

COLUMBIA LAND TRUST


Fieldbook

SPRING 2021

VOL 28

ISSUE 01

Conserving and caring for the vital lands, waters, and wildlife of the Columbia River region through sound science and strong relationships.



Sunshine
and Skunk
Cabbages

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“...more than 7,000 of you have changed the management of your backyards to support insects and birds. Imagine that wave of stewardship and care sweeping the country, and the world!”

A Hopeful Urgency

Mom and Dad are now 87 and 86 years old. As it has been for many of us, this has been a harrowing time for them, including trips to the emergency room with COVID-19 symptoms. So far, they have both avoided the virus. Still, I have frequently fielded calls from them about difficult health issues throughout this crisis.

One night mom called me at 10pm—quite late for her—and said, “Glenn! I have something very urgent that we need to talk about!” You can imagine the thoughts and fears that flooded my mind in the moment before she said, “I’ve just been reading a book and we must do something for nature!” She went on to tell me that her book challenged everyone to save important habitat near where they lived—to plant and keep growing trees—for people, for nature, and for the planet. She talked about the extinctions occurring today: 10% of all insects are threatened, one in four plant species are at risk, and 2.9 billion birds have been lost in North America alone in the last 50 years.

In Mom’s voice I heard just as much urgency as with the pandemic crisis. It sounded as though my mother thought that we needed to go out tomorrow and plant hundreds of trees and that, if we didn’t, we would be facing catastrophe.

Why aren’t we responding to the crisis in nature with this level of urgency? Some people tell me that they just feel hopeless. What can one person do? Well, as of today, more than 7,000 of you have changed the management of your backyards to support insects and birds. Imagine that wave of stewardship and care sweeping the country, and the world! One person at a time. Read more about the Backyard Habitat Certification Program in this newsletter. And, with thanks to your gifts to Columbia Land Trust, we are taking action to save some of our most critical habitat and some of our most imperiled creatures, like the marbled murrelet, which is losing 10% of its population every year.

Columbia Land Trust offers hope. We offer a way forward. We provide a way for you to act with the urgency that my mom asks of us. Let’s keep in mind that for so many creatures—including us humans and the earth itself—this is indeed a crisis, a question of survival. Let this understanding inform our day-to-day and lifetime decisions. Thank you for supporting Columbia Land Trust!

Glenn Lamb, Executive Director

Columbia Land Trust conserves and cares for the vital lands, waters, and wildlife of the Columbia River region through sound science and strong relationships.

Columbia Land Trust has earned accreditation from the Land Trust Alliance, which recognizes land trusts that adhere to national standards for excellence, uphold the public trust with rigorous ethical standards, and take steps to ensure that conservation efforts are permanent.



Cover photo: Skunk Cabbage bloom.

Inside cover: Klickitat River. Brian Chambers Photography.

Opposite page: Sandy and Ruth Lamb.



columbialandtrust.org

connect@columbialandtrust.org

@ColumbiaNature

@ColumbiaLandTrust

Columbia Land Trust

Main Office

850 Officers Row
Vancouver, WA 98661
(360) 696-0131

Portland Office

511 SE Morrison St.
Portland, OR 97214
(503) 841-5918

Hood River

216 Cascade Ave.
Suite B
Hood River, OR 97031
(541) 436-4210

Astoria

112th Street
Room #203
Astoria, OR 97103

Executive Director

Glenn Lamb

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The Backyard Blooms

An Extraordinary Year for the *Backyard Habitat Certification Program*

BY ALEX ATKINSON



“Sometimes we just need to be quiet and present to notice nature happening around us.”

- a | Happy certified participants.
- b | Naturescaped yard.
- c,e,f | Raingarden planting with Verde in the Cully neighborhood in Portland.
- d | Simple birdbaths or more elaborate water features like this one are both excellent for habitat gardens.
- g | Pacific bleeding heart (*Dicentra formosa*) and native *Oxalis*.
- h | The program is great for families with children!



“Our program,” says Susie, “turns this enthusiasm and delight into native habitat spread far and wide across our urban landscapes.” Susie enrolled her own backyard in 2010, a year after Columbia Land Trust and Portland Audubon launched the program. “That first year, we enrolled about 30 backyards, and we thought that was pretty good. What’s happened since...well, it’s just been incredible.”

Incredible indeed: 7,400 enrolled backyards, over 120,000 new native plants in the ground, and 1,800 or so acres of beautiful, life-giving habitat for birds, bees, and all our wild neighbors.

How has the pandemic affected the program? “With so much on everyone’s



minds, we really didn’t know what to expect,” says Susie. “Thankfully, 2020 has been our best ever year, with over 1,200 enrollments.”

Right now Susie and her program staff are working with sites smaller than an acre in Clackamas, Clark, Multnomah, and Washington counties. For people with larger yards or who live outside the program’s service area, there’s a treasure trove of information at backyardhabitats.org.

Enrolling couldn’t be simpler. You get a site visit from a technician, who walks through your entire yard and helps you put a plan together. Your pathway to certification can involve anything from growing more native plants and fewer noxious weeds, to removing pesticides



and other wildlife hazards, to doing a better job of capturing stormwater.

Susie sees another benefit for enrollees in the BHCP. “Our program is built on relationships. Folks help each other out by sharing plants, ideas, solving problems, and encouraging others in their community to sign up.” And this is when the magic happens. Individual backyard habitats grow into neighborhood clusters, which eventually blossom into wildlife corridors that stretch for miles across our urban and suburban environments.

Susie believes our backyards have a bigger role to play in the wider work of the Land Trust. “Backyards are gateways. Witnessing these miraculous transformations on a small scale makes people



2020 IN REVIEW

1,068
NEW SITES
VISITED

260
NEW BACKYARDS
CERTIFIED

20,171
NEW NATIVE
PLANTS

946
VOLUNTEER
HOURS

5,265
FACEBOOK
FOLLOWERS

think about other ways they can help the natural world beyond their fence line.”

In this way, the Backyard Habitat Certification Program is growing a community of informed, inspired conservationists, one yard at a time. 🌱





SUMMER ON THE SWAMP

A New Chapter for an Ancient Floodplain

BY ALEX ATKINSON

Summer is construction season for Columbia Land Trust. A time for tackling large-scale restoration projects on properties that need a lot of love, sweat, and heavy machinery. One of the most anticipated projects slated for the coming months will set 146 acres of weed-choked fields and dilapidated ditches on a path back to its natural state: a magical, ecologically important Sitka spruce wetland.



This is Nelson Creek Swamp, along the Elochoman River. Only, this peaceful section of the Columbia River Estuary hasn't been a spruce swamp since it was drained and cleared for farmland a century ago.

The land is no longer productive for agriculture, which led to our purchase of the 120-acre property in partnership with Bonneville Power Administration. And so began one of the largest restoration projects we've ever undertaken. This summer, we roll up our sleeves for the third and final phase of the project. The restoration crew will divert Nelson Creek from its current drainage route to instead flow naturally into the Elochoman River. There are ditches to fill, culverts to remove, new tidal channels to excavate and a massive revegetation effort to bring back the natural wetland habitat for the wildlife that depend on it.



“Finding common ground is an essential part of everything we do. With the Nelson Creek project, we’re helping the local community solve one of its infrastructure problems while also returning a magnificent floodplain back to its best.”

i |

It's a significant undertaking for us, and a big deal for the local community. For years now the undersized culverts have been failing, regularly flooding the local area. So the final piece of the project involves replacing the culverts with a 50-foot bridge spanning Nelson Creek.

Finding common ground is an essential part of everything we do. With the Nelson Creek project, we're helping the local community solve one of its infrastructure problems while also returning a magnificent floodplain back to its best.

Wetlands take time to heal themselves. But ten years from now, the landscape will look very different. Beavers will take up the baton, turning a simple habitat into a complex ecosystem as they dig channels, build dams, and manage the vegetation. And that's exactly what juvenile steelhead and Coho want, giving them more places to feed and take cover while they prepare for their seaward journey.

“With so much bad environmental news in the world, I see these projects as hopeful,” says stewardship director Ian Sinks. “We’re giving these special places resiliency and staying power to deal with whatever the future holds.”

This project reminds Ian of something a veteran Land Trust conservationist used to say. “He liked to describe the loss of our region’s watersheds as death by a thousand cuts, and that it’s going to take a thousand Band-Aids to put it all back together. This project, for me...it’s a big, beautiful Band-Aid.” 🌿

i | Nelson Creek Swamp.

SUNSHINE AND SKUNK CABBAGES

For Land Steward Austin Tomlinson, Springtime is Validation

BY ALEX ATKINSON

Ask members of our stewardship team to reveal their favorite season, and they'll likely reply: “We're in it!” From trilliums sprouting along the forest floor to wildflowers blanketing our mountain meadows, springtime varies wildly across the Columbia River region.

Along the coast where Columbia Land Trust steward Austin Tomlinson works, deciduous and seasonal vegetation is sprouting up and leafing out. “Right now I’m starting to see a lot of changes on the landscape,” says Austin. “Almost overnight these habitats have been transformed from looking brown and barren to a vibrant wash of green.”

A lot of wetland species are waking up from their winter slumber, including salmonberry, alder, and willow. But one plant is always especially eager to show itself. “For me, skunk cabbages are the first sign of spring,” admits Austin. “You start seeing these bright green and yellow plants shooting out of the ground. They look otherworldly to me. And with their trademark odor, they’re pretty easy to identify.”

Skunk cabbages also herald the “field season” for our land stewards. “Now is a really good time for me to get out there and see how our habitat systems are functioning,” says Austin. “Before long, the mosquitoes will hatch, the vegetation turns into this giant, impenetrable wall, and our work gets more challenging.” Spring is also a good time to spot unwelcome visitors. During the spring months, it's easier to control invasive species while they're just waking up.

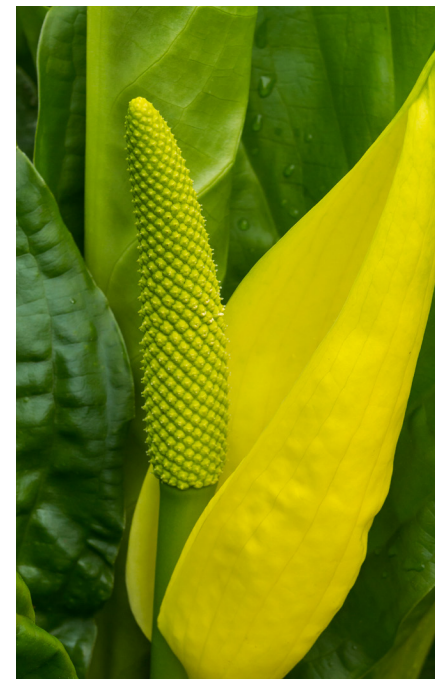
One of Austin's favorite places to visit this time of year is Nelson Creek Swamp, a 120-acre property we're restoring near the Columbia River Estuary (see p.4). “I was just in there a few weeks ago,” says Austin. “It was a beautiful day, and you could just see everything coming to life wherever you look...from the overstory of Sitka spruce trees bursting into life to the thick shrubs and wetland grasses carpeting the forest openings.”



j |

“They look otherworldly to me. And with their trademark odor, they’re pretty easy to identify.”

k |



l |



m |

Something else Austin likes about spring is the sense of achievement. A stinky skunk cabbage, a delicate wild iris—individually, the signs of spring are beautiful. Together, new life tells us that what we're doing is working. Which is why we encourage everyone involved with the Land Trust to go outside, see the springtime show, and feel a deep sense of accomplishment. 🌿

j | Snowberry.

k | Wetland Skunk Cabbage.

l | Skunk Cabbage bloom.

m | Spirea and Skunk Cabbage.



“We’ll remove worn-out fences, construct more deer-friendly fencing, and prepare the ground for another 27,000 native trees and shrubs for planting next year.”

What happens when your floodplain habitat is plowed up for farmland? Or when the floodplains you call home are diverted and disappear? If you’re a Columbian white-tailed deer, what happens is your population declines until just a thousand of you remain.

The greatest threat to this rare and gentle deer is habitat loss. Their future depends on places like Columbia Stock Ranch and other conserved sites in the Columbia River lowlands that can provide the forage, shelter, and space they need to recover and thrive.

In collaboration with Bonneville Power Administration and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Land Trust now enters our third phase of restoration on the historic, 500-acre Columbia Stock Ranch floodplain.

In 2020, we planted 20,050 willow stakes on the property, along with other native plants and shrubs. We also moved a small number of deer from the Julia Butler Hansen National Wildlife Refuge onto the conservation property.

Early signs are encouraging, and the work continues this summer. We’ll remove worn-out fences, construct more deer-friendly fencing, and prepare the ground for another 27,000 native trees and shrubs for planting next year.

Soon the small herd will be joined by others, until they can be left to take care of themselves on some of the most spectacular wetlands in the Northwest. 🌿

n | Columbia Stock Ranch floodplain



o |

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Columbian White-Tailed Deer

BY ALEX ATKINSON

IDENTIFICATION

The Columbian white-tailed deer is a small, lowland subspecies of white-tailed deer. Its coat changes from red-brown in the summer to gray in the colder months. Other points of distinction are its white throat, prominent white rings around its eyes and nose, and a long, floppy tail. Protected from hunters for decades, individuals are surprisingly calm around humans. When spooked, however, they lift their tails to reveal white underside fur, then wave them from side to side like a windshield wiper to alert the herd.

LIFE

These deer need a specific mix of habitats, including open oak prairie for grazing and dense creekside woodland for cover. As a result, their range is limited to the Puget Trough, the Willamette Valley, and the historic floodplains of the Columbia River region. The deer breed between September and February, and fawning season begins in June, with adult does typically giving birth to two fawns. They browse on leaves, graze on grasses, and keep alert for coyotes, their main predator.



Odocoileus virginianus leucurus

p |

STATUS

Sadly, the Columbian white-tailed deer is listed as threatened federally and endangered in Washington State. For over a century, most of its lowland habitat has been developed for agriculture. This has pushed the deer into isolated pockets of suboptimal land, and their numbers plummeted to roughly a thousand individuals in the 1960s. They are also especially vulnerable to flooding, habitat loss, and other impacts of climate change. Thanks to habitat restoration in their historic range, Columbia Land Trust and our partners have helped stabilize the population. Work is already underway to bring this graceful species back to our conserved lands so they can rebound to sustainable numbers within the next 20 years. 🌿

o | Columbia White-Tailed deer. Photo by Gary W. House.

p | Columbia White-Tailed fawn. Photo by Angie Vogel.

MEET THE TEAM

Introducing Three New Staff Members



Helen

In February, Columbia Land Trust hired three new stewardship assistants. We sat down with Helen, Adam, and Jonathan to see what they thought so far.

Helen Gavrilov

TYPICAL DAY. I go out into the field several times a week and help the team maintain plantings, control weeds, monitor our lands and easements and basically do whatever needs doing on our properties. It can be tough sometimes, coming home sore and scratched up. But I get to be out in nature every day, and that means so much to me.

HAPPY PLACE. Old-growth forests. When I stand among these giant trees, I think about how old they are, what they've seen, and what they've lived through.

FAVORITE PROJECT. Summit Creek in the Klickitat River region of the East Cascades. There's such a contrast between the ponderosa pine stands we're restoring and the beautiful old-growth forests on the adjacent Yakama Indian Reservation. It's like a window into the future, because this is what Summit Creek is going to look like one day.

BIGGEST DISCOVERY. I have three, if that's okay. First, it's the Pileated Woodpecker, which I realized is an under-appreciated bird. They don't get much attention, but these beautiful birds are ecosystem engineers, creating habitat for a multitude of other species and helping the forest function as it should. The second lesson hit me during the early days of the pandemic when we all had to stay indoors. I realized how much peace and healing I get from the natural world. Our natural areas really are a gift that needs to be cherished. My last big insight? Blackberry is mean.

Adam Baek

GREEN SHOOTS. Like many people growing up in the Pacific Northwest, I took our beautiful corner of the world for granted. So for me, my life in conservation began thousands of miles away at a salt lick in the Peruvian jungle. As we watched flocks of macaws getting their minerals from the clay in the cliff face, we could also see the river eating away at the cliff below. The experience showed me how everything's connected in the natural world.

WHY STEWARDSHIP? When I read the job description for this position, there was a line that went something like this: "Applicants must be comfortable spending time in isolated forest environments without cell phone service." Yup, count me in!

FAVORITE PROPERTY. I've been going to Long Beach since I was a kid, and I thought I knew it pretty well. But recently I worked on a property the Land Trust conserved a few years ago called Leadbetter Point. I had never been that far north before, and it is this lost world where shrubs like salal and huckleberry grow to almost six feet tall. We followed deer trails through the wetland, walked past beaver dams, and felt like we were in a place that is truly wild and thriving.

CLASSIC PNW. I live in Portland, so most days I'm driving to properties out east. That means I'm often passing through the Gorge at dawn and dusk. Seeing the light cascading down the canyon walls and the crazy shadows at that time of day, those are the moments when I realize how lucky I am to be right here.

Jonathan Albarran Velazquez

MOTIVATION. When I was younger, growing up in Gresham, we had a park in our neighborhood that was a sanctuary for a kid like me. I was shy and didn't speak English well, so I spent a lot of time there by myself. Sadly, the park wasn't looked after properly, and it became a place nobody wanted to be anymore. Green spaces like my park give so much to so many people, and it's just so easy to lose them.

PERFECT DAY. I always enjoy heading out to a Land Trust property to do its annual monitoring. I walk the fence line, checking for intrusions, make a note of the plantings and overall health of the habitat, and take photos from specific points so we can see how the landscape has changed over time. I was recently out at a beautiful site near the coast, and I saw photos of how it looked before the Land Trust took care of it. This wild place once looked like a landfill with old tractors and other rusting debris scattered everywhere. So much time and sweat goes into cleaning up a site like that.

BEACH OR MOUNTAIN? I'm a mountain person. I love the cold and the mist in the morning and the incredible views when it clears. There's a trail on Mount Hood I like to go on when I need to unwind. It's a really long trail with plenty of nature and very few people, and I can just walk on and on and on.

LAST WORD. Conservation is a long process. But you need people to take that first step and give our natural spaces time to heal, and to realize that a few protected acres will grow into a huge deal for nature and the community. Without people doing that, what happened to my old park will happen someplace else. 🌱



Adam



Jonathan



850 Officers Row
Vancouver, WA 98661

columbialandtrust.org
connect@columbialandtrust.org

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STEP OUTSIDE AND EXPLORE

A New Map Reveals More Than 100,000
Acres of Wild, Accessible,
and Protected Land

THE OREGON
I·AM

On Earth Day this year, April 22, our friends at the Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts (COLT) released a new map to help all of us connect with more outdoor spaces. This first-of-its-kind guide highlights 81 different locations throughout Oregon that anyone can visit.

Brought to you by 30 conservation organizations—including Columbia Land Trust—the map celebrates the lands and people we love by inviting us to safely connect with one another while venturing outside into both our favorite Oregon places and the spots we have yet to discover.

After our collective year of confinement and anxiety, COLT's new map is a timely remedy, with 81 magical places just waiting to be explored and appreciated. So get the map, fetch your boots, and go wander.

COLT's beautifully illustrated map can be found at oregoniam.org/map, where you'll also learn more about the project behind the map, The Oregon I Am—a play on the word "Oregonian."

