



*The Nature Conservancy is committed to prairie conservation within the South Sound region and the Willamette Valley /Puget Trough/Georgia Basin ecoregion. The Conservancy will continue to perform outstanding stewardship, protect key conservation parcels and promote a conservation community of cooperative partners.*

## **Ft. Lewis and McChord Project**

**Project Manager** – A new TNC staff member was added to direct the Ft. Lewis/McChord project. Mason McKinley comes to the Conservancy from University of Washington’s Pack Forest, where he was Deputy Director of that research area. After a quick two-week break-in period Mason commented, “I am extremely impressed with the scope and scale of the conservation actions on the project. There is more to the project than I imagined. It will keep me interested for more than a few years.”

**Projects** – During the past quarter, more than 350 acres of Scotch broom was mowed to enhance prairie, oak and pine habitats on Ft. Lewis. About 13,000 seedlings were planted on Ft. Lewis for a bioassay study on wet prairies and for gray squirrel habitat enhancement. The Ft. Lewis western grey squirrel survey was a big success this quarter, expanding their currently known distribution on the installation. At McChord, the survey for mammals was initiated, with the first bat survey locating 7 of 9 likely species. Weed control and restoration actions on McChord kept apace.

**McChord Article** – A nice summary of the Conservancy’s partnership with McChord Air Force Base was presented in ‘The Northwest Airlifter’ on May 20<sup>th</sup>. The article highlighted on-going work along Clover Creek and in the South Approach Zone. Mike Grenko’s quote summarizes our partnership well. “The Nature Conservancy’s mission to preserve habitat matches with the base’s mission to sustain its lands. The Nature Conservancy’s work is very cost effective too”, he added.



*Mason McKinley, new Ft. Lewis/McChord Project Manager, examines a fescue plant.*

## **Thurston County Project**

**Prairie Appreciation Day/ Project Bluebird** – The 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Prairie Appreciation Day was held May 7<sup>th</sup> at Thurston County’s Glacial Heritage Preserve. It is estimated that more than 1,000 people participated in this community event completely planned and run by Conservancy volunteers. A wide range of educational and fun booths and activities were available due to the participation of partners such as the WA Dept. of Fish and Wildlife, WA Native Plant Society, Black Hills Audubon, Littlerock Fire Dept and others. Thanks to all the volunteers that contributed to the success of Prairie Appreciation Day. If you missed the celebration, plan to attend next year, it just keeps getting better. Project Bluebird, our cooperative program with Tumwater School District, Pacific Education Institute and WA Dept. of Fish and Wildlife, gained significant notoriety with the installation of a webcam. This webcam, <http://wdfw.wa.gov/wildwatch/bluebirdcam/>, follows a bluebird family in one of the nest boxes installed by students, with the help of Conservancy staff, at WolfHaven Intl. The project was also the subject of a front-page story in the Tacoma News Tribune on July 4<sup>th</sup>.



*The WA Dept of Natural Resources conducted two training fires in July at the Glacial Heritage Preserve, burning nearly 85 acres of prairie. Their participation complements or helps to match actions funded by US Fish and Wildlife Service, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Thurston County and The Conservancy.*

**Mima Corridor Project** – Work is continuing on this project with two new sites this quarter. As the pictures suggest, these areas have benefited tremendously from initial Scotch broom control efforts. We are planning on enhancing these sites later this fall, including planting oaks and prairie species. The project will continue to expand its partnerships next quarter, working with additional landowners as well as deepening our relationships with current partners.

## **Rare Species Recovery Project**

**Ecoregional Field Trip** – The ‘Rare Species Recovery Project’ and partners ranging from British Columbia to Oregon hosted a 6-day field trip throughout the ecoregion. This field trip brought together prairie and oak woodland conservationists from throughout the ecoregion to discuss current conservation issues and efforts. Typically, each day included a discussion of pertinent topics, followed by visits to field sites related to the topic. A diversity of conservationists found the field trip productive, creating new partnerships and acquaintances and reinforcing current information and resource sharing efforts.



*Before and after broom control on a Mima Corridor property.*

## **Of Regional Significance**

**Red Fescue** – Many of us have recently been paying closer attention to the taxonomy of the fescue species that occur in the south Sound Prairies. Fescues comprise a major component of our restoration efforts, and considerable effort and expense are directed toward the collection, propagation, and outplanting of this material. Recently, some seed stock and plant material thought to be Roemer’s fescue has turned out to be red fescue instead. Steps are underway to generate new clean Roemer’s fescue seed, and to remove planted red fescue from key restoration sites. Distinguishing fescue taxa can be challenging, and when both native and non-native taxa co-occur on a site, there are legitimate concerns regarding the possibility of inadvertently enhancing non-native fescues, which may play somewhat different ecological roles than their native counterparts. Peter Dunwiddie has produced a brief guide to distinguishing these species in the field, especially focused on information suitable for seed collectors. Email Peter [pdunwiddie@tnc.org](mailto:pdunwiddie@tnc.org) to obtain a copy of this paper.