

Our Backyard

A NEWSLETTER ON THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IN SAANICH



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Whitehead Park Volunteer Stewardship Project

By Winona Pugh, Saanich Pulling Together Volunteer and member of the Friends of Tod Creek Watershed

Whitehead Park, on the shores of Prospect Lake, was purchased from the Whitehead family in 1959 on the condition that it be established as a park. More than half an acre on the east side of Tod Creek was added in 1965 with the purchase of three lots from the Logan family. Long established as a swimming beach, the main area was maintained by Saanich, but the natural area suffered from human uses and gradually degraded over time.

In 2010, the restoration of the riparian area and stream began: a twelve year project of discovery! After the initial work was completed by Saanich Parks, the Friends of Tod Creek Watershed took on the maintenance. Removal of invasive Golden Willow, Himalayan Blackberry and English Ivy from the boundaries of the park allowed native species including Nootka Rose, Bigleaf Maple and Western Redcedar to thrive. A gravelled stream was restored and storm-water run-off was directed into a wetland for bio-filtration before entering Tod Creek. Reed Canarygrass, and Yellow Flag Iris were also removed and contained, and the riparian banks stabilized with Red Alder, Black Hawthorn, Salmonberry, Hardhack, and Nootka Rose.



Meeting at the park is always enjoyable and rewarding, however the opportunity to connect with friends and the community during the COVID restrictions has also provided additional physical, social and mental benefits during a difficult time.



As a part of the Saanich Pulling Together volunteer program, park volunteers have completed a restoration plan, replanted native plants and created trails to facilitate a close-up experience with nature. Hundreds of native plants, countless wheelbarrows full of mulch and thousands of volunteer hours have restored the ecology of this diverse area. Work continues with the *Pulling Together* volunteer group every Monday morning and new volunteers are always welcome.

Today this once-overlooked section of the park is now a valued community asset that provides an outdoor classroom for local schools, a rough path that meanders through the forest, and an opportunity to learn more about our natural ecosystems.



Saanich Mayor Fred Haynes and CRD Board Chair Colin Plant at ribbon-cutting ceremony.

20 New EV Charging Stations Open in Saanich

By: Erika Schade,
District of Saanich Communications Manager

The District of Saanich has opened 20 new public electric vehicle (EV) charging stations to make it easier for Saanich residents to drive EVs in the community and ensure access to charging on the go. These new level 2 stations are adding to the 12 existing stations that have been available for residents at Saanich facilities since 2013, and bring the total number of Saanich-operated stations to 32.

The 20 new stations are located at the following eight municipal sites, including four brand new locations at Saanich parks:

- Saanich Commonwealth Place – 6 new stations (plus 2 existing stations)
- G.R. Pearkes Recreation Centre – 2 new stations (plus 2 existing stations)
- Cedar Hill Recreation Centre – 2 new stations (plus 2 existing stations)
- Cedar Hill Golf Course – 2 new stations (plus 2 existing stations)
- Gyro-Cadboro Park – 2 new stations
- Mount Douglas Park – 2 new stations
- Hampton Park – 2 new stations
- Beckwith Park – 2 new stations

Through its [Zero Emissions Vehicle Incentive Program](#) (ZEVIP), Natural Resources Canada provided a \$100,000 investment to the District of Saanich for the deployment and installation of the new EV chargers.

Saanich charges a \$1/hour user fee for the charging stations to encourage turnover and cover the cost of maintenance and electricity. EV Charging Stations and their availability can be found in real-time on plugshare.com. Instructions on how to access Saanich's EV stations are available at saanich.ca/ev.

QUICK FACTS

- In Saanich, gas vehicles account for more than 50% of our community's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.
- Transitioning to EVs is expected to make the largest contribution toward Saanich's target to cut GHG emissions in half by 2030.
- The Capital Regional District has the highest percentage of new EV registrations in Canada.
- Since 2013, there have been more than 109,000 charging sessions at Saanich-owned chargers.
- As of publication time, there are now 115 public charging stations in Saanich operated by various providers, consisting of 91 level 2 stations, eight DC Fast Charging (DCFC) stations, and 16 Tesla Superchargers.
- Approximately 36% of Saanich residents will need to be driving an electric vehicle by 2030 in order to reach climate targets.
- Saanich will be working with the CRD to encourage and help others, including private businesses, to install public charging stations. In addition, Saanich will continue to install public chargers at Saanich facilities.

Habitat Protection Fencing

Protecting Sensitive Ecosystems, Species at Risk, and our Feathered Friends



Mt. Douglas summit fence crew

By Rick Hatch, District of Saanich Parks

The Municipality of Saanich is rich in ecosystem diversity: rocky outcrops with Garry Oaks, a variety of different wetlands, coastal shorelines, and Douglas-fir forests. Each habitat supports different flora and fauna. The balance between protecting these sensitive habitats and the ever-expanding public trail use (and sometimes abuse) is challenging for Saanich Parks staff and community volunteers.

Over the past decade, Parks staff have constructed many cedar split-rail and post-and-rope fences to help protect restoration projects and to close off rogue trails in Saanich parks. We've seen great success in the re-establishment of native trees, shrubs, and herbaceous plants.

In 2021, Saanich Parks Natural Areas launched a new effort in the protective fencing program with new projects in Knockan Hill and Mount Tolmie Parks. These simple but effective post-and-rope designs (with signage) do in fact keep most people and dogs on the designated trails, leaving the protected area to rebound with native camas and other herbaceous plants. Not only does the flora get a chance to flourish, the areas become less traveled and quieter for birds and other wildlife to use as nesting and feeding sites. With increased funding, pending 2022 budget approvals, there will be more post-and-rope projects in Knockan Hill, Little Mount Doug, and Mount Tolmie Parks, to name a few.

Many species and ecosystems at risk are found in our natural-state parks, especially in Garry Oak ecosystems. Saanich Parks has committed to a new program called the *Garry Oak Dripline Restoration*. This program is part of our commitment to the UN *Decade on Ecosystem Restoration* that began in 2021. In support of this global initiative, Mayor Haynes signed a proclamation on January 11, 2021. We will see a half dozen or so mini-restoration projects under the canopy, or drip-line, of our mature Garry Oak trees each year and we hope to have more than 50 sites completed by 2030. Most of the original Garry Oak Restoration Project sites will be included in the Garry Oak Dripline program. The first parks chosen for this project are Mount Tolmie, Braefoot, Fairburn, Hyacinth, Cuthbert Holmes, and Knockan Hill. Working closely with many of our *Pulling Together* volunteers, staff will be removing invasive plant species, planting native trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants, and installing protective fencing at most of the sites.

The Cuthbert Holmes Park and Colquitz Creek Trembling Aspen restoration site (funded by the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure), has two newly constructed fish habitat alcoves that offer protection, resting, and feeding opportunities for the returning Coho Salmon and Cut-throat Trout populations. Many undesignated creek and pond access points are widely used by trail users and their canine companions; not only is this disruptive to the sensitive fish habitat but also to the local and migratory bird populations. Permanent cedar

split-rail fencing, silt fencing, and temporary snow fencing has been installed to keep the fish and wildlife habitat protected.

With the installation of three Great-Horned Owl nesting platforms in 2021, Saanich Parks also constructed protective fencing sections to block off rogue trails to keep dogs and people from getting too close to the nesting sites. In 2021, volunteers documented three successful Great-Horned Owl births and all three fledglings spent up to a week close to the forest floor after they had made their first big plunge out of the nest. A small section of cedar split-rail fencing was installed between the riparian area and trail to help keep trail users away from this sensitive area.

A Great Blue Heron Rookery has been identified at the Mount Douglas Beach parking lot and seasonal snow-fencing and signage has been installed temporarily to keep a 60 metre quiet-zone buffer for the nest trees. Although some bird species will habituate to human noise, keeping the ground below free of disturbance is an important step to protecting the nesting and feeding zones. Great Blue Herons are known to abandon their nesting colonies due to visual disturbances.

In Saanich, in addition to the work of dedicated *Friends of groups*, *Pulling Together* volunteers spent 15,000+ hours in 45 different parks in 2021. Protective fencing is often needed to keep people and pets out of the newly opened up areas: minimizing off-trail use and allowing native vegetation to thrive. For example, a new fence is being installed in Rithet's Bog to protect a shallow fen ecosystem from off-trail use, and at the Mount Douglas Summit split-rail fencing is the first stage of a restoration project that will see staff and volunteers remove large patches of Scotch Broom.

Plant and animal diversity is imperative to help keep our sensitive ecosystems surviving and thriving. COVID 19 has seen a huge rise in trail use and Saanich's *Natural Intelligence* initiative encourages everyone to enjoy nature as part of their daily/weekly routine. It is possible to strike a balance between ecological diversity and recreational use. Protective fencing around sensitive habitats is an important tool at realizing this goal.



Mt. Douglas summit split-rail fence



Knockan Hill post-and-rope fence protecting Garry Oak ecosystem

Cuthbert Holmes Park riparian protection

Saanich Environmental Awards

Congratulations to the 2021 Award Winners

By Carolyn Richman, Environmental Education Officer

The annual Environmental Awards are an initiative of the Saanich Environment and Natural Areas Advisory Committee. Since 2000, we've recognized more than 170 people and organizations contributing to protection of the natural environment in Saanich.

Visit the web for more awards information and to sign up for email notifications:

saanich.ca/enviroawards

2021 Award Winners

Individual Environmental Achievement: Craig Elder

Craig received the individual environmental achievement award for his community leadership, restoration and stewardship in the Swan Creek Watershed. Craig contributes considerable time to his volunteer efforts, as a leader for the *Friends of Swan Creek Watershed*, a lead steward for Swan Creek and in his roles with the Peninsula Streams Society. As a board member and active volunteer of Peninsula Streams, it is estimated he has contributed more than 1000 volunteer hours. Craig has led over 3000 volunteer hours of community members and school groups in restoring Swan Creek, which has included the construction of rock riffles and pool, the addition of gravel for salmon spawning, riparian planting to provide shade and habitat, removal of invasive species, creek clean-ups, and split rail fencing.

Biodiversity Conservation: Ferndale Forest Pulling Together

The *Ferndale Forest Pulling Together* group was honoured for community engagement and commitment to restoration and stewardship at Ferndale Forest Park. For more than 8 years, Ron Crabtree, Anne Whetham and Doug Hare have led a volunteer team that has contributed close to 4,000 hours to restore and steward this Douglas-fir forest. Volunteers have methodically removed invasive plants from most of the forested areas and work weekly to maintain this. Native plants have

been planted in the park and cared for to increase ecosystem health and biodiversity. In addition, this group has encouraged community connections with Ferndale Forest Park, by engaging local students in restoration and neighbours in good stewardship practices.



Volunteer Organization: Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary Volunteer Program

The Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary Volunteer Program was recognized with the volunteer organization award for significant volunteer contributions to education and conservation at the Sanctuary. Volunteers contribute in a variety of ways, through place-based community engagement and education, and by managing invasive species at the sanctuary. Adapting to challenging times, recent volunteer efforts have included photo journalism for public engagement and a new senior's sewing circle fundraising initiative. In 2020, the Sanctuary's volunteer program provided 3,635 volunteer hours; a significant contribution to conservation and the stewardship of these local natural areas.

Business: The Plot Garden Market

As the owners and operators of the Plot Garden Market, Emily Harris and Tyler Brown were honoured for their business leadership in environmentally sustainable food production. Through their bio-intensive market farm, they not only promote local food security, but offer educational tours and local employment. Emily and Tyler have cleared their land of invasive species, especially large areas of Himalayan blackberry in order to restore the integrity of the farmland. They use no spray/ no till practices, maintaining soil health and biodiversity and they also protect riparian areas through erosion control techniques. Emily and Tyler's development of this thriving, sustainable farm protects the natural environment while providing healthy local food to restaurants, grocery stores and individual customers.



Youth: Lambrick Park Secondary School

Lambrick Park Secondary School received the youth award for their commitment to environmental stewardship and restoration at Feltham and Bow Parks. Teachers and students have contributed annually to ecosystem restoration efforts, supporting *Pulling Together* volunteers in these parks with invasive species removal, mulching, and native planting. One class participated in a stewardship series to learn about and map the ecosystems. A service day for grade nine students has involved students annually in Feltham Park since 2017. The ongoing relationship of the school and students with these natural areas has contributed to positive learning and stewardship development, inter-generational learning opportunities, the development of an Eco-Club, incorporating hands-on experience as part of the school's curriculum, as well as making positive contributions to restoring and protecting these natural areas.

Sustainability: Capital City Allotment Garden Board of Directors

The Board of Directors of the Capital City Allotment Garden received the Sustainability award for their leadership in environmental stewardship at the Capital City Allotment Gardens and Swan Creek. This Board is described as working long hours, above and beyond, to support the Allotment Gardens and demonstrate good stewardship. Allotment gardeners are encouraged to provide habitat for birds and pollinators and are provided with educational resources. The Board has worked closely with the Friends of Swan Creek Watershed in planting the riparian areas of Swan Creek that runs along the property to protect this sensitive ecological area.



Long Term Achievement: Rick Nordin

Rick Nordin was honoured for his Long Term Environmental Achievement in community leadership and citizen engagement for lake stewardship in Saanich – a nomination supported by six community-based organizations in Saanich. An internationally respected limnologist, Rick Nordin was recognized for his extensive volunteer work that has created a legacy of lake stewardship. In 1997, he co-founded the BC Lake Stewardship Society where he has worked tirelessly, including delivering Lakekeepers training courses, aquatic plant workshops, and supporting volunteer efforts. His work has contributed immeasurably to the health and stewardship of lakes in Saanich. Rick Nordin has supported and empowered volunteer stewardship and monitoring, thereby reinforcing the scientific credibility of data collected by volunteers. Rick accomplishes things through cooperative leadership, science-based advocacy and innovative partnerships.

If You Build It ...

Re-Wilding Cuthbert Holmes Park



By Rick Hatch, District of Saanich Parks

Phase one of the Colquitz River riparian restoration project in Cuthbert Holmes Park began last August and will continue in 2022. The goal of this three-year project is to restore a thirty-metre wide riparian buffer zone along both sides of Colquitz River for approximately 200 metres. This area of Cuthbert Holmes Park had been cleared for agricultural purposes many decades ago. The infestation of invasive trees over the past few decades created a monoculture of English Hawthorn trees with very little habitat diversity.

Last year the section of the Colquitz River across from the Silver City Theatre saw the construction of two new tidal flood-plain alcoves and four more will be constructed in 2022 during the fisheries window in July and August. This is the period of time when work in and about a stream can be conducted with reduced risk to fish and fish habitat, having completed the necessary regulatory notifications. Part of the new trail design will include a river-viewing platform adjacent to the new fish alcoves and a Trembling Aspen grove. Similar to other

viewing areas along the Colquitz River, these will be used for education, wildlife viewing, and research opportunities.

The largest floodplain bench or alcove is more than 900 m² and includes a 30 m² amphibian pond. The second floodplain alcove is 200 m². Both alcoves have approximately 40 m² of permanent pool area (creek bed level) to re-create floodplain riparian zones that were lost decades ago. Large boulders, woody debris, spawning gravel, and tree stumps improve fish habitat by creating predator-escape areas, and the 2500+ native grasses, rushes, sedges, and forbs that were planted in 2021 will attract insects that salmonids can feed on.

Supporting these two habitat alcoves is a new Trembling Aspen forest: more than 200 trees were planted in 2021, funded by the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MoTI) through mitigation funds from the new McKenzie interchange. These funds will be spent over a ten-year period to develop and enhance a Trembling

Aspen forest in Cuthbert Holmes Park. Habitat enhancements to mimic a more mature forest were added by erecting snags, placing or hollowing out large woody debris (logs and branches), anchoring large tree stumps and woody debris in pools, and placing large boulders throughout. Other tree species planted to support the Trembling Aspen grove include red-listed Oregon Ash trees (grown from seed by Satinflower Nurseries), Bigleaf Maple, Red Alder, Douglas-fir, and Western Redcedar.

Since the completion of the in-stream work and restoration planting, many animal species have visited the site. These include: Great Blue Herons, Cooper's Hawks, American Coots, Double-crested Cormorants, American Robins, California Quail, Mallards, Buffleheads, Belted Kingfishers, Northern Flickers, an American Kestrel, various shorebirds, native frogs, River Otter, Harbour Seal, and spawning salmon.

Dave Clough, the lead biologist for most of Saanich Park's creek projects, was key to the design and construction of the creek habitat enhancements; in his words, *"That is a gorgeous floodplain, just think of all those riparian trees drinking that water and all of our fish safe from the fast lane, feasting away. Most urban streams don't get to flex their muscles like they do at Cuthbert Holmes Park, they get built up with housing and then flood; we are lucky to have this ecological setting."* The Parks Natural Areas crew look forward to working with the Public Works Creeks and Waterways crew, Dorothy Chambers from *Salmon in the City* (credit for these photos), Julian Anderson (*Pulling Together* Lead Steward and historian), and other community members over the next several years as the Cuthbert Holmes Management Plan comes to fruition.



Juvenile Double-crested Cormorant



American Kestrel





Adopt A Patch at Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary

*Interested in ecological stewardship, but don't know where to start?
Come to the Nature Sanctuary to gain hands-on invasive plant
management skills you can use in your own backyard.*

By Julia Dawson, Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary Community Coordinator

Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary is launching a new program in 2022 *Adopt A Patch*, where volunteer groups embrace and rehabilitate designated plots on the Nature Sanctuary grounds or waterways. This program is ideal for families, schools, organizations, or other community service groups as a team building, learning, and restoration activity. Activities are adaptive and accessible for a variety of abilities, group sizes, and knowledge levels.

As we saw throughout British Columbia in the fall of 2021, flooding and subsequent erosion of river, lake, and wetland banks can be catastrophic! That is what makes it particularly important to restore riparian habitats (any land next to a water body) and increase the capacity of these areas to prevent downstream flooding, provide homes for native species, and filter pollution. There are many patches around Swan

Lake that are overrun with invasive plant species and afford great opportunities for high impact rehabilitation.

Your *Adopt A Patch* stewardship team will be trained to remove invasive species and restore native plants with hands-on activities. As the program develops, videos will supplement in-person learning, and participants will be able to advance through modules, learning restoration concepts and earning badges. This program will build your practical knowledge, which you can then translate to conservation activities in your own backyard and neighbourhood.

Consider the ***Adopt A Patch*** program at the Nature Sanctuary this year, and see the positive impact you can make for climate resilience! For more information contact info@swanlake.bc.ca

Winter Gardening

By Kayla Siefried, Compost Education Centre

This winter has already proven to be a chilly one. With wild winter weather these past months, vegetable gardeners have been trying to shelter their veggies from the deep freezes on the coast. Even if your winter vegetables look ragged, there is still hope for the hardiest of winter vegetables in the garden like broccoli, cauliflowers, and kales, which, if the correct winter varieties were planted, should withstand the chill of the weather no problem. Other veggies may look even more atrocious above ground, like mushy chard, and carrot tops that have been zapped by the frost, however, their roots are likely still intact and healthy. The chard may grow back come warmer temperatures, and the carrots may have just gotten sweeter.

If you mulched your garden in the fall with a deep layer of leaves or straw, then your carrots and parsnips are even more sweet and flavourful with the cool temperatures. Root veggies like carrots create starches as they grow, and as temperatures drop, they convert some of these starches into sugars, which effectively act as a sort of anti-freeze for the vegetable, preventing the water in the vegetable from freezing. The result is an uber-sweet carrot. Lucky for us on the coast, it is possible to have harvestable vegetables from the garden nearly year-round, as temperatures don't stay cold enough for long enough to prevent this veggie anti-freeze adaptation from working.

With the uncertainty associated with the changing climate, we cannot know what any future seasons will bring, so the Compost Education Centre is excited to play a role in equipping you with the knowledge you need to adapt. We offer an array of gardening, soil health, and conservation-themed workshops for adults. To see the 2022 schedule and to register for workshops, check out www.compost.bc.ca.



The Kestrel Story in Cuthbert Holmes Park

By Dorothy Chambers,
Salmon in the City

In early November, an uncommon bird visitor to our region came to Cuthbert Holmes Park and put on a show. An American Kestrel, a type of falcon, spent time hunting along the highway berm in the park. He was frequently seen perched at the top of the upright dead trees that were installed for this very purpose.

To encourage him to find a mate and stick around, John Potter, who volunteers with local conservation organizations, and builds various sized nesting boxes, made and installed the appropriate sized nest box. Our resident Red-tailed Hawk watched with keen interest from its nearby perch. Another great wildlife collaboration with Saanich Parks and the area stewards.

I hope we all get to continue to enjoy his presence!

Check out the following link. It is a wonderful video from inside a nest box of Kestrels raising their young:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y04R9ZrSRlg>



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

Compost Education Centre Visit compost.bc.ca for more programs

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Cover image: Every now and then the region is converted to a winter wonderland. This scene, taken along a section of one of the many trails in Saanich, gives residents a different view of our wild spaces.