

The Morgan Property Acquisition

The Nature Conservancy is the new owner of 125 acres of native prairie adjacent to Fort Lewis, thanks to a collaborative effort that will complement ongoing conservation efforts at the Army post and provide much-needed habitat for several of our region's imperiled plants and animals.

The purchase establishes The Nature Conservancy's first preserve supporting prairie habitat in the South Puget Sound area. The Conservancy has spent the past decade helping to establish several publicly owned sites and to restore public and private prairie parcels, but it has never owned a preserve in the South Puget Sound prairie area.



Acquisition of the property from the Morgan family was made possible by significant support from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, with funding from the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program and the federal Cooperative Endangered Species Conservation Fund. The Nature Conservancy will assume responsibility for long-term care and management.

The Conservancy purchased the property at fair market value from Thomas and Grace Morgan, who had inherited it from Thomas' parents, Lewis B. and Katherine Morgan. The Morgan family, including Thomas' sister Jean Morgan, have demonstrated a strong commitment to conservation and stewarded the land well during the 50 years that they owned it, said Eric Delvin, the Conservancy's Thurston County Program Manager. Under their ownership, for instance, they allowed the Conservancy to install nesting boxes for western bluebirds, a species the Conservancy is helping to restore by way of a partnership called Project Bluebird.



“We are very grateful to the Morgans for their contributions to our region’s natural heritage,” Delvin said. “While there is work to do here, this piece of prairie still boasts a wonderful array of native species. Bluebirds are nesting, meadowlarks are singing, hawks are hunting. Rare *Mazama* pocket gophers still live here, burrowing through their native prairie home and leaving behind the mounds of rich soil favored by our wildflowers.”



“We’re tremendously excited about this purchase,” said Pat Dunn, the Conservancy’s South Puget Sound Program Manager. “And with funding for restoration already lined up, we’re ready to move quickly. Our goal is to restore the property to high-quality, native prairie.”

The remnant prairies of the South Puget Sound region are considered one of the most imperiled ecosystems in the United States. Scientists estimate that less than 10 percent of the original pre-settlement prairies is left, and most of what remains has been overrun with non-native plant species. Many native prairie plants and animals that depend on them have become rare and endangered. To help these species recover, the Nature Conservancy and others are working hard to restore pieces of South Puget Sound prairie to a healthy and native state.

The Conservancy’s restoration efforts will also focus on enhancing habitat for animals recognized as threatened or endangered in the region, including the streaked horned lark, golden paintbrush, and butterfly species such as the Mardon skipper and Taylor’s checkerspot.

The project is the first around Fort Lewis to serve as a conservation buffer, so-called because it benefits native species and potentially alleviates growing pressure on military lands that, due to encroaching development outside the base, have become de facto nature reserves. The Conservancy hopes this conservation effort and others like it around the country will relieve the military of some of the burden of holding the highest-quality remaining habitat in regions that have been heavily developed.

By purchasing and restoring habitat adjacent to a large prairie on Fort Lewis, the Conservancy and its partners intend to expand and enhance habitat for species that have come to rely on the fort's Weir Prairie as a refuge.

"Fort Lewis has been a great partner over the years. They have worked hard to be good stewards of the prairie habitat on the base, even as they advanced their training objectives," said Dunn. "We're pleased to have Fort Lewis as a neighbor now and look forward to continued collaboration to improve and care for our rich natural heritage."