



Great Peninsula Conservancy

Protecting our lands and waters for generations to come

Fall 2023



Protecting forever the natural habitats, rural landscapes, and open spaces of the Great Peninsula.

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Note from the Director



Nate uses an increment borer to determine the age of a tree on a Walk & Talk.

If you've been part of Great Peninsula Conservancy during our journey as an organization, you know that our core mission is to protect and care for the most ecologically valuable lands in our region. We steward these spaces by restoring and improving habitat while engaging with people through programs like Land Labs, GPC's K-12 environmental education curriculum. You make a direct impact on our collective power to conserve the landscapes we know and love.

Reading through this newsletter you will see strong evidence of the work GPC has

been able to achieve through collaboration. Our community engagement team has been working to integrate the Stillwaters Environmental Center as a program of Land Labs (read more about Stillwaters on page four). This coming together will build on the Stillwaters legacy and engage more people in the beauty and ecological value of the Carpenter Creek Watershed, while continuing to engage community scientists in environmental monitoring. We are excited to see future generations of environmental stewards learning in the Stillwaters outdoor classroom in the decades to come.

Stillwaters joining GPC highlights our community conservation approach to land protection. Stewarding the Carpenter Creek Estuary requires a team of people from many backgrounds with a breadth of experience and knowledge. This team, built of members, partners, staff, board, and volunteers, makes projects like purchasing the Tahuya River Preserve or expanding Grovers Creek Preserve possible. Before the year is out, we'll have completed several more projects made possible through partnerships with the Hansville Greenway Association, the Friends of Miller Bay, and other partners. The power to make these conservation successes a reality is based on GPC member support. I urge you to consider your legacy and dream big about the change you can make right here in your community by making a matched pledge today. Thank you.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Nathan Daniel".

Nathan Daniel
Executive Director



AmeriCorps Vista members Kora Freeman-Gerlach and Sophia Pelletier with Executive Director, Nate Daniel during Kitsap Salmon Tours this fall.



Plaques celebrating the six new members of the Legacy Society in 2023.



New Legacy Society Members, Chuck and Debra Holland.

Leaving Your Legacy

Great Peninsula Conservancy hosted a luncheon this August celebrating our Conservancy Circle and Legacy Society members at Sehmel Homestead Park in Gig Harbor. The afternoon was a great opportunity for friends, old and new, to gather in support of their lasting impact on local conservation. Attendees heard from GPC staff leadership about exciting 2023 projects while being serenaded by a youth string quartet whose members were recent winners of the Bremerton WestSound Symphony's Young Artist Competition.

If you have been considering making a charitable bequest to Great Peninsula Conservancy or making GPC a charitable beneficiary of a retirement plan, life insurance policy, or trust in your estate planning, now is the time to submit a pledge and join GPC's Legacy Society. Kit Ellis, former GPC board president and Legacy Society member, created a pool to incentivize all of us to include GPC in planned giving, no matter the amount. **For every new Legacy Pledge GPC receives, \$1,000 will be activated, up to \$20,000!**

By simply completing and returning a pledge form, you release \$1,000 that GPC will use today to protect ecologically valuable wildlife habitat. We honored six new Legacy Society members since the start of the challenge, unlocking \$6,000!

To make your Legacy Pledge and help GPC protect lands forever, visit www.greatpeninsula.org or contact Nate Daniel at 360-373-3500 or nate@greatpeninsula.org.



Scan here to sign the pledge today!

Celebrating Conservation in 2023



In 2023, GPC's annual Conservation Celebration returned to Kiana Lodge for an evening of dinner, drinks, and community conservation! We were excited to honor Phil Best with the Gary Allen Cunningham Conservation Award and Dawn Dockter as our Volunteer of the Year. Thanks to the amazing community rallying around local conservation, a record-breaking \$162,682.00 was raised!



Conservation Today, For Tomorrow

Imagine sitting in the cool shade of a bigleaf maple that is stretching over a river filled with the ripples of salmon fins on the last leg of their journey to spawn. Around you, yellow warblers that grew up in the willows and dogwoods - planted to restore the floodplain flit about catching a late summer hatch of midges. Take a deep breath of fresh air and envision this future for the new Tahuya River Preserve.

Partnering to Protect Endangered Salmon in Tahuya

Since our founding, GPC has prioritized the preservation of salmon habitat. We're excited to announce a monumental win for local endangered runs: a 147-acre

acquisition on the largest river on the peninsula, the new Tahuya River Preserve. This property spans a mile of riverfront, protecting important

salmon habitat, floodplain hardwood forests, and towering firs that overlook the valley. Only a few miles from the mouth of the river



Top: An aerial image of the newly acquired Tahuya River Preserve. Bottom: GPC Stewardship Manager Adrian Wolf (left) and Conservation Manager Erik Steffens navigate a giant cottonwood log along the Tahuya river front.

this preserve was a high priority for its significance to local salmon runs and restoration potential. Both the Federal Endangered Species Act listed Hood Canal summer chum and Chinook salmon use the Tahuya River watershed. Protecting lower portions of the river will support both staging areas for adult salmon traveling upstream and provide habitat for juvenile fish to grow strong in.

In collaboration with the Hood Canal Salmon Enhancement Group, this former horse farm will be restored to a natural state. Reconnecting the river to the wide floodplain is not only critical for habitat, but will abate downstream flooding, and remove tons of sediment that bury salmon redds (nests for salmon eggs).

Great Peninsula Conservancy acquired the Tahuya River Preserve with funding from the Washington Department of Ecology Streamflow grant and the state Salmon Recovery Funding Board.

Grovers Creek Expansion

Early in 2023, Great Peninsula Conservancy saw the potential to grow a treasured conservation property. The now 329-acre, Grovers Creek Preserve is at the center of a contiguous forest corridor spanning nearly 1,700 acres. The Grovers Creek Expansion was a rare opportunity to expand in an area under increasing development pressure. The project was made possible through community support, raising a combined \$237,000 to permanently protect the expansion. The 38.4 additional acres includes extensive wetlands, rare stands of mature Sitka spruce, and a tributary of Grovers Creek.



Above: GPC Administrative Manager, Michelle Graves admires a mature cedar in the Grovers Creek Expansion. Credit: A Woods Walk Photography. Below: Land Labs students helping build a habitat pile at Grovers Creek this fall.

This property will also serve as a reservoir for plants and animals to repopulate restored areas of the preserve. The stewardship team, volunteers, and hundreds of Land Labs students, have been building habitat piles as a component of our ecological forestry practices. These piles mimic the downed logs and debris found in more mature forests and support a variety of wildlife. Pockets of Grovers Creek forests are homogenous and overcrowded and GPC has been thinning trees and building piles to encourage greater diversity and forest health.



Putting a new roof over Stillwaters



Newly retired Program Director of Stillwaters, Melissa Fleming and GPC Community Stewardship Fellow, Beatrice Lincke monitoring water quality in the Carpenter Creek Estuary.

By Claire Voris,
Community Engagement Manager

Do it right, invest in your materials, and a good roof can last anywhere from 25 to 50 years. I learned this from my father who upon fitting and fastening the last piece of rake trim



The Stillwaters Tree House about to receive a new roof.

to his barn called me to celebrate. “It should outlast me,” he said.

I thought about his comment as I read through work emails last week. The most emphatic subject line read, “Treehouse roof replacement is complete!”

If you’ve been privy to the updates coming from GPC communications in the last few weeks, you might have read about the exciting plans for the integration of Stillwaters Environmental Center under the umbrella of GPC’s outdoor education program, Land Labs. As the details of that transition were made final at the end of October, GPC staff have begun to move forward with next steps. Conversations about reinvigorated volunteer opportunities, celebratory event series, and the purchase of new water monitoring equipment have begun to shape the way

GPC staff are thinking about the summer of 2024 as the beginning of a “Season of Stillwaters.”

There are, of course, many other less glamorous but no less important discussions ahead. A few weeks back, GPC Administrative Manager Michelle Graves polled staff regarding asphalt shingle colors. Driftwood, peppermill, or onyx? Which would best suit the Stillwaters Environmental Center’s cabin (lovingly called “The Treehouse” for its second story views of the swooping cedars and dark hemlocks) in its next chapter with GPC?

When Naomi Massberg and Joleen Palmer founded Stillwaters Environmental Center back in 1999, I doubt shingle preference played a large role in their planning, but I do know they have always had a penchant for doing things right and investing in things that will last.

For the last 24 years, Stillwaters has served the Kingston community as a gathering place for the science-minded, conservation curious, and environmentally inclined. With the help of a nimble board and a few dedicated jack-of-all-trades staff, Stillwaters made a name and a home for itself here on the peninsula synonymous with community science and restoration of the highest quality.

Prior to celebrating her retirement in April of 2023, Stillwaters Program Director Melissa Flemming and I developed a habit of convening at Kingston's Coffee Oasis on Friday mornings. These meetings were, for me, an education on the historical record of Stillwaters programming and a chance to talk through how best to carry the torch forward. Beach elevations, driftwood counts, green crab monitoring, fecal coliform samples, and have we mentioned there's a beaver in the freezer? More important than what was being studied, Melissa took care to share the human element of each project, the countless hours contributed by Stillwaters staff, volunteers, and interns in the quiet meandering waters between Carpenter Creek and the estuary.

Over the last two decades, a lot has been going on under Stillwaters' roof. The removal of two punky plywood pieces and the addition of new flashing around the chimney this fall means that the innards of the Stillwaters Treehouse will stay dry through winter rains. It's a good roof, a solid start, and a reminder that while nothing lasts forever, the things we do right should outlast us.

Thank you, Naomi and Joleen, for cultivating a culture of environmental curiosity in the Kingston community. Thank you, Melissa, for your patience in helping me to understand and imagine a future for "the data." Thank you to the staff and board members of both organizations who took the time to come together and envision a path forward. Lastly, to the many individuals who have contributed to the legacy GPC now inherits, thank you.



Top: Community Engagement Manager Claire Voris enjoying a day out at Stillwaters. Bottom left: Monitoring the Carpenter Creek estuary. Bottom right: Stillwaters volunteers learning about invasive European green crabs.



Excited participants during a Walk & Talk at Curley Creek this summer.

Walk & Talks: Free Public Events

Monthly Walk & Talks continue to offer unique opportunities to connect with local experts while touring GPC preserves (sometimes at preserves that aren't always open to the public). This year, over 180 people have joined us for trips spanning topics from the history of Home Cemetery on a conservation easement on Key Peninsula, to wildlife tracking at Newberry Woods Community Forest near Silverdale. It's been a dynamic year and Walk & Talks remain free and open to the public because of the generous support of GPC's members.



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Above: Students from the Marvin Willaims Center on a field trip with the Land Labs team at Misery Point this summer. Cover: A curious barred owl. Photo Credit: Brendan McGarry