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Cornet Bay Vegetation Maintenance Report, June-September 2021: Island County Marine Resources Committee

Background

The Island County Marine Resources Committee (MRC) has been partnering with the Northwest Straits Foundation (NWSF), Washington State Parks, and additional partners to restore shoreline habitat at Cornet Bay in Deception Pass State Park.

Restoration in areas 4, 6, and 7 (see Figure 1) occurred in October 2012, and included removing a creosote-treated bulkhead, re-grading the beach to a natural slope, and planting native vegetation.

Restoration in areas 1 and 3 occurred in November 2015 and included removing fill along the shoreline, re-grading the slope, expanding the salt marsh area, and planting native vegetation.

The native vegetation has been maintained through regular weeding, watering, and installation of additional plantings as needed. The MRC has partnered closely with the NWSF and Skagit Fisheries Enhancement Group (SFEG) on these efforts.

This report covers native vegetation maintenance led by the MRC in June-September 2021. The focus of these efforts was primarily in area 1, (Figure 1) where the vegetation maintenance needs are greatest.



Figure 1. Cornet Bay restoration areas

Ongoing Maintenance

Gwendolyn Hannam (MRC Member/project lead) and Ann Prusha (Island County staff) performed vegetation maintenance throughout the summer months of 2021. This mostly involved watering and weeding. They used a County-owned Ford F250 with a lift gate, and borrowed a 425 gallon watering tank and pump from Island County Parks and Recreation, which they filled at Deception Pass State Park with permission from Jason Armstrong, Area Manager for Deception Pass State Park. They were able to purchase some equipment utilizing funds provided through the MRC grant to include hoses, valves, and weeding equipment, which will be able to be used for future MRC activities.

Anna Toledo (MRC Coordinator), Ann, and Gwendolyn investigated the site and performed a practice run with all of the equipment on June 9. Ann and Gwendolyn continued to performed vegetation maintenance on July 1, July 23, August 6, August 18, September 3, and September 17.

The MRC and Whidbey Island Conservation District are planning to host a volunteer maintenance event at this site on October 8. Ann and Gwendolyn are coordinating this event.

Due to some concerns with vandalism, Ann posted “Restoration in Progress” signage around the site on June 17.

Observations

Community members continue to be invested in the site’s success, speaking with Ann and Gwendolyn at the site during maintenance on a few occasions. It has been reemphasized that the community does not want anything to block their view of the water, and questions about self-starting trees has come up on multiple occasions. It is the intention of the volunteer maintenance event to repurpose any self-starting trees to maintain the original agreement with the community.

Watering has seemed to make a quite a difference at this site. While other plants in the area were struggling during the summer drought, the native plants installed by SFEG are greener with notable new-growth; in previous years, there has been very little new-growth. Despite the positive response observed during this summer’s increased maintenance, due to poor soil quality as a result of non-native fill material installed in the area, the plants will need a few more years of increased maintenance to fully establish. Both Ann and Gwendolyn enjoyed seeing the increased maintenance efforts pay off.

Fencing notes:

- The fencing that surrounds the maintenance area was cut open in two places when Anna, Gwendolyn, and Ann investigated the site in June. The northeast opening was intentional, as it had been used as a regular point of access. This opening was held shut by reusable zip ties. However, in June 2021, this area was permanently opened (likely by vandalism) and the zip ties were taken.
- There was a new access point cut into the fence on the northwest side, facing the water, as a result of further vandalism. Because there were a lot of dog feces in the fence, it was speculated that the area had been used as a dog run. In response, “Restoration in Progress” signage was

posted by Ann on June 17. This new and unplanned opening was eventually closed off, presumably by the Washington State Parks staff, after Ann brought it to their attention.

- Ann and Gwendolyn were approached by a member of the community. He mentioned that a couple of deer had gotten stuck in the fenced area, and speculated that it had been cut open by community members to help the deer escape. He also reported that a fawn had gotten its head stuck in a fence gap. Ann asked State Parks staff if it was possible to replace any of the 4" fencing with something that has smaller gaps. Some portions of the fence have 2" gaps, and this should be used for the rest of the fence.

Replacement of a pier has caused damage to part of the vegetated restoration area, in front of the public restrooms. Efforts to replant the area are scheduled to begin in February 2022. The pier replacement is part of the overall nearshore conservation and restoration efforts at Cornet Bay. The pier replacement will involve the removal of creosote-treated wood and will reduce impacts from dock shading.

Recommendations for following years

Community members of this area have expressed an interest to be involved in volunteer maintenance events in the future. Sending mailers to Cornet Bay homes about upcoming restoration events might garner some volunteer support. In effort to continue fostering relations with the community, it is important that they be updated and included in any future events as appropriate. Because the community sees the area daily, they are helpful observers of the site.

This site should continue to receive summer watering. It should be weeded periodically, either by staff or volunteers. The poor soil has not allowed the plants to establish well yet, and they are still stunted. Increased maintenance helps, but the plants need more time to establish.

Other observations for new restoration project sites include: "Restoration in Progress" signage should be posted immediately; site fencing should never exceed 2" gaps to protect local wildlife; and the access points should not be opened unless maintenance is being performed.

Photos



Gwendolyn Hannam maintains the Cornet Bay restoration site. (Ann Prusha)



Left: Cornet Bay restoration site. (Ann Prusha); Right: Ann Prusha waters. (Gwendolyn Hannam)