



Seattle
Parks & Recreation

Green Seattle Partnership

Healthy Environment Stories



“The magic of the [Green Seattle Partnership](#),” says former Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR) Superintendent Ken Bounds, “is that it grew out of a completely grassroots community effort and is fueled almost entirely by the energy of dedicated and invaluable volunteers.”

Bounds recalls that the ambitious, 20-year effort to restore the forests in Seattle’s parks began with the work of a few community organizations and one “green angel,” the late Ann Lennartz. It is a direct response to one of SPR’s three aspirations: Healthy parks, healthy environment, and strong communities.

Genesis of the GSP

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a handful of community groups applied for [Neighborhood Matching Fund](#) awards to create restoration plans for forested areas that were at risk from such invasive species as Himalayan blackberry, bindweed and English ivy. Then a 1999 [American Forests](#) study sounded the alarm: all the forests in Seattle’s parks were threatened. The study estimated that within 20 years, 70% of Seattle’s forested parklands would be an ecological “dead zone” where invasive plants predominate, where trees are dead or dying, and where native wildlife habitat is gone.

In the meantime, citizen and horticulturist Ann Lennartz funded the methodologies, surveys, mapping and plant inventories that became the basis of the GSP through her [Starflower Foundation](#). The Foundation also provided grants that supported many early forest restoration efforts. She shared her information with the Cascade Land Conservancy (now [Forterra](#)), [EarthCorps](#) and TREEMendous Seattle, now an inactive nonprofit. SPR joined them in 1999.

Implementation

This long-term view of the importance of nurturing a healthy forest took on new importance when in 2004 SPR partnered with Forterra, EarthCorps and other nonprofits and City agencies to create the Green Seattle Partnership. Its goal is to restore 2,500 acres of park forest land by the year 2025. The GSP is now recognized as a national leader in forest restoration, and Seattle is recognized by American Forests as one of the nation’s top 10 cities for urban forests, calling the GSP a “mature program.” Its structure and methods are emulated in other cities (be more specific).

The work of the Partnership began in earnest in 2004 as the leaders developed decision-making processes, established a governance structure, and adopted a [20-year plan](#). Using the Tree-age Model, the GSP identified nine sub-categories, developed cost estimates for restoration and ongoing maintenance, and chose the first sites based on the recommendations of the [Equity and Environment Agenda](#) to ensure equitable distribution of projects.

The GSP uses Best Management Practices and carries out restoration projects, conducted almost entirely by volunteers, using a four-phase approach:

- Clear the site and remove the invasive plants
- Plant new native plants
- Water and mulch
- Perform ongoing maintenance over the long term.

At a recent GSP work party on the Burke-Gilman Trail, 10-year volunteer retiree Rick Lee said he volunteers to help the environment, to get outside, and to give back to his community. Dave Kessler, another long-term volunteer, said “my number one reason is for volunteering is carbon sequestration; my number two reason is to cool the city by providing shade; and number three is the three B’s: native birds that eat berries and bugs.”

Also at the Burke-Gilman work party was Eric Ballentine of Minority Veterans of America and "The Mission Continues," a group of military veterans who want to contribute to their communities in a family-friendly environment. Grownups and kids alike had fun and removed invasive plants.

Where We Are Today

2017 data shows that under the GSP, 170 trained Forest Stewards oversaw 78,666 hours of volunteer time, 24% of it by youth volunteers. They removed 8,697 ivy rings, installed 164,177 plants (of which 38,194 are trees), and over the course of the partnership, passed the one million mark in volunteer hours, which equates to \$24,501,670 in volunteer leverage!

On just one rainy Green Seattle Day, November 4, 2017, 1,200 volunteers working in 22 parks planted 10,000 native plants.

“The GSP is on track,” said SPR Horticulture Manager Jon Jainga, “to meet all its goals on time. The challenge will be to get sustained funding to maintain the restored forest into the future.”

Healthy Forests Tomorrow

After the approval of the [Seattle Park District](#) by voters in 2014, the first six-year financial and spending plan for District funds includes \$14,622,748 through the year 2020. To date, City funding for the GSP totals \$35,022,745. Beyond 2020, the GSP will have to compete with other priorities for Park District funding.

Learn more

www.seattle.gov/parks/volunteer/urban-forest-restoration

Benefits of Forests

- Reduce pollutants reaching our waters, saving \$1.5 billion per year in stormwater management.
- Produce oxygen and absorb such pollutants as carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, and nitrogen dioxide from the air.
- Trees provide shade, keeping us cool when the weather is hot.
- The forest soaks up carbon dioxide that fuels climate change by capturing and storing it. A forest can keep as much carbon as it produces.
- Wildlife calling the forest home just in Seattle includes tree frogs and long-toed salamanders, beavers, opossums and the occasional cougar, as well as bats, birds and butterflies.
- The forest controls erosion with the tree roots that bind the soil, and the leaves reduce the force of rain and wind on soil.
- The forest creates majesty. Trees, the natural giants of the plant kingdom, inspire respect, awe and art all over the world.
- The forest draws us as a place where we can relax, explore, play and contemplate.
- The forest buffers noise. Arbodayblog.org estimates that a 100-foot wide planted buffer will reduce noise by 5 to 8 decibels.

