



GO Restore!

Newsletter of the Garry Oak Restoration Project in Saanich

Fall 2006 / Winter 2007

ISSUE 7



Fall Acorns
Photo: M. Fuchs

“ The creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn. ”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

IN THIS ISSUE

Page 2

Introducing:
Kelly Mulhern

Mahone Park

Page 3

Profile:
Garry Oak
Restoration
Project

Page 4
Upcoming events

Fire: Friend or Foe to Garry oak ecosystems?

Smokey the Bear did a great job educating people about the negative impacts of fire. At the end of this region's annual drought, concerns about wildfires are understandable: the grasses are tinder-dry, the licorice fern appears dead and even the landscape itself looks scorched. However, Smokey may not have had all the facts.

The ecological role of fire in natural areas, particularly Garry oak ecosystems, has been largely understated.

Frequent, low-intensity fires increase biodiversity as patches of plant populations at different stages of ecological succession result. This is referred to as a “mosaic landscape”. Without disturbance, shrubs such as snowberry or roses, and eventually thick stands of Douglas-fir forests dominate, at the expense of the sun-loving Garry oak ecosystems and their associated plants and animals.

Fire also plays other important ecological roles. It releases nutrients contained in plant materials that would otherwise be unavailable to surrounding vegetation. Insects and fungal pest populations can be reduced by fire and some plants may actually be stimulated by a fire. For example, Arbutus and Garry oak trees have dormant (epicormic) buds along the base of their trunks that sprout after fire. Most importantly, small, more frequent fires reduce fuel-loads and prevent larger, more destructive ones from developing. Larger fires not only devastate shrubs and trees above the ground, but also the organisms in the soil which take much longer to recover.

In the past, First Nation's people in this region used fire as a management tool. Indigenous peoples burned areas every year or so to keep ecological succession at bay and maintain the open nature of Garry oak ecosystems. This favoured some foods such as berries and deer, and in particular, the sweet, tasty bulbs of the sun-loving camas lily. The absence of fire is a major threat to the composition of Garry oak ecosystems and their

associated species at risk.

If a fire was to ignite on a GORP site, human safety and potential loss of property demands that the fire be put out. After over 150 years of fire suppression, it is also likely that the accumulation of fuel

would cause a fire so hot and intense that it may cause more harm than good if it was allowed to burn unchecked.

So are all the ecological benefits of fire completely lost? Not necessarily; seasonal mowing helps to reduce competition from shrubs and grasses. The GORP volunteers play their part too by manually removing invasive plants and by mulching, which helps to reduce competition and restores nutrient cycling on the GORP sites. Last but not least, small fires still do occur, such as the one on the Mount Tolmie site in 2005. The GORP can seize this opportunity to monitor plant response in light of a variety of introduced plants that are now a major factor in Garry oak ecosystems. It's that time of year to send Smokey (and the GORP) back to fire-ecology school!



Fire at Mt. Tolmie ~ August 2005



Introducing: Kelly Mulhern GORP Steering Committee Member Horticultural Foreman, Parks District of Saanich

Kelly's roots sprouted at BCIT where she earned a diploma in horticulture and apprenticed with the Vancouver School Board. She began with Saanich Parks as a gardener in 1984 and now supervises the Horticultural and Natural Areas staff and all of their associated activities. This includes the floral displays in 580 traffic islands, 3 libraries, 4 recreation centers, and the Municipal Hall.

Most importantly, Kelly prepares all the equipment and sends her notoriously eager, friendly and helpful staff to the GORP work parties. Long before the endeavors of the GORP, Kelly and her staff worked hard to keep the invasives in Saanich Parks in check. She has been instrumental in educating Saanich staff and residents about the threats posed by noxious weeds and in the summer of 2005, earned her unofficial title; the "giant hogweed queen"!

In her spare time, Kelly is a busy soccer/ badminton/sailing mom. She enjoys spending time in her own garden with her pet Patrick, the big-horned goat. It's obvious that Kelly loves growing things and watching things grow including her family, the people she supervises, and of course, her beloved plants.

Articles and Ideas

Do you have information about Garry oak ecosystems to share with other Garry oak ecosystem enthusiasts? Do you have suggestions as to what information you'd like to see in Go Restore!? Please send your comments and ideas to:

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Introducing

The Mahone Brook GORP site is part of the larger municipal Colquitz River Linear trail system at Brydon Park. This area was homesteaded in 1853. By 1908, rural density increased and this farmland was subdivided, a development pattern that continued through to the 1950's. Suburban development began in the 1980's.

This GORP site came into being because of the dense groves of Garry oak trees planted as part of Tree Appreciation Day activities starting in 1999. With only one established Garry oak tree on site, this old farmland has a long way to go to becoming a Garry oak ecosystem. Himalayan blackberry and English hawthorn trees, orchard and reed canary grasses dominate the site. For the last 4 years, the GORP volunteers have been working hard to eliminate these invasive species, particularly the grasses by sheet mulching.

As part of the Centennial celebrations, the Mahone Brook site got a new trail, which is already well-travelled. What an opportunity to educate all the passers-by about the values and threats to endangered Garry oak ecosystems!



Mulch keeping grasses in check around planted Garry oaks at Mahone Brook GORP site



Profile

Introducing Garry Oak Meadow Restoration Project :

One of the GORP's goals is to support and partner with like minded groups. Go Restore! would like to introduce yet another initiative for Garry oak ecosystems restoration.



Volunteers have participated in the UVic Garry Oak Meadow Restoration Project in many ways including vegetation monitoring and planting. (Photo by Magnus Bein.)

RESTORING OLD FIELDS TO GARRY OAK MEADOWS ~ HOW TO DO IT

Don Eastman

Garry oak ecosystems are nationally endangered, and many people are working hard to save what we have left of them. However, many other areas that once supported Garry oak ecosystems are now old fields dominated by introduced species, especially grasses! Can we restore these fields, and if so, how should we do it?

To try and answer these questions, a project was started in 2004 at the University of Victoria. Called the Garry Oak Meadow Restoration Project, the study is testing nine different ways of preparing a site, including mulching, tilling, solarization and scalping, to determine which techniques best favor native species. A total of 17 different native species were planted in the fall of 2004, either as seedlings or as seeds, to see how well they fared in each of the site treatments.



Continue to volunteer with the Garry Oak Restoration Project!



Keep on mulching at Mahone and continue to salvage and replant on other GORP sites, such as Wetherby. We can all participate in restoring one of Canada's most endangered ecosystems.



For more information contact:
Jenny at 744-1710
or ferns1@telus.net

Please check our website for the fall 2006 program schedule:
www.gorpsaanich.ca



The results are beginning to come in, and a few lessons already are apparent. For example, the planted bulbs like camas and shooting star seem to persist in all types of treatments. Also, mulching seems to be the most effective way of reducing the dominance of introduced grasses. However, we need to wait a few more years to see if this continues. Our findings, with those gathered by others doing similar types of experiments should provide a firm basis for anyone interested in restoring old fields to Garry oak ecosystems.

The success of this project has depended on the cooperative efforts of UVic students, community volunteers, and university staff. Everyone has worked together from the planning to the implementation stages. Over one hundred people now have a personal stake in the project! We are always looking for volunteers to help out, so send an email to Magnus Bein, ambein@uvic.ca or Don Eastman, deastman@uvic.ca. We will be glad to get you involved!





UPCOMING COMMUNITY EVENTS



Saturday, October 21st
Feltham Park
9:30-11:30 AM
* Remove ivy and Daphne

Saturday, November 18th
Mahone Brook
9:30-11:30 AM
*Sheet mulch

Saturday, September 23rd
Mount Douglas Summit
9:30-11:30 AM
* Remove broom

Sunday, October 22nd
Camas Park
9:30-11:30 AM
* Remove blackberry and fall cyclamen

Sunday, November 19th
Feltham Park
9:30-11:30 AM
*Remove ivy, blackberries and Daphne

Saturday, September 30th
Playfair Park
9:30-11:30 AM
*Remove invasives

Saturday, October 28th
Little Mount Douglas
9:30-11:30 AM
* Remove broom

Saturday, November 25th
Camas Park
9:30-11:30 AM
*Remove invasives, mulch

Saturday, October 14th
Mount Tolmie Park
9:30-11:30 AM
*Remove invasives and garden escapees

Saturday, November 4th
Chatterton Hill Park
9:30-11:30 AM
* Remove invasives, mulch

Saturday, December 2nd
Wetherby Park
9:30-11:30 AM
* Remove invasives, mulch



Saanich's 12th Annual Tree Appreciation Day Sunday November 5, 2006 (9:00 AM -12:00 PM)

One hundred Garry oak trees will be planted at Cedar Hill Golf Course to celebrate Saanich's 12th Annual Tree Appreciation Day. Bring your shovels, gloves and dress for the weather. Refreshments will be provided to volunteers that help to leave this legacy for Saanich's next 100 years. Meet at the Cedar Hill Golf Course Clubhouse at 1400 Derby Road.

For more information contact Cathy Weston at:
westonc@saanich.ca or 475-1775, extension 3506



Restoration of Natural Systems 10 Year anniversary Celebration, Free public lecture series:

Friday September 29th, 7-9 pm

Facing the challenge of the alarming loss of nature on Southern Vancouver Island
(ASER900 2006F1 C01)

Vicky Husband (Sierra Club of Canada)

Bill Turner (Executive Director the Land Conservancy)

Monday, October 16th, 7-9 pm

Rare and endangered species in and around cities on Vancouver Island: Challenges and Opportunities
(ASER900 2006F C01)

Trudy Chatwin (Ministry of the Environment)

Must Pre-register at (250) 472-4747