temporary Yet Vital.



By Jenny Bell, Director, Friends of Mount Douglas Park Society

Ephemeral ponds appear seasonally when rainfall increases, and water collects in shallow depressions and disappear come summer when temperatures rise and rainfall decreases. Ephemeral ponds are extremely important to their local ecosystems and greatly benefit the environment. They support a wide variety of life, and act as natural filters, purifying water through the soil before it returns to a larger source. Like a sponge, ephemeral ponds absorb and store a lot of water in the soil, and this ability can reduce flooding, buffer against drought and help regulate the temperature of the surrounding area.

Amphibians are the most threatened group of vertebrates globally and many rely on ephemeral ponds to lay eggs and for their young to grow and develop before moving on to a life in the forest. Ephemeral ponds are ideal for amphibians because they are devoid of fish, which see them as a tasty snack and compete with amphibians for food. Saanich is home to the following native species of amphibians: Northwestern Salamander, Western Red-backed Salamander, Long-toed Salamander, Wandering Salamander, Rough-skinned Newt, Pacific Chorus Frog, and Northern Red-legged Frog. Most of these depend on ephemeral ponds for

breeding success because of the impact of the non-native American Bullfrogs living in permanent ponds.

Unfortunately, amphibians are facing big threats. Amphibians have extremely permeable skin used to transfer oxygen, carbon dioxide, and water between the environment and their body. This increases their risk of being impacted by contaminants like pesticides that run off into their environment. Even things considered to be natural like dog droppings, fertilizer, compost, and yard waste can introduce harmful bacteria, bring about infectious disease, and cause large algae blooms, using up oxygen in ponds.

Habitat loss from drainage or diversion of these ponds is also a huge threat. Many amphibians cannot reproduce in dry conditions because their eggs are jelly-like and their young require water to develop. If they lose their habitat, they will be forced to find a new home leading to additional risks as they travel longer distances to find habitat, including trying to cross roadways.

Even seemingly harmless activities can be detrimental to ephemeral pond inhabitants. Parks everywhere are faced with the challenge of finding

a balance between nature, humans, and their four-legged friends. While most people do not see the harm in letting their playful pooch or curious kids splash around in ephemeral ponds, it may result in the destruction of eggs and death of young amphibians.

The climate crisis has a significant impact on amphibians as well. They may reproduce early because of warm temperatures and then climate extremes could cause late season freezing, killing the eggs and young. Rising temperatures also dry up ephemeral ponds before the tadpoles have sufficient time to develop, and at this phase in life tadpoles cannot live outside of water and will die. Increasing temperatures also interfere with amphibians' ability to regulate their internal body temperature via water evaporation through their permeable skin. If it is too hot and dry, they face a risk of dehydration and could overheat.

From a distance, ephemeral ponds appear to be nothing more than a large puddle, and the life within is often overlooked. Being so vital to many amphibians, they need to be recognized and protected. Identifying them is the first step. During the dry season, look for blackened and compressed leaf litter, watermarks on surrounding tree trunks and patches of grey soil. Generally, there will be moisture tolerant vegetation in the area as well. Protecting the forest surrounding ephemeral ponds is important as amphibians enjoy a cool moist environment, and abundant hiding places. Having a healthy canopy of trees provides a necessary source of shade and shelter. It also slows the pond from drying up, giving young amphibians enough time to fully develop.

It's a good idea to have a riparian buffer zone between the pond and any activity that could potentially contaminate or degrade the water quality. Ephemeral ponds accumulate water runoff from surrounding areas, and even small amounts of contaminants can have deadly consequences. A buffer zone also blocks excess sediment, which can fill the bottom of ponds, suffocating eggs, and reducing water quality.

Adding and removing debris from the pond can also be harmful to its inhabitants. Adding woody debris could cause excess nutrients to leach into the pond resulting in algae blooms and reducing water quality. Removal of debris should also be avoided as this may kill existing eggs that are attached to them or disturb juveniles using the debris for shelter.

On a larger scale in populated areas, fencing off ephemeral ponds should be taken to protect them year-round. It is extremely important that they remain undisturbed, even during the dry season when they appear to be empty. Foot, pet, and vehicle traffic will compact the soil and result in water flow change and may lead to early drainage. Walking through these areas will also harm dormant eggs and larvae that are buried beneath the leaf litter.

We must tread lightly, reduce our carbon footprints, and be mindful of our surroundings if we are to protect these seasonal gems. If everyone does a little, it will amount to a lot.

Long-toed Salamander



Western Red-backed Salamander



Exciting Community Partnership to Revitalize Doris Page Park



By Coleen Rogers and Anita Kess

Spring and summer bring growth and change – and change is definitely afoot in Doris Page Park thanks to a community partnership to restore the native species in the park - an initiative with a vision to feature an accessible ethnobotany trail in the future. The forest park, which sits just above Cordova Bay beach, is close to the site of the historic village of ʔEL̓.ŁĆ.

The Cordova Bay Association, Saanich Parks, and Victoria Master Gardeners have joined to create a project that will increase interest in the park, restore the area, and bring awareness of the importance of native plants. The vision is to include information about these plants in relation to traditional Indigenous uses as well as to the local environment.

Project development is in the early stages. Restoration work will start with identifying and mapping native and invasive plants, ensuring protection of native plants, and prioritizing removal of invasive plants. Then, the physical work can begin!

There's room for volunteers to join this project and to make a difference to the environment and the community – and maybe to learn more about Cordova Bay's cultural history and ethnobotany at the same time.

Potential volunteers will learn about safe and effective removal of invasive plants through the *Pulling Together* volunteer program. We're just getting started, so work days and times can be structured to suit the volunteers.

Do you have questions, or want to volunteer? Contact coleenrogersmg@gmail.com - we'll let you know about work party times so you can drop in to a work party and see if this project is for you!

Find information about the Saanich Parks *Pulling Together* volunteer program at <https://www.saanich.ca/EN/main/parks-recreation-community/parks/natural-areas/volunteer-for-pulling-together.html>

People, Pets and Parks Strategy

Photo credit: Joe Caione on Unsplash



At the July 5, 2021, Special Council Meeting, Saanich Mayor and Council approved the development of a strategy titled *People, Pets and Parks: A District Wide Strategy for Sharing Saanich's Parks*.

The goal of the strategy is to conduct a transparent, clear and robust public engagement process, resulting in the development of a shared use framework. That framework will allow Saanich and its park users to achieve positive relationships between people (pet owners and non-pet owners) as well as pets and the environment. The timeline below indicates the strategy's public engagement process.

Round 1 of public engagement began in late May and continues until mid-June. We encourage people interested in this process to register for updates by visiting the project [webpage \(https://www.saanich.ca/EN/main/parks-recreation-community/parks/parks-trails-amenities/saanich-ppp-strategy.html\)](https://www.saanich.ca/EN/main/parks-recreation-community/parks/parks-trails-amenities/saanich-ppp-strategy.html) or go directly to the [sign-up form \(https://secure.campaigner.com/CSB/Public/Form.aspx?fid=1849307&ac=bugx\)](https://secure.campaigner.com/CSB/Public/Form.aspx?fid=1849307&ac=bugx). Interested and registered individuals will be updated via email.

EVENTS



Saanich Recreation Trails & Treks

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

Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary www.swanlake.bc.ca 250-479-0211

Victoria Natural History Society Visit www.naturevictoria.ca for more programs

Calendar of events: http://www.vicnhs.bc.ca/?page_id=1518

Front cover photo:

Henderson's Shooting Star (*Primula hendersonii*), is best pollinated by bumble bees, along with a few other native bees. These bees release pollen by grasping the flower with their legs or mouthparts and vibrating their flight muscles without moving their wings.

Rear cover photo:

A **Yellow-faced Bumble Bee** (*Bombus vosnesenskii*) visiting a **Woolly Sunflower** (*Eriophyllum lanatum*). This native plant is visited by a huge diversity of pollinators and adds an incredible splash of sunshine to even the gloomiest spring!



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