

Volunteers in Parks



2025 Volunteer Recognition Event

by Nadine Collison

On November 15 we held our annual Volunteer Recognition Event and Awards Ceremony, hosted at the Esquimalt Gorge Park Pavilion for the second year. Not only is it a beautiful, purpose-built building that honours the original Japanese Teahouse built on the site in 1902, but it was also constructed with many local materials highlighting eco-conscious methods.

The event began with a poignant territorial acknowledgement by our Indigenous Cultural Programmer, Leslie McGarry, and continued with a delicious buffet, including a waffle bar, supplied by Poncho's Catering.

After brunch, Cliff McNeil-Smith, the Chair of the CRD Board, thanked the volunteers for all their hard work and dedication. Then we welcomed our keynote speaker, Jay Kakaluzny, a Fire Management Officer with Parks Canada. He is a certified Fire Behaviour Specialist, with 25 years of experience that has been national and international in scope.

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James Baumann
Steve Burgess
Shirley Cao
Katherine Carruthers
Julie Csori
Lorne Daniel
Carmen Davies
Karen De Lisle
Terrylynn Drury
Cathy Frost
Leslie Gardiner
Mike Hartman
Tori Jones
Charles Kahn
Sandi Koop
Brian Lawson
Harry Lewis
Greg McKillop
Christine Parker
Charles Perin
Nathan Pritchard
Bill Scriven
David Shaw
Carol Stewart
Ethan Trenaman
Dru Ursu
Carolina Vidal
Drew Wambolt

5th Year Award Winners

Karen Chen
Jamie Disbrow
Dave Downman
Ian Downman
Neil Neate
Kathy Paige
Joanna Verano

Having seen firsthand some of the most negative impacts of wildfire, Jay has a passion for the proactive management we can undertake to work toward ecological balance. His fascinating talk, “Nature Under Fire: Risk Reduction and Ecological Balance”, gave us all more insight into the ways that fires are impacting our changing climate and what to expect in the future.

Following Jay’s talk, we held the awards ceremony. We started off by honouring all the contributions from our recreation group partners, including the Elk/Beaver Lake Equestrian Society, the South Island Mountain Biking Society and the Sooke Bike Club. Each group has their own group of volunteers who contribute hundreds of hours in our regional parks each year. We also honoured all the other groups we partner with for restoration and conservation, including The Land Conservancy of BC and Mayne Island Conservancy.

We then awarded our Corporate Award to Stantec. This is the third year they have received this award by contributing 95 volunteer hours in 2025 to clean up and restore Island View Beach Regional Park.

Finally, we honoured our regular volunteers who were receiving annual milestone awards. This year we had 31 first-year recipients. Seven volunteers received their fifth-year award. Many of the fifth-year award recipients were members or founders of the Beaver Elk Environmental Stewards (BEES) and it also included the leader of the Pipeline Stewardship group. Each recipient was given a coveted walking stick, handcrafted by our longest-running volunteer, Brian Peddlesden.

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Our volunteer group photo!



Jay Kakaluzny speaking on fire behaviour in parks.

10th Year Award Winners

Dorothy Elias
Beverly Hall
Valerie Hawkins
John Potter

15th Year Award Winners

Paula Johanson
Andrew Malczyk

20th Year Award Winners

David Gellately

30th Year Award Winners

Roxana Argast

Next we honoured our four tenth-year recipients, including two Devonian Stewardship group volunteers, a naturalist, and a restoration volunteer who has already put in over 230 hours in 2025! Thank you to John, Valerie, Beverly and Dorothy! We awarded two 15-year awards, one to Andrew, a naturalist at Francis King Regional Park, and one to Paula, a naturalist who is mostly in Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park, but who has also done lots of events with the Interpretation team. Our single 20-year award went to David Gellately, a Park Steward who cycles the Lochside Regional Trail, sending much needed reports on the condition of the trail and alerting us to issues. David has impressively donated over 1,300 hours of time to the health and well-being of our regional parks and trails. Finally, we had one 30-year award, going to Roxana Argast. Roxana is our second longest-running volunteer and is a Park Steward as well, spending much of her time on the Galloping Goose Regional Trail and in our regional parks out in Sooke.

Thank you to all who were able to attend and thank you to all of YOU for the wonderful work you do year-round to make our regional parks better!



The Two Teds: Ted Robbins (CAO of the CRD) and Ted and Roxanne Simmons.



Marg Howe receiving applause as one of our 2025 top contributing volunteers.



Roxana Argast receiving her 30-year award from CRD Board Chair Cliff McNeil-Smith.



Stantec receiving their third annual Corporate award for contributing almost 100 hours with their staff at Island View Beach Regional Park.

2025 Year in Review: Stewardship Highlights

Each year volunteers and staff do an incredible amount of work to improve and restore our regional parks. It's important to pause and celebrate all that hard work!

The Stewardship Team consists of Jill (Senior Conservation Biologist), Morgan (Conservation Biologist), Jake (Stewardship Technician), Rob and Avalon (Conservation Technicians), plus six Restoration Assistants who host restoration events with volunteers: Olivia, Rachel, Erin, Emily, Olga and John. We also work closely with Rachael (Outdoor Recreation Specialist) as she liaises with the Recreation License groups and works towards increasing accessibility in our parks. Here are some of the highlights from the Stewardship and Recreation Teams:

- As highlighted in the previous newsletter, staff participated in the building of a sea garden adjacent to Coles Bay Regional Park with the Pauquachin First Nation.
- In the summer the CRD proudly supported SC'IA'NEW First Nation to host the 2025 Tribal Journeys landing at Aylard Farm at East Sooke Regional Park for their penultimate stop on their way to Lower Elwha.
- Preliminary designs for shoreline restoration at Coles Bay Regional Park were completed.
- The oxygenation report for the new oxygenator installed at Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park was completed and presented to the Regional Parks Committee – water quality improvements are slowly being observed.
- The State of Natural Features report was completed and presented to Regional Parks Committee, and it will be available online for volunteers to check out in the New Year.
- We piloted a carnivore monitoring program led by the Conservation Technicians.



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Volunteers removing broom at an Earth Day event with Tsawout First Nation.

- We partnered with Tsawout First Nation on four broom removal events north of Island View Beach Regional Park and hosted three workshops for youth during spring break.
- A mobi-mat was installed at Island View Beach Regional Park in May of 2025, which improved visitor access to beach and has concentrated human impacts in the foreshore, improving habitat for coastal sand ecosystem species.
- The Prior Lake dock refurbishment improved visitor safety and experience while increasing protections for ecological values such as water quality and shoreline vegetation at Thetis Lake Regional Park.
- We worked with the Sooke Bike Club to upgrade more than 1km of eroded trail at Sea to Sea Regional Park. The new trail significantly improves the user experience and is designed with sustainability best practices to minimize ecological impacts.
- We added images of key day use areas and trails to Google Streetview to improve park accessibility information available to people with disabilities.
- We planted 25 trees and more than 100 shrubs with the South Island Mountain Bike Society at Mount Work Regional Park.
- We facilitated 17 different external research projects, including bat monitoring, genetics research, and ecological shifts in response to climate change.



Participant Photo, Pauquachin S'uyulu Skweyul/Pauquachin Spirit Days 2025.

The volunteer program has had an extraordinary year:

- We had a successful full year of the EcoMonitor program in which we monitored two species, purple sanicle and white-top aster. We are now planning for 2026 with our partners, the Province of BC, the District of Oak Bay, Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary and the District of Saanich, and looking to expand.



Mobi-mat installed at Island View Beach Regional Park.

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- We now have formal Stewardship Agreements in place with the BEES, Metchosin Invasive Species Cooperative and the Pipeline stewardship groups, which cover restoration work in Elk/Beaver Lake, Matheson Lake, Roche Cove and Wittys Lagoon regional parks, removing several species of invasives and restoring the parks.
- We have expanded the hours of the Francis/King Nature House, hoping to reach more children and families in the mornings. We have recruited and trained several new naturalists for those new hours.
- We launched our pilot project for our Volunteer Growers, who are under the umbrella of the Restoration Volunteers. We chose 10 native plants and have over a dozen volunteer plant foster parents, with the intent of planting them into regional parks next fall.
- We held four volunteer hikes, the Park Stewards' Start of the Season gathering, the Spring Icebreaker for Restoration Volunteers, two Danger Tree trainings, a Chance Finds training, a workshop about beavers and one learn how to use iNaturalist.
- We added the role of Event Volunteer. These volunteers work with our Interpretive Team to help host some of our largest events of the year like Salmon Sensation and Hawk Watch and are able to reach hundreds of people at each event.
- In 2025 we chose two focus regional parks where we tried to invest more energy into restoration, native plants and other conservation mechanisms like fencing. Those parks were Island View Beach and Witty's Lagoon. Over 230 volunteer hours were dedicated to Witty's Lagoon Regional Park and about 120 hours to Island View Beach Regional Park. New fencing is being installed this December at Witty's Lagoon to protect the areas where we have removed broom.

In 2026, we will be developing a Volunteer Plan that outlines ways we can grow and improve the volunteer program over the next five years, based on the results from the Volunteer Satisfaction Survey we did in 2023 and maintaining all the good things it already embodies.

We all appreciate the hard work and effort all the volunteers put into regional parks and are so thankful for the continued dedication and passion from all of you. Thank you for making us stronger!



Volunteers learning about beavers at Elk/Beaver Lake Regional Park.



The fall volunteer hike!

Species Spotlight: Douglas-fir

As winter solstice approaches, many different cultures and religions celebrate evergreen trees. They represent life, growth and renewal. Here on the west coast the Douglas-fir embodies these qualities and, for some local Indigenous People, it's considered the grandfather of the forest.

The Douglas-fir was named after David Douglas, a Scottish botanist, in the early 1800s. The Douglas-fir tree is not actually a true fir tree (genus *Abies*). The hyphen indicates that it is like a fir tree. In 1867, Douglas-firs were placed in a new genus, *Pseudotsuga*, which means false hemlock.

Douglas-fir are large coniferous trees that have a large range and grow along western parts of Canada and the U.S. and into the northern parts of Mexico. They grow in many different climates and ecosystems, from rocky, dry mountainous areas to temperate rainforests. It is a hardy tree with thick, grooved bark which helps to resist impacts from forest fires and insects. The coastal Douglas-fir can grow up to 120 metres and can live 500-1500 years! Douglas-firs are quick growing, and one of the first trees to return after a forest fire, offering much needed habitat and food. The cones of the Douglas-fir are an important food source for many birds and mammals, and bears are known to pull off the trees' bark and eat the sap.

Because they grow fast, straight and strong, Douglas-firs are popular with the forestry industry and the lumber is used in construction. It's also the best-selling species of Christmas tree in Western Canada. For many Indigenous Peoples, many more gifts come from this grandfather tree. The bark is harvested from blown-down trees because once it's dried, it burns very hot and smokeless, which is perfect for winter fires. The wood can be used to carve plates, bowls, spoons and other utensils. The pitch can be used to seal up holes in canoes and leaking water containers and can also be wrapped around the top of a stick to create a torch used for clam digging at night throughout the winter.

So, as you are walking through the forest this winter, or perhaps enjoying a Douglas-fir Christmas tree covered in twinkling lights and shining ornaments, take a moment to appreciate all the gifts the grandfather tree offers to the ecosystem, the animals, and to us and reminds us of life and renewal in the darkest part of the year.



Staff Profile: Olivia Gribbon, Restoration Assistant

Tell us a bit about yourself:

I was born and raised in Victoria, on the lək̓ʷəŋən and WSÁNEĆ peoples traditional territories. I am an avid recreationalist, spending as much time outside as possible anywhere from trail running, surfing, cycling or skiing! I am currently a student at the University of Victoria completing my Bachelors of Science in Geography. I mainly focus on environmental management, physical geography and geographical informational systems. I have worked a variety of parks and recreation jobs. In 2021 and 2022 I was a BC Parks Student Ranger based out of Goldstream, doing invasive species removal, outreach, maintenance and Indigenous relations projects. In 2023, I had a Co-Op on the recreation services team again in BC Parks. Then in 2023 I became a CRD Park Ranger until the Summer of 2024. Subsequently, I got the amazing opportunity to be a Restoration Assistant, exploring my passion for conservation and community building.



Olivia sitting along a crevasse on Bridge Glacier in the Lillooet Icefield.
Photo: J. King



Olivia with native plant seeds during a seeding event at Elk Lake with the BEES.
Photo: E. Miller

What do you enjoy most about working in regional parks?

I really enjoy working in the regional parks system. I spend my time in diverse ecosystems with great co-workers and volunteers. I see the impacts we have as a collective, especially when removing invasive species. The huge piles of scotch broom are wildly impressive. I am also in a role where I feel I can give back to the environment, helping foster new growth and opportunities. One of the best aspects of my job is the connection with both nature and volunteers. CRD volunteers are amazing and I really appreciate all of their hard work. I feel immensely grateful to have worked in many different park systems and I really enjoy the variety of parks throughout the CRD.

Park Updates

The CRD's annual PAWS in Parks public awareness campaign will kick off early in the new year. The campaign runs from January until the end of March, and focuses on promoting good pet etiquette in CRD regional parks, as described by the PAWS acronym:

- Protect nature by keeping your dog away from wildlife and sensitive areas - stay on trail.
- Always respect others who might not welcome your dog's attention.
- Watch that your dog is under control, in sight, and on a leash where required.
- Scoop your dog's poop and take it to the trash - abandoned dog waste bags can be hazardous for wildlife.

This year the campaign will have social media, public outreach, temporary signage, a photo submission contest, traditional media, and advertising components. If you see our posts in your social feeds, please feel free to share!



PAWS in Parks campaign in action at Island View Beach Regional Park.



Mushroom at Mill Hill Regional Park.

Thanks to your input and reporting, Regional Parks staff have worked to create new temporary signage related to mushroom harvesting.

This signage will be deployed in strategic areas to ensure it is being communicated to park visitors that harvesting mushrooms is not allowed. You should see these signs popping up in a regional park near you very soon!