

Our Backyard

A NEWSLETTER ON THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IN SAANICH



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In This Issue:

Community Caring for Cuthbert Holmes Park | [Seeds of Change: Native Plant Growers Program](#) | Small Changes Can Have Big Impacts | [Colquitz River Fish Fence Update](#) | Working to Restore Freshwater and Marine Ecosystems | [Lesser Celandine Update](#) | What Happens to Data Collected from Water Quality Monitoring? | [What's the Deal with Blue-Green Algae?](#) | [Pulling Together](#) Volunteer Profile | [Saanich Neighbourhoods Becoming More Connected](#)



Cover photo: Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary

Community Caring for Cuthbert Holmes Park



By Renée Cenerini, Environmental Education Coordinator, District of Saanich Parks

Many of us know that urban greenspaces provide a variety of benefits to people, from enhancing physical and mental health to giving opportunities to connect with others, but we may forget that we too can give to nature in many positive ways. This past fall saw an assortment of members of the community, from kids to seniors, *Pulling Together* volunteers, and Saanich staff, care for Cuthbert Holmes Park. Groups included preschoolers from nearby Saanich Neighborhood Place, students from Tillicum Elementary and Spectrum Community School, and corporate partners through Tree Canada and Schneider Electric.

Working together to remove invasive species such as English Ivy, or to plant a variety of native plants including Oregon Grape, Sword Fern, Douglas-fir, Trembling Aspens, and more, all contributed to Saanich's commitment to the [UN Decade on Environmental Restoration](#). This work connected people to the land in good ways. Children received a positive message on how they can contribute to a thriving environment while adults expressed joy at being outside and contributing to a worthy endeavor.

While the scope of ecological restoration can seem daunting, it can help to view this process as an ongoing relationship where a fixed end goal is not the point. It is about nurturing connections and giving precious time and energy to something worthwhile. By nurturing green spaces within our urban environment, we are creating a community of care that is investing in the future health of the land and all who thrive along with it, from people to plants, animals, fungi, and more.



Wondering how you too can get involved?

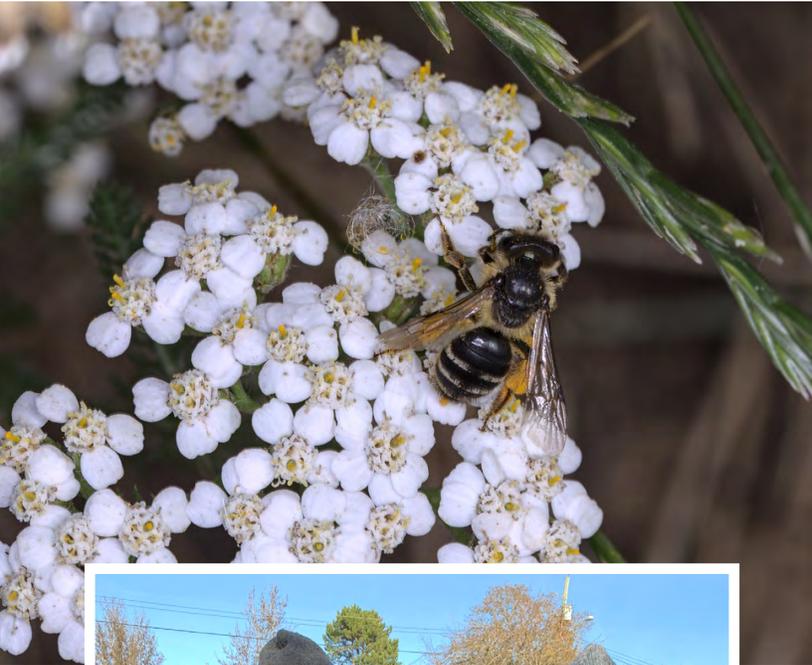
Join one of the more than 45 different *Pulling Together* groups operating in parks and natural areas in Saanich by contacting Parks at [250-475-5522](tel:250-475-5522) or parks@saanich.ca or visit the Saanich website at www.saanich.ca for more information.

SEEDS OF CHANGE:

The Nature Sanctuary Launches New Volunteer Native Plant Growers Program



By Tara Todesco, Manager, Volunteer Programs Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary

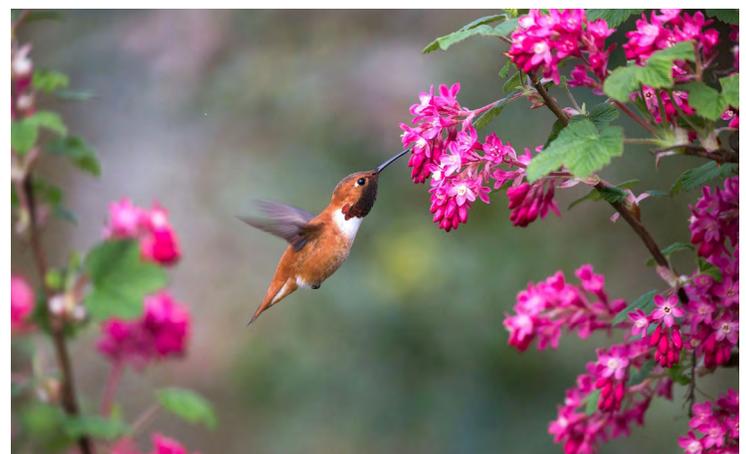
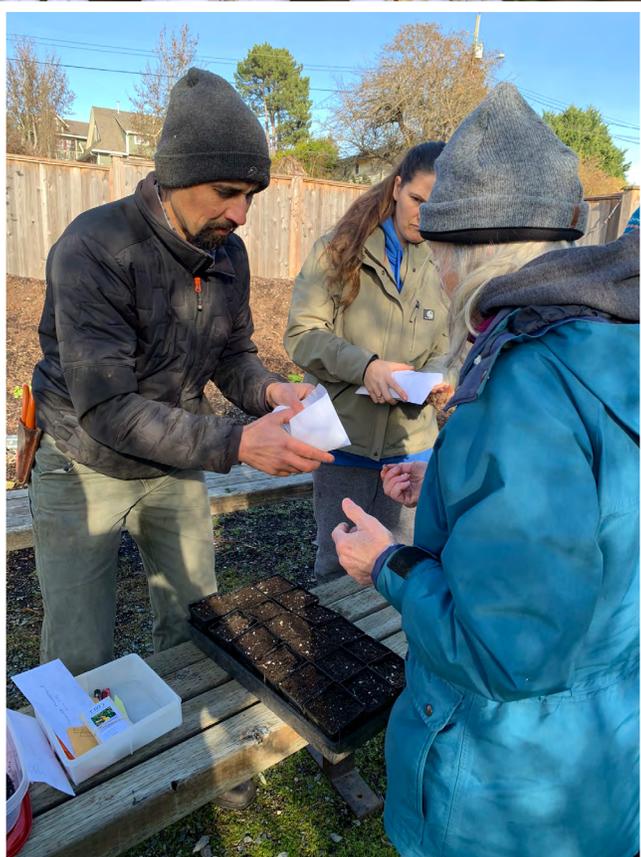


The Nature Sanctuary has launched an exciting Native Plant Growers Program, aimed at enhancing onsite ecosystem restoration efforts and supporting community participation and knowledge sharing.

The initiative kicked off this November with a group of 20 enthusiastic volunteers participating in the first of a series of in-person trainings in native plant propagation. Volunteers left with seeds, pots and soil to start growing plants right away, including Fawn Lilies, Great Camas, and Woolly Sunflowers. Over the next year, volunteers will continue training and cultivating other native plants and shrubs in their home gardens.

Susanna, one of the new Native Plant Growing Volunteers, reflected that, "For someone like myself, who is interested in learning more about how to grow native plants and in making a contribution to restoring our natural habitats, the program is like a dream come true."

These plants will be used to support both Nature Sanctuary restoration projects, as well as the organization's annual Native Plant Sale Fundraiser.



For more information or to discuss how you can join this program, contact Tara Todesco at volunteer@swanlake.bc.ca

Small Changes Can Have Big Impacts



By Maddy Litster, Natural Areas Practitioner, District of Saanich Parks

It is easy to feel overwhelmed when thinking about the extent to which some of our ecosystems have been damaged. There are many factors influencing the health and function of our environment, including invasive species, pollution, and climate change. Amid these challenges, it can feel like change is next to impossible due to the global impact of these threats. A great way to combat these feelings of being overwhelmed is to start small in your own community. Healthy communities create the foundation for a healthy world.

In 2021, the United Nations declared 2021-2030 as the Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. This initiative calls on everyone, big and small, to get involved and help revive damaged ecosystems. As part of our commitment to this Decade, Saanich has made a specific commitment to the restoration of Garry Oak ecosystems and is working hard to enhance the biodiversity of these endangered spaces and improve the health of large mature Garry Oak trees.

One park currently undergoing restoration is Vic Derman Park, a small and beautiful swath of Garry Oak woodland and meadow. This park is facing many threats: Scotch Broom and Himalayan Blackberry encroach on the camas meadow, while undesignated trails trample through native vegetation and increase compaction of the soils.

Thankfully, these threats at Vic Derman Park are being mitigated with the help of Saanich staff and one volunteer who wanted to make a difference in his community. Peter Walters is the Lead Steward volunteer for Vic Derman Park and over the past seven years his dedication has been transforming the park. The latest undertaking by Peter and staff has been removing two large Himalayan Blackberry patches in the meadow and replanting with native shrubs, trees, and herbaceous plants.

If making a difference feels daunting, just remember that small changes can have a big impact. Just as Peter saw an opportunity to help his local community park, you can too. Maybe it's picking up garbage as you go for a hike, or managing invasive species on your own property. No matter the way you choose to help, it all adds to the cumulative efforts of people across the world to revive and restore our ecosystems.



UNITED NATIONS DECADE ON
**ECOSYSTEM
RESTORATION**
2021-2030

Design by WSÁNEĆ / Coast Salish emerging artist Sarah Jim



Before



After

Colquitz River

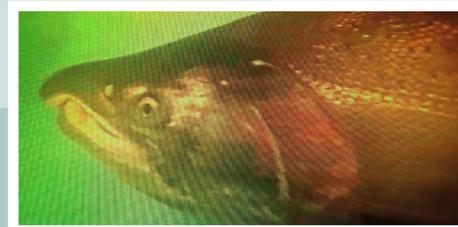
Fish Fence Update

By Dorothy Chambers, Salmon in the City

In 2022, Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) collaborated with Anthem (Tillicum Mall), World Fisheries Trust, Saanich Parks/Public works, Esquimalt Anglers, Fish Kissing Weasels Environmental, Pacific Salmon Foundation, and Salmon in the City to install a motion detection camera near the Colquitz River fish fence. The camera takes a photo of motion passing in front of it – which also includes leaves, twigs, otters, coffee cups, etc.

With the drought of summer/fall of 2023, the Colquitz River water levels were extremely low, and the fish fence was not closed to avoid interfering with any fish that made it. Many of the creeks and rivers in the area had very low returns this year. A few spawning fish were seen in Swan Creek, so we know some made it into the Colquitz River. The camera was operated for a while to work out bugs, and documented a fair number of leaves.

The River Otter, American Mink, and Harbour Seal predation has become an ongoing concern during salmon spawning: loitering at the counting fence, waiting for the salmon heading up stream. We also got a general assessment of the 2022 Coho spawn, and the opportunistic Cutthroat Trout that follow the salmon egg buffet: Coho 450, Cutthroat 150.



Working to Restore the Freshwater and Marine Ecosystems within Saanich

By Katrina Adams, Senior Aquatic Biologist, Peninsula Streams & Shorelines

Peninsula Streams & Shorelines (PSS) has been working in the Colquitz Creek Watershed for more than a decade now doing restoration, community stewardship, and environmental education. PSS's strong partnership with the District of Saanich Natural Areas department, as well as local community groups, has led to extensive restoration work being completed in the watershed. Recently, more than 400 metres of salmon habitat was restored in the Colquitz Creek within Copley Park and 300 metres in Swan Creek Park, resulting in a significant increase of potential salmon spawning habitat.

In late May of this year, PSS, with Saanich Parks, staff walked the entirety of the Colquitz Creek and mapped out the current state of the stream habitat as well as identifying opportunities for restoration. Restoration this summer involved restoring four sites within the watershed, including two sites within the Colquitz, 300 metres of Swan Creek, as well as Gabo Creek. The work was done in partnership with Saanich staff and involved building spawning habitat, improving instream cover, and enhancing riparian vegetation. Look out for more exciting projects happening this coming year!



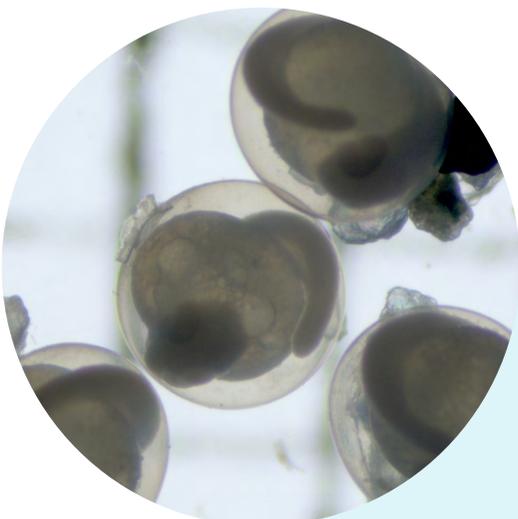
Check out this
NEW video about the
Colquitz River Restoration Project:
<https://vimeo.com/906428245>



In addition to stream work, PSS also monitors the beaches around Saanich looking for forage fish eggs. Forage fish, such as Pacific Sand Lance and Surf Smelt, are small schooling fish that are integral in marine food webs, directly and indirectly feeding birds, fish (including salmon), and whales. Since starting in 2018, PSS volunteers have collected a little over 100 samples, spread out over 19 beach survey sites. Cordova Bay, Cadboro Bay, and Finnerty Cove have all had positive samples containing forage fish eggs.

A big thank you to the Pacific Salmon Foundation, BC Salmon Restoration and Innovation Fund, BC Community Gaming Grants, District of Saanich, BC Conservation Foundation, Sitka Foundation, and World Wildlife Fund for their generous support.

Please contact peninsulastreams@gmail.com if you are interested in volunteer opportunities or would like to know more about our projects.



District of Saanich Lesser Celandine Update

By Ann Klein, Environmental Technician, District of Saanich Parks

Each new year ushers in the return of a crop of winter-hardy invasives that have already begun to emerge. Managing invasive species is a year-round task and keeps the Natural Areas section of Saanich Parks and the Saanich *Pulling Together* volunteers busy, amidst other restoration works.

In what is otherwise a slow growing season, Lesser Celandine (*Ranunculus ficaria*) is already starting to make an appearance and is one of our most prolific and time-consuming species to manage.

Lesser Celandine is a low growing, herbaceous perennial from the Buttercup family and can produce dense groundcover infestations that eliminate native plants and impact wildlife. It is also toxic to most mammals, causing sickness in livestock and even death in rare cases.

This species can spread quickly, dispersing seeds using animals and water as vectors. Lesser Celandine goes dormant with warm spring weather and can also be spread via its roots, tubers, and bulblets if the soil is disturbed or transported. Please DO NOT dispose of this species through home composting or putting it into the District of Saanich's green bins or garden waste bins, as this will likely increase its spread.

Lesser Celandine has been found in our public parks and boulevards and on private property. In 2023, there were approximately 185 active sites on private and public properties. 40 of these sites were newly discovered or reported, which highlights the importance of private property owners and *Pulling Together* volunteers with locating and reporting unknown populations, in addition to our survey crews.



Please call the Parks office at 250-475-5522 or email parks@saanich.ca with any new sightings: staff will respond to all calls. Although herbicide treatments are often the best way to manage most populations (dependant on size, distribution, ecosystem types, native plant co-domination, etc.), staff and volunteers use other methods like hand-digging, smothering, and some non-chemical spray as well whenever possible.

The invasive species program at Saanich Parks continues to expand quickly and resources are limited. To help with prioritizing, we will survey all known sites of Lesser Celandine to determine an appropriate treatment program based on sound Integrated Plant Management ([Integrated Pest Management \(IPM\) | District of Saanich](#)).

The Saanich Alert Sheet on Lesser Celandine can be found on the District of Saanich's website: www.saanich.ca/invasives (Invasive Resources).

What Happens to Data Collected from Water Quality Monitoring?

By Winona Pugh, Katie Wilson, and Carmel Thomson, Friends of Tod Creek Watershed

This summer, *Swim Drink Fish* established a Victoria Monitoring Hub in partnership with *Power To Be* at their Prospect Lake site. Together, *Power To Be* and *Swim Drink Fish* are working towards connecting people to land and water.

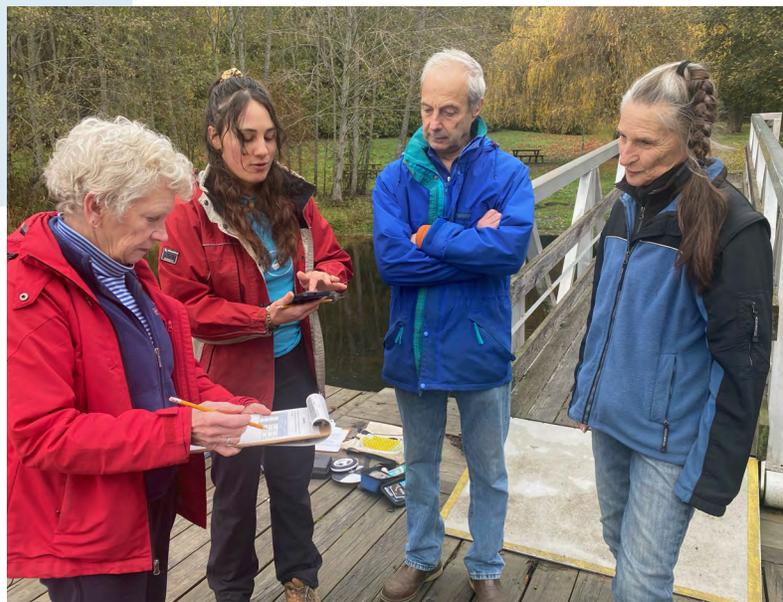
Water samples are collected weekly from Prospect Lake and various other measurements are taken including: temperature, dissolved oxygen, and clarity. Samples are then tested on-site in the *Swim Drink Fish* lab for Total Coliform and E. Coli bacteria, with results available the following day. The data is then shared on the *Swim Drink Fish* website: <https://www.swimdrinkfish.ca>.

In mid-November, in addition to monitoring the *Power To Be* Hub, *Swim Drink Fish* Victoria Water Monitoring Coordinator Katie Wilson hosted a water sampling workshop; providing a hands-on learning opportunity to residents of Saanich's Prospect Lake District.

Katie, a recent University of Victoria graduate with a BA in Environmental Studies and Geography, tells us: "The main purpose of collecting water quality data is to ensure people have access to information they need to recreate safely and to generate advocacy for enhancing the health of the natural environment."

Through a network of Community Based Water Monitoring Hubs, *Swim Drink Fish* has inspired and continues to inspire people to know and safeguard their local waters. *Swim Drink Fish* initiatives are active in 171 communities in 11 countries.

A handful of Saanich residents passionate about water met at Whitehead Park, and Katie took them through the water monitoring process. This was followed by a discussion on water quality issues and how to make informed decisions. Katie has established supportive relationships with local groups involved in protecting local water bodies: Friends of Tod Creek Watershed and Friends of Maltby Lake Watershed Society.

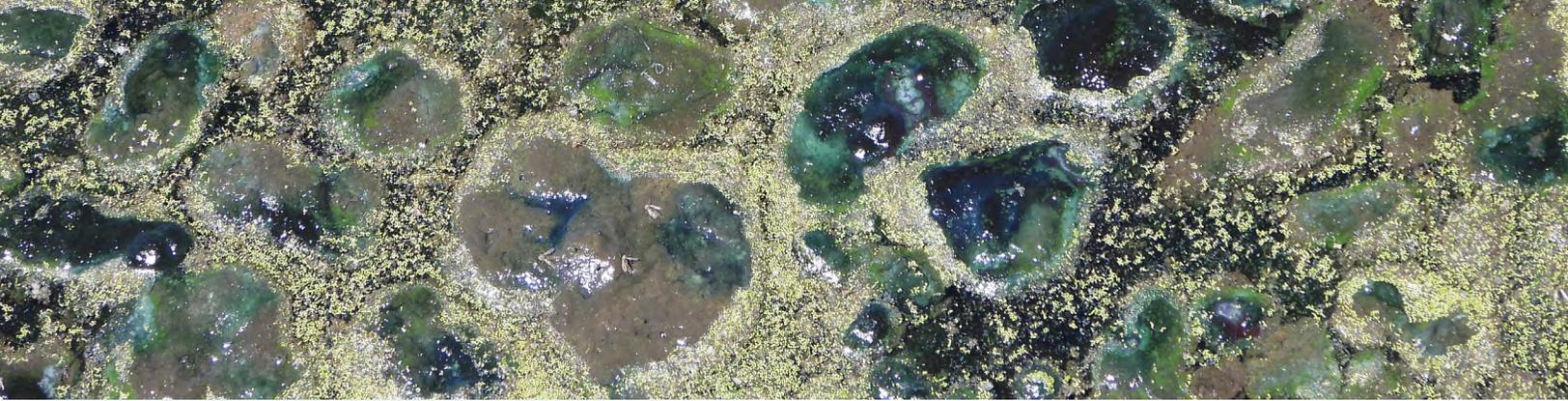


**SWIM
DRINK
FISH**



STAY TUNED:

The Victoria Swim Drink Fish Hub will be offering volunteer opportunities and more community sampling workshops beginning next swim season.



What's the Deal with Blue-Green Algae?

By Renée Cenerini, Environmental Education Coordinator, District of Saanich Parks

You may have seen signs posted around some Saanich lakes or heard warnings about blue-green algae and wondered about the fuss. Algae is a good thing, right? Well, as it turns out, not all algae are created equally, and some can be harmful to humans and our furry companions, so it's helpful to be in the know.

Blue-green algae, also called cyanobacteria, are tiny plant-like organisms that arise naturally in freshwater sources such as lakes, rivers, and ponds. If blue-green algae are a natural phenomenon, why worry about it? It turns out that some species produce toxins and ingesting them, or even encountering the water that contains them, can cause all kinds of unpleasant health problems and at worst, can result in death for livestock or pets.

Although you usually can't see them in the water, algae can form blooms visible at the surface under the right conditions. These have a blue-green sheen; looking like paint floating on the water, but can also be a green, brown, or reddish colour. Even if you can't see a bloom, the toxins produced by the algae can still be present, so it's important to pay attention to any posted warnings. The Algae Watch website offers opportunities to submit your observations and gives helpful identification tools and resources (www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/air-land-water/water/water-quality/algae-watch).

Although it would seem logical that blooms would only occur in the heat of summer, they can and do occur at any time. Winter is a common time for algal blooms in deeper lakes such as Elk Lake, when storms can mix the deep-water nutrients with the shallower waters. These nutrients are the main cause of blooms and human activities that add extra nutrients to water sources (e.g. agricultural runoff, malfunctioning septic systems, livestock or pet waste) can all have an impact.



So, what can you do? If you see a blue-green algae bloom, assume that toxins are present and avoid any contact with the water for both you and your pets. If there are no warnings posted, contact the **CRD Infoline** (<https://www.crd.bc.ca/contact-us?r=info-line>). There is also information found on the CRD's website at www.crd.bc.ca/education/concerns/blue-green-algae-blooms.

In terms of prevention, you can support healthy lakes and other freshwater sources by:

- Using phosphate-free detergents, personal care, and household cleaning products
- Avoiding using fertilizers on lawns, especially those that contain phosphorus
- Maintaining a natural shoreline if you have a lake or streamside property
- Planting or maintaining vegetation along waterways
- Checking septic systems to ensure they are functioning well

All of us can play a role in helping keep our lakes and watersheds healthy!



Saanich Parks Volunteer Profile Peter Walters

By Peter Walters (*Pulling Together* Lead Steward Volunteer) and
Katie Turner (Stewardship Coordinator, District of Saanich Parks)



Peter Walters is the Pulling Together Lead Steward at Vic Derman Park. Peter has been Lead Steward since 2018 and a volunteer since 2016. Thank you to Peter for his stewardship of this natural habitat for people, plants, and animals. He also has a wicked sense of humour!

What do you enjoy most about volunteering with Saanich Parks?

The dogs. I get to meet a lot of wonderful dogs, as they walk their people along the Vic Derman Park Trail. Their people are nice, too.

Tell us about one of your most memorable experiences volunteering.

I mostly volunteer alone, so some of my best memories are from *Pulling Together* work parties. A small group of people can make a huge difference in a few hours. As a Lead Steward, helping people have fun learning and working together is a great feeling.

My favourite moment was when one little girl walked up to me shyly, and asked, "Do you live in the park?"

I promised her that I did indeed have a home nearby. And it prompted me to wear slightly less ragged work clothes.

Tell us a bit about yourself.

My wife and I live next to Vic Derman Park, and I look into it from my study. Choosing it as the place to volunteer was an easy decision.

When I started volunteering with *Pulling Together*, I knew almost nothing about ecosystems and invasive plants, and didn't like getting dirty. But I did like the idea of supporting a park that's so well used and loved by the neighbourhood.

Now that I'm in my seventh year as a Lead Steward, I don't mind getting dirty quite so much. I'm learning the annual cycles of when to deal with which plant species, and I can see the restoration progress.

I'm still no expert. I rely on the patience and support of Saanich Parks staff, and the training they provide. Their guidance and encouragement make it a little easier to go out on cold and wet Saanich mornings. And I've been honoured to meet and work with Vic Derman's family, who are wonderful folks.

As volunteer gigs go, I think *Pulling Together* is one of the best. I'm semi-retired, so I try to get into the park for a couple of hours every second or third day. There's always something to do and learn.

And there are dogs. That's always a bonus.

For more information about how you can volunteer with Peter and the *Pulling Together* Volunteer program: [Volunteer for Pulling Together | District of Saanich](#)

or to join a work party: [Events Calendar | District of Saanich](#)

EVENTS



Saanich Recreation Trails & Treks

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

Any questions please call Alison 250-475-5408 or email alison.chamberlain@saanich.ca

Easy Walks (FREE)

Mondays | 1:30 pm to 2:30 pm | Leader: Penny

One-hour, easy-paced social walks on pavement and smooth trails through parks and interesting neighbourhoods. Where possible, routes avoid steep hills. Please wear supportive shoes. Sorry, dogs not permitted. No registration required.

Jan. 29 | Layritz Park/Interurban Area

Meet in Layritz Park parking lot, on Layritz Avenue, off Glyn Road

Feb. 5 | Vantreight/Glencoe Cove Parks

Meet by Vantreight Park, Vantreight Drive, off Ferndale Road

Feb. 12 | Playfair/Braefoot

Meet in main parking lot for Playfair Park, on Rock St off Quadra St

Feb. 19 | Family Day NO WALK

Feb. 26 | Cordova Ridge Circle

Meet in main parking lot for Claremont Goddard Park, on Haliburton

Mar. 4 | Cadboro Bay/Telegraph Cove

Meet at Cadboro-Gyro parking lot, end of Sinclair Rd by washrooms

Mar. 11 | Marigold Park/Welland Heritage Orchard

Meet at Marigold Park, on Iris Avenue off Grange Road

Mar. 18 | Blenkinsop Valley

Meet on Lochside Trail beside Lochside Elementary School. Street

parking along Lochside Drive, north of Royal Oak Drive

Mar. 25 | Beckwith Park/High Quadra Area

Meet in Beckwith Park, Beckwith Avenue, off Quadra Street

Walk & Talk (FREE)

Tuesdays and Thursdays | 9:30 am to 11 am

Leader: Dianne on Tuesdays | John on Thursdays

Enjoy beautiful scenery, a friendly chat, and gentle exercise as we take different walks through Saanich parks and trails. Walks follow mainly chip or gravel trails but may have some steep sections. No registration required. Sorry, dogs not permitted.

Jan. 30 | Tyndall Park to Arbutus Cove Park

Meet at Tyndall Park, 4368 Tyndall Avenue

Feb. 1 | Glencoe Cove

Meet at Vantreight Park, on Vantreight Drive, off Ferndale Avenue

Feb. 6 | Glanford Park to Copley Park

Meet at Glanford Park parking lot, 620 Kenneth Road, off Glanford

Feb. 8 | Knockan Hill Park

Meet at Strawberry Vale and District Community Club, 11 High

Street, off Burnside Road

Feb. 8 | Vantreight Park to Tyndall Park

Meet at Vantreight Park, 490 Vantreight Drive, off Ferndale Avenue

Feb. 15 | Lower Trails of PKOLS (Mt Doug Park)

Meet in park parking lot at the junction of Ash, Cordova Bay and Cedar Hill Road

Feb. 20 | Copley Park/Royal Oak Area

Meet at Copley Park parking lot, 598 Parkridge Street, off Vanalman

Feb. 22 | McMinn to Kentwood/Outerbridge

Meet at McMinn Park at 4830 Maple Grove Street, near Lochside Drive

Feb. 27 | Braefoot Park to Blenkinsop Lake

Meet at Braefoot Park parking lot, 1359 McKenzie Avenue

Feb. 29 | PKOLS (Mt Doug Park) to Majestic Park

Meet in park parking lot at the junction of Ash, Cordova Bay and Cedar Hill Road

Mar. 5 | Glanford Park to Mount View Park

Meet at Glanford Park parking lot, 620 Kenneth Road, off Glanford

Mar. 7 | Mount Tolmie & Finnerty Gardens

Meet at Henderson Rec Centre parking lot, 2291 Cedar Hill Cross Rd

Mar. 12 | Gordon Head Parks South

Meet at Gordon Head Recreation Centre entrance, 4100 Lambrick Way, off Feltham Road

Mar. 14 | Cadboro Bay/Mystic Vale

Meet at Cadboro-Gyro Park parking lot, end of Sinclair Road by washrooms

Mar. 19 | Broadmead Area Trails

Meet at Lochside School parking lot, 1145 Royal Oak Drive

Mar. 21 | Ten Mile Point

Meet at Wedgewood Park, by corner of Arbutus Road and Arbutus Place, park on road

Mar. 26 | Cadboro-Gyro Park to Haro Woods Park

Meet at Cadboro-Gyro Park parking lot, end of Sinclair Road by washrooms

Mar. 28 | Beckwith/Maltwood & Stoneywood Park

Meet by washroom building in Beckwith Park off Beckwith Avenue

Sunday Hikes (FREE)

Sundays | 1:30 pm to 3:30 pm | Leader: Penny

Discover the beauty and variety of Saanich parks on our Sunday Hikes, which are open to anyone who enjoys longer walks. Routes may include rural trails with steep rough sections, please wear sturdy footwear and bring water.

Feb. 18 | Queenswood Circle

Meet at washroom block in Cadboro-Gyro Park, off Cadboro Bay Rd

Mar. 10 | Layritz/Logan Park

Meet in Layritz Park parking lot, on Layritz Avenue, off Glyn Road

Apr. 14 | Garden City/Knockan Hill

Meet at Hyacinth Park parking lot, Marigold Road

Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary

www.swanlake.bc.ca 250-479-0211

Guided Bird Walks (Drop-In)

Every Sunday | 9:00 am to 10:30 am

Bring your binoculars and walking shoes and dress for the weather. Meet in the large parking lot for this informal walk around the lake area. Donations are appreciated.

Victoria Natural History Society

Visit www.naturevictoria.ca for more programs

Saturday Morning Birding (most Saturdays)

Check the Calendar to find out the week's location and time

http://www.vicnhs.bc.ca/?page_id=1518 All experience levels welcome. Non-members can participate up to three times.

Natural History night (every 2nd Tuesday)

TBA | Tues, Feb 13, 7:30 pm

TBA | Tues, Mar 12, 7:30 pm

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

Botany Night (every 3rd Tuesday)

TBA | Tues, Feb 20, 7:30 pm

TBA | Tues, Mar 19, 7:30 pm

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

Birder's Night (every 4th Wednesday)

123 Years of Christmas Bird Counts | Jan 24, 7:30 pm

Magnificent Laysan Albatross of Kaua'i | Feb 28, 7:30 pm

TBA | Mar 27, 7:30 pm

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

Marine Night (last Monday of the month)

Denizens Of the Cold, Dark Deep | Jan 29, 7:30 pm

Kelp Forests in A Warming Ocean | Feb 26, 7:30 pm

TBA | Mar 25, 7:30 pm

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



Saanich Neighbourhoods Are Becoming More Connected and Resilient

By Glenys Verhulst, Sustainability Planner, District of Saanich

Through the Neighbour to Neighbour Resilience Initiative (N2N) pilot, the District of Saanich is supporting residents' projects to address emergency preparedness, climate action, and caring for nature at a neighbourhood scale.

Your neighbourhood group can access a \$500 community grant. If you already have an idea in mind, you can apply for the grant right away. If you don't have a project idea already, you can bring a neighbourhood group together for a workshop series with Saanich staff to help you and your neighbours get to know each other and collaboratively design a project.

Recent projects have included an ecological restoration project on the public right-of-way beside a popular walking trail, and a project helping neighbours care for their hummingbird feeders during severe weather or other times they need help.

Applications are reviewed on a first-come, first-served basis starting January 1st of each year, with grants provided based on eligibility, as funds last.

For more information, project ideas, resources, or to apply, visit www.saanich.ca/n2n.



Join the *Our Backyard* mailing list!



Keep up to date on local community-based ecological restoration 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.

Editor: Darren Copley | Phone: 250-475-5579 | Email: Darren.Copley@saanich.ca

Cover photo: Swan Lake
Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary