

## **Considerations and Recommendations for Enhanced Stewardship in Saanich**

### **Briefing Note from the Resilient Saanich Technical Committee to Saanich Staff and Consultants**

July 1, 2023

The Resilient Saanich Technical Committee (RSTC) was mandated to advise on development of a “Stewardship Program” in the November 2017 motion by Council initiating the Resilient Saanich process. “Stewardship Program” was modified to “enhanced Stewardship Program” and “Enhanced Stewardship Program” in the [Terms of Reference](#) (TOR) last updated in October 2021. In this brief, we consider “stewardship” and “enhanced stewardship” as equivalent.

The District currently lacks a municipal-level and comprehensive Stewardship Plan, as noted in the TOR. The Plan is the roadmap for a Stewardship Program. We understand that a Stewardship Plan will either be included in the Biodiversity Conservation Strategy (BCS) under development or stand-alone and be closely integrated with it.

Our intent in this brief is to highlight some issues which should be addressed in the plan, including what we think “stewardship” entails (why, what, who, where, and how), and ways the District can facilitate stewardship to enhance biodiversity, and the condition and resilience of Saanich’s natural environment.

### **Summary of Recommendations for the Stewardship Plan and District Actions**

The Stewardship Plan and subsequent Program should:

- Support key priorities, goals, and objectives identified in the BCS for biodiversity protection and enhancement and ecosystem restoration, rehabilitation and reclamation<sup>1</sup> for different land ownership types and areas.
- Clearly define what stewardship encompasses in the context of Resilient Saanich and the BCS
- Commit to developing and maintaining a publicly- accessible inventory of District- and community-led stewardship programs. This helps identify stewardship gaps and facilitate partnerships among the District and community.
- Encourage community science programs to collect data for documenting biodiversity and condition of the natural environment and ensure timely and open accessibility to collected and vetted data.
- Include metrics to assess the effectiveness of different stewardship approaches with respect to ecological condition and biodiversity on public and private lands, and commit to monitor and report their effectiveness.
- Commit to maintain and publish ecological conditional assessments as a baseline for assessing future stewardship programs.
- Assess the contrasting strengths and weaknesses of District- and community-led stewardship and how to best utilize the strengths of each in developing effective partnerships.

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<sup>1</sup> Gerwing, T.G. et al. 2021. Restoration, reclamation, and rehabilitation: on the need for, and positing a definition of, ecological reclamation. *Restoration Ecology* 30. <https://doi.org/10.1111/rec.13461>

- Assess how best the District can support community-led stewardship efforts.
- Affirm the need to ensure sufficient District staffing to support stewardship and increase restoration efforts on public lands (including public rights of way and boulevards), and to facilitate stewardship on private properties.
- Commit the District to meet or exceed the standards set by potential regulations for private lands.
- Encourage residents to voluntarily steward biodiversity on their properties and on public lands through positive publicity, financial incentives based on meeting appropriate biodiversity targets, and other approaches.
- Enhance and incentivize stewardship by developers and landscapers.

Further details about these recommendations can be found below.

### **Background and Broad Concepts**

The concept of stewardship has a long history and has been characterized in different ways<sup>2</sup>. Defining stewardship in a way appropriate to Resilient Saanich is necessary as it facilitates communication and guides the development of potential stewardship policies.

We suggest that stewardship refers specifically to environmental stewardship, or *the desire and actions taken by the community to protect, maintain, restore, and enhance biodiversity and associated ecosystem functions for current and future generations of human and other life.*

Environmental stewardship both enhances the natural environment and, more broadly, promotes community involvement and participation by residents, i.e., civic engagement<sup>3</sup>.

Environmental stewardship in the community can include many activities and issues, occur at different scales, and be organized and governed in different ways. For example:

Actions can be:

- Direct (e.g., removing trash, removing invasive plants, planting trees, establishing pollinator meadows); or
- Indirect (e.g., environmental education, fundraising, data management) – i.e., actions which do not directly “improve” the natural environment but which facilitate or encourage direct actions.

Actions can include:

- Physical labour, applying specialized skills for planning and organizing actions, and citizen science-related data collection and dissemination.
- Efforts to improve the ecological condition of existing natural sites, naturalize gardens to increase biodiversity and build resilience to climate change, and minimize the impacts of one’s built environment on nearby native species, for example minimizing inappropriate lighting and sound to protect local or migrating insects, bats, and birds.

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<sup>2</sup> Welchman, J. 2012. A defence of environmental stewardship. Environmental values 21. <https://doi.org/10.3197/096327112X13400390125975>

<sup>3</sup> Johnson et al. 2019. Context matters: influence of organizational, environmental, and social factors on civic environmental stewardship group intensity. Ecology and Society 24. <https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-10924-240401>

Actions can vary in complexity and scale from individuals to large, organized groups and programs.

Here, stewardship is considered to apply to the natural environment on private and public land in Saanich. However, practices in Saanich that also benefit the natural environment of other areas should be encouraged and celebrated. Stewardship activities are often place-based (e.g., a park, stream, neighbourhood) rather than issue-based.

Civic environmental stewardship is often considered to be performed by the community, typically as unpaid volunteers, although participation can be encouraged by fiscal or other incentives. We suggest that “stewardship” in the context of BCS, also include actions by paid workers engaged in stewardship activities. For the latter, some may argue that “stewardship” involves actions above and beyond those of normal business operations.

Municipal stewardship activities and programs may be primarily municipal government-led or community-led, with varying degrees of partnership. Government-led programs should include active engagement with, or participation by, the community. Community-led activities often have strong underlying motivations and desire to act, but lack capacity and need logistical or financial support from government.

### **Voluntary versus Regulatory Approaches**

We suggest that, for the purposes of Resilient Saanich and, specifically, the BCS, that “stewardship” refer to actions done as unpaid volunteers incentivized by non-regulatory means, or as paid employees.

Some would argue that “stewardship” encompasses voluntary and regulatory approaches.

Considerations:

- Both approaches seek to protect and benefit the natural environment, but the motivations differ.
- Both approaches require monitoring to assess their effectiveness.
- The distinction between voluntary and regulated actions is consistent with arguments raised by some private property owners against the previous EDPA. The public won't accept being regulated when the District does not hold itself to the same standard.
- Voluntary stewardship applies across public and private lands, but comparable municipal regulations typically apply only to private lands.
- The BCS is intended to consider and prioritize the broad suite of actions which could protect and enhance biodiversity. (Voluntary) stewardship is a subset of the suite of possible policy approaches; mandated policies (regulations) are another subset.
- Voluntary and regulatory approaches can be complementary rather than exclusive.

Most people likely prefer to voluntarily do stewardship-type activities and be encouraged appropriately, rather than being required to take those actions. However, voluntary approaches may be insufficient to protect biodiversity and desirable ecological goods and services on privately-owned lands, especially given the potential financial attraction of other land uses. Regulations may discourage voluntary stewardship by some people; conversely, regulation may encourage additional voluntary stewardship actions above and beyond minimum legal requirements, and greater appreciation and desire to protect

the natural environment. Appropriate encouragement and extensive buy-in by the community is necessary to ensure the effectiveness of regulated stewardship.

The RSTC recognizes that balancing voluntary stewardship and regulation in the context of continued development will be politically challenging, but this does not preclude the need for both approaches. Voluntary stewardship approaches and regulations should complement each other.

### **Existing Stewardship Programs**

There are many stewardship programs already in place in Saanich or that have been developed elsewhere and could be implemented in Saanich. Resilient Saanich Factsheet 7 (FS7) provides ca. 10 examples of stewardship programs in Saanich and examples of programs in other cities which might be applicable to Saanich.

We conducted a scan of District-led and community-led stewardship organizations operating in Saanich to supplement the FS7 list and attempted to categorize them based on whether they were District- or community-led, their focus, and whether they emphasized stewardship on public or private property (see attached draft spreadsheet). While this list is incomplete, we still found **60+** organizations or specific District programs engaged in stewardship.

Initial conclusions:

- 1) Most organizations or programs focus on stewardship of public lands and waters, rather than private.
- 2) Many programs, mainly community-led, focus on aquatic ecosystems and fish habitat and have varying degrees of partnership with the District and other municipalities in the CRD. Some other programs, again community-led, focus on certain taxonomic groups, including native plants, bats, birds and insects and other pollinators.
- 3) Some programs (such as Pulling Together, the native plant salvage program & PLUS [propagation, learning, using, sharing]) are Saanich-driven and funded, and rely heavily on unpaid community volunteers. Naturescape, while province-wide, is promoted in Saanich by the District and focuses on private property.
- 4) Some programs are largely independent of Saanich and led by community groups or NGOs, such as the Green Shores programs and Habitat Acquisition Trust's Good Neighbours programs. A hybrid governance model is that of Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary which is on District land and receives partial (ca. 50%) funding for operations from the District; however, stewardship is administered by a non-profit society which receives its remaining funding from external sources. Similarly, Haliburton Farm and the Horticultural Centre of the Pacific are administered by non-profit societies on land owned by the District, although their stewardship efforts differ from those of Swan Lake Christmas Hill.

Regardless of whether a stewardship program is District- or community- led, there is likely to be some partnership between the District and community.

Clearly, there are many stewardship programs operating in Saanich, either District- or community-led, focusing on a variety of stewardship issues, land ownership, and scale. It is not clear how many members of the community in total are actively involved, but the number and variety of active

organizations and programs and focus suggests a strong existing interest in stewardship in the community. That interest should be supported.

The RSTC strongly supports a variety of stewardship programs in Saanich. However, it is unclear how effectively existing stewardship programs, whether District- or community-led, protect and enhance biodiversity and ecosystems in Saanich. This uncertainty, and the need to measure and monitor effectiveness, should be addressed in the BCS as part of recommendations for enhanced stewardship.

### **Gaps and Weaknesses in Existing District-led Stewardship Programs**

The RSTC has not been able to assess the funding or functioning of District-led stewardship programs. Our comments reflect an outside view, similar to what the broader community might have.

It is unclear how biodiversity and associated stewardship are considered in stormwater and some other environmental management plans currently under development by the District. Application of the in-progress Environmental Policy Framework should help resolve this issue.

There is a backlog in producing park management plans. This delays ecosystem restoration, rehabilitation, and reclamation projects in parks.

The District lacks biodiversity and ecological data needed to set stewardship targets and evaluate progress (see Objectives, Targets, and Metrics section below). This is needed to prioritize stewardship actions.

A significant amount of potential habitat for native plants and some animals, including pollinators, occurs on private properties and adjoining public rights of way or boulevards. There seems to be little active support from the District in supporting voluntary stewardship on private properties. Support is mainly through Naturescape. The program has existed since the mid-1990s and is referred to in various Saanich policy documents, but participation rates are unknown. A presentation to RSTC by staff in January 2022 indicated that the program (at that time) provided “Naturescape in Progress” lawn signs for loan and provided recommendations to developers and property visits and advice (under the Noxious Weeds Bylaw). However, the program was also said to be severely budget-limited. Its current effectiveness is unknown.

Saanich arborists may provide on-site advice regarding private trees in the context of requests for maintenance or removal, but do not provide similar advice on biodiversity stewardship.

Saanich Engineering administers regulations pertaining to native vegetation establishment and maintenance on public boulevards and rights-of-way in residential areas. Such sites can be suitable for enhancing native biodiversity and be suitable local stewardship sites for neighbors, and neighborhood and community associations. However, the process for establishing native vegetation along such rights of way has been said to be onerous.

The District may lack staff capacity to carry out various stewardship and other biodiversity-related actions such as:

- Increasing the number of Pulling Together projects in Saanich Parks. Staff have suggested in presentations to the RSTC that projects are more limited by the ability of staff to coordinate volunteers and plan projects than by the number of willing volunteers.
- Ensuring natural state covenants are maintained effectively.
- Enforcing existing bylaws such as the bylaw prohibiting the feeding of native wildlife.
- Providing on-site advice to residents on stewardship opportunities, as they do for tree permits.
- Evaluate stewardship success over time and space.

### **Existing Communications and Outreach**

The District does stewardship outreach through programs such as Natural Intelligence and the quarterly publication Our Backyard, and solicits volunteers through various social media. The Natural Intelligence program has been well-publicized through local media and Saanich social media platforms. It is unclear how the effectiveness of these outreach programs has been assessed. Some existing programs, such as the native plant salvage program & PLUS, Naturescape, Green Shores (or similar), and the Significant Tree Program, appear to have little promotion and uptake.

### **Existing Funding and Fiscal Incentives**

The District provides financial and/or in-kind support on stewardship activities with non-profit partners through financial and in-kind contributions, and it provides financial assistance for specific projects via community grants.

In addition, property owners who agree to have a notable tree on their property designated as a “Significant Tree” are eligible for grant support to do needed proactive maintenance. The District’s incentive for private property owners to accept additional protection for notable trees is unique among notable tree programs in North America. To our knowledge, there are not other financial incentives for private property stewardship.

### **Existing Recognition**

The District has recognized outstanding environmental stewardship contributions from individuals, group and business through the annual Environmental Awards, typically one in each category per year. We are unaware of other formal recognition programs.

### **Issues and Approaches to Consider Going Forward**

Effective civic environmental stewardship requires attention to areas of ecological concern and, as a largely voluntary endeavor, careful thought and effort to ensure the community buys into stewardship and is actively involved. The community must feel some “ownership” of stewardship programs and be able to participate in activities they see as both enjoyable and meaningful.

Saanich has strengths to build on in enhancing environmental stewardship, including a range of ecosystems that would benefit from enhanced stewardship, and with existing community awareness and involvement with natural environment issues. Setting appropriate ecological priorities while understanding and acknowledging what motivates the community will help determine the success of “enhanced stewardship”.

Enhanced stewardship efforts should be well-planned, adequately funded, inclusive, broad-reaching, impactful, and complement, not conflict, with environmental regulations. Some specific suggestions for the municipality to include in the Stewardship Plan are to (in no particular order):

- Clearly articulate objectives.
- Build on existing stewardship and citizen science programs.
- Seek out and utilize the knowledge of local experts.
- Quantitatively (metrics and targets) evaluate stewardship success over time and space.
- Adequately resource staff to facilitate stewardship on both public and private lands.
- Support community-led initiatives (e.g., with financial or in-kind support and incentives).
- Recognize that people have different motivations to be environmental stewards.
- Provide opportunities to participate for people who do not own property in Saanich.
- Encourage participation through education and outreach.
- Develop and maintain partnerships with diverse groups, such as: environmental groups, community associations, academic institutions, other levels of government (e.g., VIHA), property developers, and landscaping professionals
- Tailor stewardship approaches (what, who and how) to land type and ownership. For example, public vs. privately-owned land inside and outside of the urban containment boundary (UCB), District- owned parkland and other protected natural areas, District- owned boulevards and rights of way in residential areas, and privately-owned gardens.
- Increase stewardship efforts on District-owned lands: these are a significant part of Saanich and encompass likely biodiversity “hot-spots”. This also sets a positive example for the community.
- Target areas at risk of imminent loss, biodiversity hotspots and public and private land hosting ecosystems and species at risk.
- Consider biodiversity beyond vascular plants, including soil and aquatic life.
- Prioritize native species and natural ecosystem functions, but recognize that non-native species have valuable ecological roles in the urban landscape.
- Consider spatial scales from local (e.g., Bowker Creek) to district-and region-wide efforts (e.g., hub/corridor protection and enhancement).

Some programs are logically directed and managed by the District. Others may be best initiated and led by the community, with appropriate encouragement and support from the District. Community-led and District-led programs each have their own strengths and weaknesses. The District and community must determine what type of partnership is most appropriate for given situations. The District should be open to a variety of governance models.

### **Objectives, Targets, and Metrics**

Stewardship should be encouraged District-wide. However, the District may want to target and promote stewardship in specific areas, based on factors such as the desire to enhance the hub/corridor network, create buffers around protected and riparian areas, and protect ecosystem integrity in Rural Saanich. Targeted areas for enhanced stewardship should be identified and rationalized in the BCS.

Stewardship objectives should relate to the underlying objective of stewardship as defined earlier. They will vary based on the scale and spatial coverage of any given stewardship program.

Any enhanced stewardship programs that the District promotes should have clear rationale and objectives. This is necessary to build and maintain community support and to ensure progress can be measured.

Examples of enhanced stewardship objectives include:

- 1) Restoration, reclamation, and rehabilitation of sensitive ecosystems to the maximum extent possible, including urban watersheds and the marine foreshore
- 2) Increased planting of native plant species, or non-native species suitable to maintain ecosystem function in a changing environment.
- 3) Maintenance and enhancement of tree canopy and biodiversity hubs/corridors.
- 4) Establishment of backyard biodiversity enhancement as a public priority. Use of nature-based solutions, e.g., for stormwater management and infiltration, heat island reduction

This list is not exhaustive but covers many broad biodiversity conservation concerns identified by the RSTC to-date.

All stewardship programs should have clearly defined targets, but developing targets is a challenge.

For example, sensitive ecosystem rehabilitation or restoration targets would likely be different for public versus private lands. In parks, the target may be to restore sensitive ecosystems to a natural state or restore ecosystem function with habitat and non-native species that provide equivalent ecosystem services. However, restoration of all private lands within the Urban Containment Boundary to a natural state is not feasible, and “naturalizing” should be the target. Residents should be encouraged and incentivized to restore sensitive ecosystems on their properties where possible, increase the amount of appropriate native vegetation in gardens, reduce the area of impermeable surfaces and improve soil health, and minimize the impacts of their built environment on habitat for desirable native fauna. Targets could be in support of expanded hub/corridors.

Examples of targets include:

- 1) Increasing tree canopy by 5% per year
- 2) Daylighting 100m of creek per year
- 3) Eliminating 75% of invasive species from parks and 100% of priority invasive species from parks and non-park public lands
- 4) Soil retention on property, neighbourhood, and district scales
- 5) 70% of native species in your backyard
- 6) 50% of residential properties with 25% native species by 2030

Enhanced stewardship programs should also include quantitative metrics, and like objectives and targets, metrics will vary by program. Without metrics, the ability to assess success of efforts over time and space will not be possible. Suggested stewardship metrics include, but should not be limited to:

- 1) Tree canopy and/or native species coverage area
- 2) Change in seral stage (e.g., to assess success of reducing lawn and enhancing (ideally) native shrub coverage under urban tree canopy)
- 3) Number of rare and endangered species present



- 4) Permeable area
- 5) Effectiveness of stewardship programs (e.g., hectares of natural ecosystem restored/rehabilitated through the Pulling Together program)

Overall, most targets and metrics would be used by staff to evaluate stewardship success over time and space. However, others could be used to encourage the public to steward their properties and give them goals to achieve and feel success in their efforts.

### **Generating Community Participation**

Addressing the gaps and issues listed above will help foster stewardship. However, there are additional barriers to stewardship participation.

The District was criticized when implementing the EDPA.<sup>4</sup> Some residents felt it unfair that biodiversity and ecosystem standards required of some private properties were not also required on adjacent Saanich Parks or non-park public lands. Others felt that sensitive ecosystem designations were improperly assigned to their properties.

To set a positive stewardship example for private landowners, the District must show it is committed to enhancing biodiversity and ecosystem condition in all public lands. This will likely require additional District staffing and continue to rely heavily on the work of volunteer stewards.

Many Saanich residents do not own land and private yards to steward. Therefore, opportunities to participate beyond backyard biodiversity should be promoted to non-landowners. Programs such as Pulling Together can be particularly effective in this regard.

Relying solely on “sensitive ecosystem” definitions and terminologies should also be avoided when identifying areas for prioritized stewardship and/or regulation, as few sensitive ecosystems remain intact in urban Saanich. Complementary approaches, particularly in fragmented and disturbed areas, include targeted enhancements of plant biodiversity appropriate to site conditions and efforts to enhance soil health. Any approaches must have broad community support to succeed.

Community-driven grass-roots stewardship initiatives, if appropriately sized and focused, may be able to act sooner and get more community support and participation than District- led initiatives; the latter are subject to municipal strategic planning processes and competition with other municipal priorities. Examples of focused community- driven initiatives include neighborhood cleanups, citizen science initiatives such as those associated with salmonid fish habitat, hyper-local terrestrial restoration efforts such as along public rights-of-way and boulevards (which are all potential habitat and biological corridors), and local workshops to promote native biodiversity on private property, build healthy resilient soil, and mature tree maintenance on private property. Local neighborhood community associations are in a unique position to support such stewardship initiatives; many already do. The District should enact policies which support such community- led initiatives.

Private property stewardship to enhance native biodiversity, maintain and retain mature trees, and otherwise encourage ecological goods and services (e.g., soil health and function, reducing stormwater

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<sup>4</sup> Diamond Head Consulting. 2017. District of Saanich Environmental Development Permit Area Independent Review. 77 pp.

runoff) can be encouraged by various means discussed elsewhere in this brief. To reiterate, these could include:

- 1) Educational resources and on-site visits.
- 2) Financial or other incentives; and
- 3) Positive publicity and recognition, including signage.

Appropriate goals and targets are needed and the effectiveness of programs needs to be monitored. Stewardship of boulevards and public rights of way<sup>5</sup>, also known as “hellstrips”<sup>6</sup>, complements private property stewardship efforts. The District should encourage, not discourage, planting and maintenance of native vegetation that supports pollinators and other ecological goods and services. While the District needs to set standards for boulevard native plant establishment and maintenance, local neighborhood and community associations are well-suited to lead and encourage local stewardship initiatives on both private properties and adjacent public boulevards.

### **Funding**

The RSTC does not know how well the District funds stewardship activities in Saanich. However, chronic underfunding of parks, urban forest and natural areas stewardship has long been a problem in North American cities. To partly address this problem, many cities work with non-profit organizations which can access external funding sources to help pay for stewardship initiatives. Saanich already does this, for example, with the Swan Lake Christmas Hill Nature Sanctuary Society and Peninsula Streams. It is worth examining whether this model can be expanded to improve community participation and stewardship outcomes on other public lands while lowering direct costs to taxpayers.

The RSTC feels that additional District staffing is needed to steward park land, including increasing the number of projects, volunteer participation, and ecological monitoring through the Pulling Together program. Additional resources are also likely needed to facilitate community stewardship of private properties and neighborhood rights-of-way and boulevards, and to develop and maintain an accessible database and GIS layers of community-based initiatives and citizen science-collected biodiversity data.

The District already has a community grants program which appears applicable to local stewardship projects<sup>7</sup>. The District should examine how this program can be optimized to encourage community-driven stewardship.

Another possible funding approach is a Local Conservation Fund. Such funds, often based on parcel taxes, have provided funding support to biodiversity conservation groups elsewhere in BC<sup>8</sup>. Associated changes to property taxes are complicated to implement and would likely require bylaw consultation, development and revision.

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<sup>5</sup> e.g., [https://www.toronto.ca/ext/digital\\_comm/pdfs/transportation-services/green-streets-technical-guidelines-document-v2-17-11-08.pdf](https://www.toronto.ca/ext/digital_comm/pdfs/transportation-services/green-streets-technical-guidelines-document-v2-17-11-08.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://extension.psu.edu/hellstrip-planting>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.saanich.ca/EN/main/community/community-grants.html>

<sup>8</sup> See <https://www.cdfcp.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Conservation-Fund-Guide-2nd-Edition-2017.pdf>

The District should consider providing subsidies or incentives to participate in private property stewardship. An existing example is the tree maintenance subsidy for Significant Trees on private property. Other possible examples include:

- Subsidized native plant supplies<sup>9</sup>
- Incentives to protect and maintain environmental features other than Significant Trees
- Reductions in property taxes based on percentage of native species or tree canopy
- Grants to encourage planting pollinator-friendly gardens with emphasizing native plants (such as the State of Minnesota “Lawns to Legumes” program<sup>10</sup>)
- Incentives to minimize impermeable surfaces, such as in Victoria (Rainwater Rewards<sup>11</sup>) and Portland Oregon (Clean River Rewards<sup>12</sup>).

### **Recognition**

The District annually recognizes an individual, business and organizations for exemplary environmental stewardship. The Naturescape program is featured on the Saanich website, but is not actively promoted. The Green Shores program<sup>13</sup> is a province-wide program targeting shoreline habitats. The Habitat Acquisition Trust Good Neighbors program<sup>14</sup> and Meadow Makers are more local programs that provide stewardship recognition, the latter associated with a certification program<sup>15</sup>. Other programs which might be adaptable to Saanich include Backyard Habitats<sup>16</sup> and Edmonton Master Naturalists<sup>17</sup>. The former is led by community organizations, with support from local governments; the latter is led by the City.

The District needs to evaluate different programs and decide what and how is most suitable for recognizing private property stewardship efforts and successes. Secondly, the District and community need to decide how best to celebrate those who meet the standards so as to inspire the broader community.

### **Native vs Non-native Species**

Ecological restoration with native species is desirable but not always feasible. In addition, climate change will complicate approaches to restore native vegetation and ecosystem services. As noted above, landscape architects, trained landscapers and their suppliers could become valuable promoters of native species and advise on the selection and appropriate use of non-native species, and on practices that minimize the spread of invasive species.

Restoration and rehabilitation of native species on private property should be acknowledged and celebrated, while the appropriate use of non-native species should not be discouraged. Development of a guide to available native species and “beneficial” non-native species would be helpful.

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<sup>9</sup> e.g., LEAF in Ontario - <https://www.yourleaf.org/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://bwsr.state.mn.us/l2/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.victoria.ca/EN/main/residents/water-sewer-stormwater/stormwater.html>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.portland.gov/bes/grants-incentives/clean-river-rewards-0>

<sup>13</sup> <https://stewardshipcentrebc.ca/green-shores-home/gs-about/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://hat.bc.ca/goodneighbours>

<sup>15</sup> <https://satinflower.ca/pages/meadowmakers-2023>

<sup>16</sup> Portland Oregon area - <https://backyardhabitats.org/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://natureedmonton.wordpress.com/welcome/about-edmonton-master-naturalists/>

## **Stewardship During Development and Landscaping**

Stewardship and biodiversity protection opportunities are often ignored when private property is developed or landscaped. Many developers, landscapers, and landowners do not understand the value of ecosystem and biodiversity protection or that development does not have to have adverse impacts on biodiversity.

Saanich could develop a workshop or video for development applicants to watch prior to submitting an application. This would explain Saanich's rationale and objectives for biodiversity enhancement and protection, and the value of doing so, and provide examples of successful projects that have enhanced native biodiversity.

Developers could be incentivized to protect and enhance biodiversity in projects. Two possibilities are:

- 1) Initiate a Developer Environmental Steward certification program. Saanich could encourage property owners to work with certified developers. Such a program would likely need to be administered by an independent organization, with certification processes and standards developed by an external body. Certification criteria could include previous success at implementing projects that achieve stewardship objectives, with the more successful projects a developer has, the higher their certification is (e.g., gold, silver, bronze developers). This could be become one of Saanich's annual environmental awards.
- 2) A Built Green-like certification program consisting of biodiversity and ecosystem service attributes could be developed and applied at a property level. The Township of Esquimalt's Green Building Checklist, the City of Surrey's Sustainable Development Checklist, and the City of Toronto's Green Standard checklists have criteria that Saanich could adapt. Ideally, staff with environmental expertise would review proposed designs to ensure they are feasible and installed. Unfortunately, biodiversity-enhancing landscape design is often a low priority as building designs.

To ensure success of programs like these, it is also likely enhanced staff (or partner) capacity would need to be found to confirm installation and ongoing maintenance of proposed projects, and monitor their success over time and space.

Many landscapers and Master Gardener associations would benefit from enhanced education on the benefits of the use of native plant species, and better selection of ecologically- appropriate non-native species, when unavoidable. Victoria's Master Gardener Association already supports sustainable horticultural practices. Such education could tie into the above-mentioned certification programs.

## **Staffing and Coordination**

Proactive coordination and promotion will be required to achieve enhanced stewardship in Saanich. Additional staff will likely be required to facilitate "enhanced" stewardship in the community. Currently District staff already coordinate stewardship, but focus on parks. Existing efforts may have enough volunteers, but because existing staff are already at capacity, they do not have the ability to take on more projects and volunteers.

Saanich parks staff and their Pulling Together volunteers cannot keep up with the removal of invasive species in parks, let alone fulsomely enhance and restore biodiversity across parks and non-park public

lands. Additional staffing to coordinate stewardship of park land should be seriously considered. Saanich does not have a stewardship coordinator for private land, although some staff review development proposals, in part from a stewardship perspective. Staffing to facilitate, promote, and evaluate stewardship programs focused on private property is needed for such programs to reach their potential even if community groups or neighboring homeowners provide the initiative and labor. The RSTC has previously suggested that Saanich hire such a coordinator.

Accurate and regularly updated ecosystem and biodiversity mapping are critical to develop and track metrics for stewardship and, more broadly, biodiversity. The District needs to have sufficient GIS and biodiversity inventory staffing to regularly update mapping and track metrics. It might be appropriate for the same staff to also manage an accessible database of stewardship programs (District and community-led) and biodiversity data from community science projects.

It is essential to manage, coordinate and do stewardship in a cost-effective way. Stewardship programs may need to increasingly rely on community partners to lead and manage some programs, and raise external funding. The District should assess whether some programs are best led by community partners. Regardless, the District should enthusiastically facilitate community-led initiatives.

Overall, Saanich needs to ensure there is sufficient staff capacity to improve biodiversity in parks and non-park public land, proactively develop, encourage, and incentivize stewardship programs on both public and private lands, support external stewardship organizations and initiatives, and update associated mapping and success metrics. Ultimately, the upcoming BCS should be used to determine the need for new staff and/or funding, or whether leveraging external organizations could suffice.