

South Puget Sound Program Highlights January – March 2008

The Nature Conservancy is committed to 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.

ACUB

This quarter, we have received an additional \$520,000 for a total of \$1,519,973 through the Fort Lewis Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) program from the Department of Defense. These funds are aimed at supporting actions that promote recovery of 4 rare species on prairie lands outside Fort Lewis. The ACUB program is in its 3rd of 5 years. TNC works cooperatively with WDFW, WDNR, Fort Lewis and Wolf Haven to select

projects that follow temporal and species-specific strategies to achieve recovery of the target species. This year's funds are supporting projects such as: Taylor's checkerspot and Mardon Skipper captive rearing programs, Butterfly Habitat Enhancements in preparation for reintroductions, Restoration plans on ACUB lands, Prairie Habitat Quality Monitoring, Invasive Species Control across ACUB lands, and research to study the life history and habitat selections of the target prairie butterflies.



Mardon skipper butterfly



FIRE LEARNING NETWORK

The South Puget Sound prairies program was officially accepted into the national Fire Learning Network (FLN) during winter quarter. FLN is a joint effort funded by the US Forest Service and Dept. of Interior and implemented through TNC's Global Fire Initiative. The program has helped develop collaborative fire efforts at local, regional and national levels. The successes of TNC's fire efforts are even being exported globally to help other countries to restore critical fire processes. Fire is a historically critical process for the South Sound prairies, and it is a collaborative goal of the program to develop a robust regional fire program. Joining FLN provides our fire program with access to critical expertise and knowledge and lends credibility as we work with regulators, administrators and the public. It is also an avenue to widely disseminate lessons learned. In the fall FLN will help conduct a workshop to help hone our long-range vision for fire management.

FT. LEWIS AND McCHORD PROJECT

Western Gray Squirrel Habitat Enhancement on Fort Lewis

Preliminary data from collared western gray squirrels have verified the usefulness of tube monitoring and bolstered the legitimacy of habitat enhancements. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife has been collaring western gray squirrels and collecting telemetry data since last fall in an effort to identify habitat use and range on Fort Lewis. Our habitat enhancement work, consisting of Scotch Broom removal, plantings of food resources and oak release, which has been focused on areas where our tube monitoring has shown western gray presence, was found to overlap consistently with the preliminary results of habitat use by collared squirrels. In addition to the current enhancement sites, several new sites were identified and enhancement efforts have already begun. These results bolster the habitat enhancement work that has been done over the last five years, and prove the usefulness of hair snag tubes in identifying western gray squirrel high use areas.



Western gray squirrel nearing a hair snag tube.



Prescribed fire at Glacial Heritage in 2007

THURSTON COUNTY PROJECT

This quarter The Nature Conservancy South Sound Program was awarded a Wildlife Action Opportunity Fund grant for a restoration demonstration project on Glacial Heritage Preserve. The Nature Conservancy has been working cooperatively with Thurston County to restore the 1,080 acre prairie preserve for more than 10 years. The Glacial Heritage Demonstration Project will conduct high priority conservation actions as identified in Washington's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy. The Wildlife Action Opportunities Fund provides competitive grants on a nationwide level to conservation organizations that are focused on implementing priority actions and strategies identified in State Wildlife Action Plans. Funds to support this program were

provided by a grant from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, which works to accelerate conservation of wildlife habitat through implementation of the Wildlife Action Plans. This award was the only one given in Washington State in 2007. The project, which will begin in May, has two broad objectives; to conduct direct restoration work which will benefit rare prairie species and to serve as a demonstration site for new restoration techniques for the ecoregion. For more information on the Wildlife Action Opportunity Fund visit the Wildlife Conservation Society webpage at: <http://www.wcs.org>

RARE SPECIES PROJECT

A range-wide workshop on the Taylor's Checkerspot butterfly was held in Olympia this January. The workshop updated the attendees on a variety of topics including population status, habitat restoration activities, and captive rearing efforts. The 2-day workshop provided a venue for interactive discussion and information sharing throughout the region as well as the butterfly's diverse habitat types. An expert in captive rearing and breeding of a closely related subspecies of checkerspot attended and presented at the workshop. Information gleaned from that long-standing effort has helped shape the future of the Taylor's rearing program occurring cooperatively between WDFW and the Oregon zoo. Additionally, key projects and research opportunities were identified at the workshop that will enhance the success of conservation for the species. Proceedings of the workshop are forthcoming and will outline the presentations, capture the essence of discussions, and provide a record of the event.