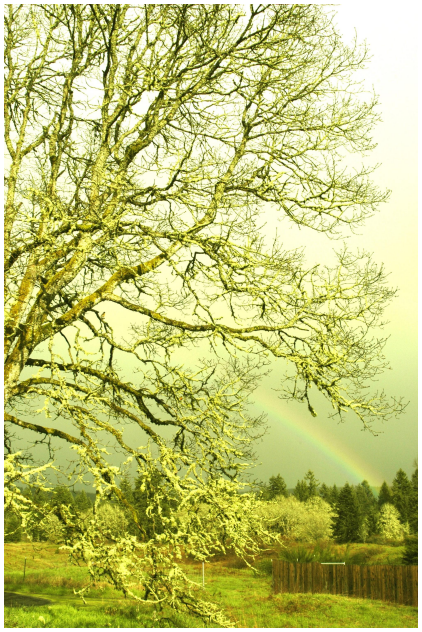
WORKING GROUP MEMBER PROFILE – Wolf Haven

-- By Tami Williams, Director of Conservation at Wolf Haven



Wolf Haven was started in the early 1980's by a few dedicated individuals. They learned from experience that there was a need for a safe place for unwanted, captive-born wolves to live out their lives in peace. Since our grass-roots beginnings, we've been home to over 100 rescued wolves and see thousands of visitors pass through our gates every year. Our mission has expanded from simply providing a sanctuary to promoting wildlife education and conservation. One of our most significant contributions to wolf conservation has been our involvement with the breeding of rare Mexican gray wolves and red wolves for restoration into their native environments.

Despite the fact that habitat restoration for a wide-ranging species like the wolf is beyond the scope of Wolf Haven's influence and resources, as our focus turned to conservation of all wildlife, we realized we could make a contribution much closer to home. The sanctuary sits on about 80-acres which is a combination of South Sound prairie and white oak/conifer forest. Over the years, we have utilized most of the oak areas to build wolf enclosures, ensuring our residents have enough shade in the sunny summer months. The remaining mima mound prairie, about 55 acres, was grazed in the past and in early days of Wolf Haven it wasn't utilized at all, until now.

Prairie restoration at Wolf Haven began by accident. At times when there are no benches to build or grass to mow, volunteer groups and animal care staff, (who often do double duty as maintenance staff), are sent out on the prairie to cut down the invasive Scotch Broom. In early 2001, a visionary executive director decided to get more serious about restoring Wolf Haven's small piece of South Sound prairie. Under a grant from the Natural Resources and Conservation Service, we contracted The Nature Conservancy to begin a concentrated effort of restoration on our prairie. With an additional grant starting this year from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service we continue our restoration and conservation efforts. While our prairie is not large, it is in an ideal location, close to state and privately owned prairies that are also slated for restoration. We are hoping to introduce Mazama pocket gophers and golden paintbrush, respectively listed as rare and endangered species for the state.

Our greatest contribution to South Sound prairies is in utilizing an asset that has been in place at Wolf Haven for a long time – our Education Department. Starting in the summer of 2006, we included an educational prairie "scavenger hunt" during our popular summer events, Howl-Ins. The education department has included a prairie presentation in our curriculum for the 2006-2007 school year. With our new grant, we hope to create a permanent nature trail through the prairie with interpretive signs that can be used as a self-guided tour route or used in conjunction with the prairie presentation.

From wolf rescue to wolf education and from conservation to prairie restoration, Wolf Haven is constantly expanding our environmental role. Wolf Haven is proud of our contribution and excited by the challenges presented in restoration of an entire ecosystem and its many associated species, both plant and animal. Having dealt primarily with the conservation of one species on a nation-wide level, Wolf Haven became involved with the Prairie Working Group in 2006 in an effort to learn more about the prairies and its inhabitants.