

Ballard Green Spaces Project: A survey of the Ballard district for ecological restoration and habitat enhancement opportunities.

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Summary

This neighborhood survey was designed to provide a tool for individuals and community groups in the Ballard area to use in identifying and pursuing habitat improvement projects in that region. As Ballard is an area seeing a particularly high level of development at the moment, it served as an ideal area to focus this project on, as there is both a need to preserve the remaining green spaces and community interest in doing so. There were two goals in this project, the first being to compile a comprehensive list of all the locations in this neighborhood that had some potential for habitat improvement, and the second was to provide all the basic information that might be needed to peruse such a project.

The year prior to completing this survey, the community organization Groundswell NW conducted their own survey of the Ballard District and published the Ballard Open Space Plan. The report was more general in scope, covering a wide area of open space uses, such as traditional parks and public art opportunities, with habitat improvement only one of many options discussed. This subsequent survey focuses solely on areas for ecological restoration and habitat improvement, complimenting the Open Space Plan with a more comprehensive discussion of these opportunities that would not be possible in a more general report.

What is the issue?

Growth and development is a natural part of urban areas, but it has adverse effects on natural ecosystems, causing fragmentation or complete loss of these areas over time. This habitat loss can result in significant loss of species in cities, as well as the ecological function of the land. Loss of natural areas in cities also has a negative effect on the residents as well, limiting their access green spaces and the benefits they provide, including an improved ability to recover from

stress and a variety of health benefits we are only beginning to understand. The very development that is bringing in people to cities and creating a greater need for natural areas to escape the stress of the city in is also one of the key reasons these areas are becoming hard to find.

The Ballard District is one of the fastest growing neighborhoods in Seattle, and development only appears to be speeding up there, with a residential development rate only exceeded by one other region of the city in 2014. The combination of a rapidly growing population along with extensive development of available land creates a situation in which it is likely that natural areas are going to become even scarcer. This made Ballard the ideal location to focus the survey on, identifying the potential for habitat improvement in the area before too much is lost.

How was the project conducted?

The first step of this project was to identify an initial list of sites to be included in the survey. Aerial satellite imagery of Ballard was used for this, as well as GIS data for vacant lands and existing natural areas. Each site was visited to determine if it was appropriate to include in the survey. A number of community organizations and individuals interested in improving the green spaces of Ballard were consulted to determine the best information to gather from each site, after which each site was visited a second time to collect this data.

What are the major elements of this project?

The report itself was based around technical reports and advice provided by Christina Pfeiffer, with the end goal being a document that not only provided all the data collected for each site, but also did so in manner that was easily used by the general public. It is comprised of three major parts, the introduction and general information on the types of sites identified in the survey, including examples of successful projects, the survey sites and their associated data, and an appendix of useful organizations and resources associated with the survey sites and other locations mentioned in the report.

For the survey sites and their data, each site is given it's own data sheet in order to put all the information that might be needed about that site in one easily accessed spot. This includes two types of information, technical details, such as size, ownership, parcel number, and environmental critical areas, that was obtained from the City of Seattle's GIS data, and observational data obtained when visiting each site (existing vegetation and structures, approximate tree coverage, ease of access). General notes and observations are also included, as well as specific contact information for each site, where appropriate.

The organizations and resources is an expansion on the information provided in the general descriptions of the types of sites identified in the survey. It includes a list of all the organizations mentioned in the report, important information on their policies and regulations that anyone working on their property should be aware of, as well as specific contact information for that particular department. Additionally, there is some more general information that may be of use in pursuing habitat improvement projects, such as how environmentally critical area regulations

affect restoration projects and links to information on obtaining grants through the Neighborhood Matching Fund.

Finally, as this project is intended to be a tool for individuals and community groups to use in working towards improving and increasing the natural areas in Ballard, it will be made publically available online and distributed to anyone interested in this issue. Additionally, the survey can serve as a template for anyone who wishes to do similar in other Seattle neighborhoods, and the organizations and resources section could easily be modified to apply to the city as a whole rather than just Ballard.