



South Puget Sound Program Highlights July - September 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.

EXPANSION OF FIRE PROGRAM

After two years of preparation, the South Sound Prescribed Fire Program has successfully completed its first burn season. In the past, TNC and its partners have had to burn in the off-season due to county burn bans and rely on engine support from DNR and local fire districts. These restrictions made it almost impossible to develop a burn program that could be applied at the landscape scale. Last year we were granted an ecological exemption to burn within the burn ban. Over the past nine months we have built our own infrastructure of fire equipment and trained firefighters. With the help of ACUB, we now have four slip-on fire engines and a water trailer, all the necessary tools and safety gear and a pool of more than 30 wildland firefighters to draw from. We also joined the Fire Learning Network, which has proven to be a critical resource for training and information. In another breakthrough, we received permission to conduct burns on Ft. Lewis, and expect to be able to begin in 2009. During the month of September, we were able complete all but two of our scheduled burn projects in spite of air quality and high fire danger shut downs. In total, we participated in 21 burn projects on 14 different days. Nine of these burns were research projects and the remainder ranged in size from 1/4-acre trial burns to 100-acre units. In total, 316 acres were burned this year in Thurston County, Ft. Lewis and Yellow Island.



Glacial Heritage

NATURE CONSERVANCY RECOGNIZED FOR PRAIRIE CONSERVATION

Pierce County

The Cascade Land Conservancy hosted its annual Pierce County Conservation Awards Lunch in September and The Nature Conservancy and Fort Lewis received the 2008 Land Stewardship Award. The recipients were recognized for their continuing partnership which has helped to restore over 15,000 acres of rare prairie habitat in Pierce County.

Thurston County

At the July 14th meeting of the Board of County Commissioners, the commissioners presented The Nature Conservancy with a certificate of appreciation for the role we played in conserving the Glacial Heritage Preserve and restoring the site, on behalf of Thurston County citizens. 2008 is the 20th anniversary of the designation of the preserve, and The Nature Conservancy has been working cooperatively with Thurston County to restore and enhance the site for more than 10 years.

PRAIRIE CONSERVATION

Townsend's Big-Eared Bat Found on Ft. Lewis

On September 12th, the last day of field work for the Fort Lewis bat survey, a male Townsend's big-eared bat (*Corynorhinus townsendii*), was captured. After a summer's worth of long nights mist-netting and acoustically monitoring bats, this capture was a great reward for Greg Falxa, a bat ecologist for Cascadia Research Collective, and Sanders Freed of The Nature Conservancy. This species is the subject of great interest in the area because of its Federal and State status as a species of concern. In addition, the last known lowland Puget Sound colony of Townsend's big-eared bats was located in Roy, just south of Fort Lewis, until its disappearance in the 1990s. Since



Townsend's big-eared bat

then, bat enthusiasts and wildlife officials have searched for the remains of this colony. This species forms large maternal colonies where the young are birthed and nursed for a month over the summer. This specimen and a female captured several days later were both fitted with telemetry devices and tracked for approximately 12 days. Information gathered on their foraging patterns and roosting affinities will help provide a blueprint for conservation of this species in the area. With future funding, efforts will be made to locate the colonies maternal roosting site, as well as designing artificial roosting structures.



Oregon spotted frog

FRESHWATER CONSERVATION

In September, Fort Lewis introduced Oregon spotted frogs, a state endangered species, to Dailman Lake on the Fort. This is the culmination of several partners' efforts, including WDFW, Fort Lewis, Northwest Trek and others. The Nature Conservancy has begun its efforts as well to create suitable habitat for the frogs and eventually reintroduce them to the prairies of South Puget Sound. Starting in February of this year, USFWS, WDFW, DNR, Fort Lewis, and the Conservancy began Oregon spotted frog surveys at several locations in Thurston County. As a result, a few new sub-populations were found and

currently sites are being prepared as potential release sites for new populations. Restoration at West Rocky Prairie will soon begin under the guidance of Dave Hays (WDFW) and Grace Diehl (TNC). Also, USFWS and TNC are investigating how grazing to control reed canary grass at Musgrove Creek will enhance the frog's breeding habitat. Read more about this at <http://www.theolympian.com/southsound/story/593299.html>

RARE SPECIES PROJECT

Regional Streaked Horned Lark Working Group Meetings

September hailed the second meeting of the Streaked Horned Lark Regional Working Group. Working group members include researchers from the Lark's entire range, representatives from State and Federal agencies as well as academics and non-profits. This regional group demonstrates the conservation power of working together by providing the opportunity for all parties to have a complete vision of Lark status as well as potentials for conservation. The group has created an up to date Wildlife Action Plan specific to the streaked horned lark. However, in the absence of an official Recovery Plan, this summarized and prioritized plan is helping to direct Lark conservation actions throughout the range and with additional funding sources. The group isn't only about planning. By coming together we have opportunities to help each other initiate the planned actions like creating Lark habitat in the industrial areas of North Portland, reducing nest predation range-wide through the use of nest enclosures, and incorporating streaked horned larks into new and existing incentive programs like the Wetland Reserve Program.



Streaked Horned Lark on Pillar Rock Island.