
Pleasant Valley Park Urban Restoration Demonstration Project A Watershed Stewards' Tale

Pleasant Valley Park is a charming community park in the Salmon Creek area near WSU Vancouver. Nestled behind the local school, the 29-acre park includes walking trails and soccer fields that are packed with children many weekends. The 5-acre natural area along Salmon Creek at the far end of the park is neglected and mostly overgrown with blackberries. Many residents in the neighborhood consider it an eyesore.

Stewards Randall Pearl and Marykay Moskal saw something completely different. Here in the midst of placid suburban sprawl, they found a habitat oasis consisting of a small spring-fed stream flowing through the park. The stream is frequented by Kingfishers, salamanders, and frogs despite the covering of blackberries. Working through the Watershed Stewards program, Randall contacted



Randall places flags to locate new plants.

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife biologist Donna Hale, who immediately recognized the value of this tiny stream. One of the major concerns for Salmon Creek in the Limiting Factors Analysis (Wade, 2001) is a lack of off-channel rearing habitat for juvenile salmonids. This small, spring-fed, year-round tributary represented a perfect opportunity to improve that habitat. The temperature of spring water stays relatively constant during the year. This gives young fish a refuge from the nearly lethal high temperatures in the summer and a calm place to thrive during winter and spring high water.

Randall and Marykay swung into action. They contacted the Vancouver/Clark Parks and Recreation department, met with staff, developed a restoration plan, and secured permission for Watershed Stewards and other volunteers to implement that plan. It all started in April of 2003 when Randall and Marykay organized a planting along the lower section of the creek for Earth Day. About 25 volunteers from the Watershed Stewards and the Starbucks Green Team showed up and planted many trees and shrubs provided by the Stewards program. The group also removed many Himalayan Blackberry plants in the lower section of the creek.

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Part of the large area cleared of blackberries by Larch Mountain inmates.

Unfortunately, there were still nearly two acres of full-grown Himalayan Blackberries (*Rubus discolor*) growing along the stream and a steep slope upstream. Removing these plants using

volunteers was difficult and potentially dangerous due to the steep slope. Vancouver/Clark Parks and Recreation and Clark County Weed Management teamed up to save the day. Weed Management treated much of the area using methods approved by the Department of Ecology. Parks hired a crew from Larch Mountain Correctional Facility who spent several days removing and hauling away the blackberry canes (and probably several more healing their cuts and scrapes!). Finally, we could actually see the land once hidden under six foot tall blackberries and begin to plan our restoration.

The only problem was we still had no money to pay for all the work that needed to be done. The answer lay in developing more partnerships with the community. Randall contacted Jeff Wittler, Environmental Services Manager for the Clark Public Utilities Stream Team. The Stream Team

Why Protect Plants?

When the Watershed Stewards restore a habitat area like Pleasant Valley Park, we always protect the new plants using plastic or wire around the stem. This prevents beaver, mice, and voles from chewing the stems and killing the plants. While it might seem natural to let plants survive on their own, this isn't practical in an urban setting. Too many non-native plants like Himalayan Blackberry, Reed Canary Grass, and English Ivy have been introduced and are often spread by birds and squirrels. Protecting new plants gives them a better chance to flourish in their new environment and grow up quickly to provide habitat and water quality benefits.

normally works with private landowners to enhance their property and improve water quality in the Salmon Creek watershed, but Jeff proved willing to donate literally hundreds of plants for the public park. Randall also contacted Watershed Steward Tammy Mackey, president of the Clark County chapter of Trout Unlimited. She applied for the NOAA Fisheries Embrace a Stream grant and was awarded \$10,000.

Fall is the best time to plant a natural area in the Pacific Northwest as it gives the plants the benefit of a long wet winter to establish roots before spring growth begins. Randall and Marykay decided the ideal day would be national Make a Difference Day, October 25, 2003. Again, the Starbucks Green Team agreed to provide snacks and volunteers. Local conservation organization Habitat Partners provided lunch and several volunteers and the Pleasant Highlands

Neighborhood Association promoted the project in their newsletter. This time, nearly 50 people showed up and went right to work. Randall, Marykay, and retired forester and Watershed Steward Paul Lauch supervised the planting and protection of approximately 800 trees and shrubs. The project was off to a roaring start and we had only spent a small portion of the grant to purchase plant protectors.

Most people would have quietly stepped away from the project, but Randall knew from his Watershed Stewards training that if we didn't maintain the area all our hard work would be spoiled as invasive Himalayan Blackberries and Reed Canary Grass moved in and crowded out the tender new plants. Randall used our grant to purchase wheelbarrows, weed whackers, and other tools necessary to maintain the area properly. He also flagged all the plants to identify which plants not to cut during volunteer maintenance parties. Because he and Marykay live in the neighborhood, they made sure to communicate with neighbors to explain the project and invite volunteer participation.

While the Watershed Stewards use exclusively Pacific Northwest native plants when restoring a natural area, even these vigorous plants can have a hard time surviving the first couple summers.

After the blackberries were removed, Randall discovered the outlet of an old well from years ago when the land was in private ownership. He worked with staff from Vancouver/Clark Parks and Recreation to install a temporary irrigation system paid for using grant funds. Randall committed to water the plants for the next several summers using this system so they can get a solid start and out-compete invasive plants. Several volunteer work parties are scheduled to remove weeds and mulch plants. Licensed staff from the parks department periodically check the area and spot treat any Himalayan Blackberry or other weeds.

It only seemed logical to expand the planting area for Make a Difference Day in 2005. After all, the small stream in the park is over 1000 feet long and the park also borders main stem Salmon Creek. Randall developed a planting plan, picked up plants from the Stewards office, and contacted the Starbucks Green Team. Zoia Raimer, our contact at Starbucks, was so excited about coming out to the site again that she immediately went to work recruiting volunteers. Thanks to her contacts with Washington Reading Corps and the Northwest Service Academy, we knew a few weeks out that at least 80 people would be there! Fortunately, we had another site nearby at Whipple Creek Park and half the crew shuttled there using one of the buses provided by Washington Reading Corps. Eighty five people worked at the two sites on October 23, putting in and protecting 400 plants at Pleasant Valley Park and 450 more at Whipple Creek Park.



Part of the crowd that came to plant on Make a Difference Day in 2004.

The Watershed Stewards will probably be working at Pleasant Valley Park for some years to come. There is still a large section of Salmon Creek that would benefit from native vegetation, an informal swimming area that needs work, and the possibility of adding waterfowl habitat in the pond. Thanks to all of our partners, the project is growing and will provide water quality and habitat benefits for many years to come. If you would like to see the project, drop by the park behind Pleasant Valley Middle School at 14320 NE 50th Ave.

For more information or to get involved in Watershed Stewards projects contact::

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