

South Sound Prairies



KEITH LAZELLE

Few places display nature's gentle side like the South Sound Prairies. In contrast to the rugged mountains and forests of Washington's wild lands lie the rolling hills and lakes of Thurston County. Here, wide-open skies arch over expanses of colorful wildflowers and gnarled Garry oaks—the colors of the land are reflected in the air by rare butterflies, blue birds and meadowlarks.

Two centuries ago, prairies and oak woodlands covered much of the South Sound. Today, only three percent of our native prairies remain. Grasslands are among the least protected and most threatened habitat types on Earth. Like grasslands around the world, the South Sound Prairies have supported human life for countless generations, providing an array of services including food, fiber, economic opportunity and protection of freshwater resources as well as habitat for multitudes of plants and animals.



Conservation Actions

- » The Nature Conservancy is working with public and private partners to establish a network of parks and preserves that will safeguard this irreplaceable natural treasure. Through the partnership, the Conservancy will add an additional 7,000 acres, doubling the prairie and oak woodlands currently dedicated for conservation.
- » Prairies were burned historically by Native Americans to keep forests at bay and promote food production. The Conservancy and its partners have an active prescribed fire program on the prairies. The program was recently selected as a demonstration site for the national Fire Learning Network.
- » As a founding member of the South Puget Sound Prairie Landscape Working Group, the Conservancy is working with public and private partners to promote and improve the management and planning of conservation actions on the prairies. By working with the Fort Lewis Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) program to restore prairie habitat on lands surrounding the base, the conservation of rare species has increased, while still assuring that Fort Lewis maintains its soldier training capacity.
- » Conservancy professionals, aided by dozens of volunteers, are working tirelessly to restore the historic prairies. Every week volunteers meet to collect seeds, remove Scotch broom and conifers, and propagate native plants. People of all ages have contributed thousands of hours and planted more than a million native plants, restoring and enhancing several thousand acres.
- » The Conservancy's Shotwell's Landing Nursery is one of the largest native prairie plant nurseries in the state. Thousands of plants representing more than 75 species are grown here and used in prairie restoration projects.
- » Along with its partners, the Conservancy continues to advocate for funding to protect more prairie lands. While the tasks are daunting, these crews are making a difference. Each year a little more prairie is reclaimed, and public appreciation for this imperiled landscape continues to deepen.

Future Conservancy Goals

- » Work with partners to generate public and private funds to protect 7,000 acres of habitat.
- » Improve the quality of protected prairie sites through restoration and management.
- » Establish at least two new populations of federal candidate species on South Sound Prairie preserves.
- » Propagate 400,000 plugs and 200 pounds of seed at Shotwell's Landing, enough to meet restoration needs.



RODERICK GILBERT

Species of the South Sound

Plants

Common camas
White-topped aster
Golden paintbrush

Butterflies

Mardon skipper
Puget blue
Whulge checkerspot
Zerene fritillary
Taylor's checkerspot

Birds

Streaked horned lark
White-breasted nuthatch
Western bluebird
Vesper sparrow
Western meadowlark

Mammals

Mazama pocket gopher
Western gray squirrel

Partners

Audubon Washington
Capitol Land Trust
Friends of Puget Prairies
Fort Lewis and McChord Military Bases
Natural Resources Conservation Service
Pierce County
Port of Olympia
Thurston County Parks and Recreation
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
U.S. Forest Service
WA Department of Fish and Wildlife
WA Department of Natural Resources
WA Department of Transportation



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The Nature Conservancy 

Protecting nature. Preserving life.™

For more information on the South Sound Prairies, call The Nature Conservancy's Olympia office at (360) 956-9713, or find us on the Web at nature.org/washington.

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