

**Friends of
Mount Douglas Park
Society**

Spring 2022 Newsletter



*The first new blossoms of the year are always a welcome sight in the park.
This is salmonberry.*

We acknowledge and respect the First Peoples on whose traditional territory Mount Douglas Park rests.

Guess Who

- Wears a bright cap.
- Knocks around the park.
- Famous for its 'laugh'.
- Often heard before it's seen.

Find the answer on the last page of this newsletter.

Invasives Report

The Pulling Together invasives group did work through the Winter but work parties were less frequent due to inclement weather. They just had to accept Mother Nature's impact. Ongoing work, such as the 16th year of searching for and removing garlic mustard, will increase with the milder spring weather. New projects are also being planned. If you'd like to volunteer to do invasives work consider joining Pulling Together. Information is provided below but may fall out of date as web links change.

Volunteer with Pulling Together in Saanich

<https://www.saanich.ca/EN/main/parks-recreation-community/parks/natural-areas/volunteer-for-pulling-together.html>

Salmon Carcass Transplant

Our annual Salmon Carcass Transplant took place on February 2, 2022. This year Grade 5 and more senior students from St Margaret's School took part. Frozen carcasses were again provided by the Goldstream Volunteer Salmonid Enhancement Association. In addition to helping to spread fish along the creek, the older students conducted a stream survey. They documented the state of the stream and its surroundings. As well, they identified invertebrates they found in the stream, a vital ingredient for young fish. We also transplanted 500 Coho "pre-smolts" into the weir pond.

Salmon fry hatch and remain in fresh water anywhere from a few months to a couple years before heading out to sea. The survival of these young salmon



Frozen salmon carcasses in the creek at the new riparian and salmon education centre in Mt Douglas Park.

largely depends on the health of their habitat. Salmon fry need plenty of hiding places, like boulders and logs, to stay safe from predators and prevent being washed down stream. Water quality must also be high to attract food sources for them to eat, and to provide a healthy estuary for them to spend time in during their transition from fresh to salt water when they're ready to migrate to the open ocean.

Salmon carcasses are important to the ecosystem because after being out at sea, a salmon's body contains nutrients that can only be obtained from ocean water. When the salmon die, these nutrients are deposited into the earth and their bodies become an important food source for other creatures. In an effort to bring salmon back to Douglas Creek, we work with local organizations to be able to toss salmon carcasses into the creek every winter. This mimics the natural life cycle with the intent of increasing nutrients in the environment, attracting new life, and promoting a healthy ecosystem for the salmon to thrive. Invasives

Storm Water

We sent a letter to Saanich Mayor and Council, on 16 April, 2021, outlining our concerns about the storm water that flows from the watershed into the creek. In brief, we are concerned that the ongoing and inevitable redevelopment of lands in the watershed is changing more of the surface from permeable, natural surfaces to impermeable surfaces, and structures and pavement. Rain water flows rapidly from impermeable surfaces into pipes and is funnelled directly into the creek above the weir. Storms or heavy rain leads to damaging high water that is undermining the many years of creek restoration work we've led.

In brief,

The Friends of Mount Douglas Park Society formally requests Saanich Engineering to initiate a study that determines the feasibility of a bypass storm water pipe, its cost, external funding opportunities, regulatory implications, and identify necessary steps for this project to proceed.

The letter is available in full on our website.

Ephemeral Ponds

If you walk along the Bridge trail or through the Cedar Grove on Norn in the wet season you'll encounter one of the park's two small ephemeral ponds. Ephemeral ponds are seasonal. They fill in our rainy season and slowly dry up in the summer. By August or September they may show only damp soil where the water stood before. These ponds and several marshy areas around the park are vital habitat for many species, including some at risk.

Ephemeral ponds provide a source of water for wildlife. They are seasonal breeding grounds used by many amphibians, reptiles, and insects. Some creatures rely on ephemeral ponds exclusively to breed and will migrate to the same pond each spring to lay eggs. In the Park a few species that can be found in ephemeral ponds are the northwestern salamander, red-backed and long-toed salamanders (see below for photos), rough skinned newt, pacific tree frog, and the northern red legged frog.



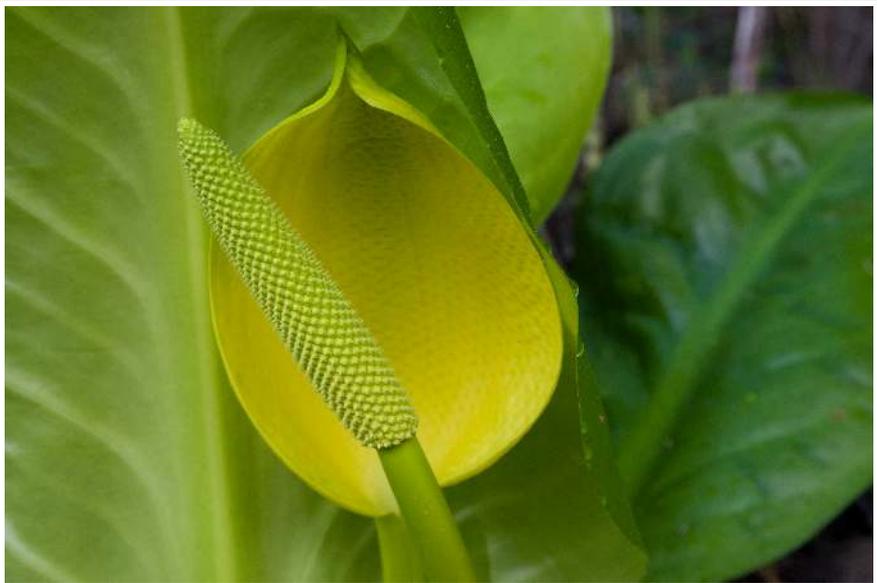
The small pond on Norn trail is important habitat. It'll be dried up by the end of summer.

Being temporary and shallow, ephemeral ponds don't provide a good environment for fish, creating an ideal habitat for frogs and salamanders. Fish would eat these creatures and their young and also compete with them for food by consuming insects. Even without the threat of fish, amphibians still need to be on guard because these ponds are also an important stop for migratory birds who may see them as a snack. As an ephemeral pond becomes more established it attracts other animals as well including turtles, snakes, and large and small mammals, such as raccoons, and deer.

In the spring, breeding frogs and salamanders deposit jelly-like masses of eggs in ephemeral ponds. As thousands of these amphibians hatch they feed on a variety of insects that are hatching at the same time, such as dragonflies and mosquitos. Young amphibians will remain in the ephemeral ponds until fully developed before making their way into the forest to continue their adult life.



Long-toed salamander at the Norn pond.



Skunk cabbage flowering in a marshy patch on Irvine trail.



Red-backed salamander near the creek.

In B.C. approximately 44% of salamanders and 64% of frogs are at risk, with human interference largely to blame. Invasive species, global warming, habitat loss, pollutants, and letting pets and children play in ephemeral ponds all play a role in amphibian population decline.

Amphibians have extremely permeable skin used to transfer nutrients, oxygen, carbon dioxide and water between the environment and the amphibian's body. This puts them at a much higher risk of being impacted by contaminants in their environment. Dog droppings can introduce harmful bacteria, bring about infectious disease, or contribute to algae blooms that can reduce essential oxygen in ponds.

Allowing dogs and children play in these ponds is an important issue. Parks all over are faced with the challenge of finding a balance between nature, humans, and their four-legged friends. While most people don't see the harm in letting their playful pooch or curious kids splash around in ephemeral ponds, it does damage to these important ecosystems. Many sensitive creatures and their delicate eggs and young are living in ephemeral ponds. Some may be lying dormant underground in winter months. Foot and pet traffic in and around the ephemeral ponds compacts the soil and risks damaging these small animals and their eggs or young.

Ephemeral ponds are often overlooked, and being so essential to many woodland species it is extremely important to recognize and protect them. Tampering with ephemeral ponds in any way can be detrimental to the inhabitants. Even seamlessly harmless activities like letting children and pets splash around in them, or moving a log can have an impact.

Enjoy these parks and wetlands, host to so many animals and special plants by admiring them from a distance. Please help keep them healthy by keeping yourself and your animals out of these beautiful, important, and very sensitive areas.

Creekside Learning Space

New interpretive signs are coming to the bridge as part of the completion of the bridge riparian and salmon outdoor education space. These signs will help to educate visitors to the site about topics like:

- Fish, Bugs, and Birds – the animals that use the creek;
- Reconstructing a Creek – how have the banks and the creek environment been restored and protected;
- The Watershed – where does the water that flows in the creek come from;
- Dynamic Creek – how does the creek change through the seasons;
- How You Can Help – things we can do to help keep the creek healthy.



New cedars, planted along the Bridge trail this past winter.

Teachers Planting Cedars

This winter, teachers from local school district participated in a Professional Development activity at the new outdoor classroom. Our society was present to show them the site and to talk to them about the salmon education we help with, carcass transplants, school-raised salmon fry releases, and our own salmon fry release.

As part of this event, the teachers did some vegetation restoration work and planted 30 cedars along the Bridge trail between the bridge and Douglas Trail.



Remember winter? There were a couple of significant snowfalls. Here, snow has almost buried ferns along the shore of the creek.



SMOKES OVER MOUNT DOUGLAS are grey and hazy with smoke today and may be that way for some time. Saanich firemen say brush fire that started Tuesday afternoon could take a week to extinguish with fresh winds and dry weather. Worst aspect of blaze will be aftermath, when hikers, horsemen and motorists

and motorcyclists will find Victoria's biggest hill has lost its cover of green. Teen-agers, taxi-drivers, butchers and barbers are hauling hose and digging fire trenches today to contain many pockets of fire on mountain's northerly slope—(Photo by Bill Halkett)

Mountain Fire Still Spreading

'It Could Take Week To Put Out'—Fireman

By GLEN ALLEN

It is the 95th brush fire since the beginning of August and the worst in memory for Saanich. The fire that broke out around 3 p.m. Tuesday near the top of Mount Douglas and was fanned to full bloom by southwesterly winds, still rages today.

"It could take a week to put out," said a weary Saanich fireman.

All Saanich firemen not on holiday fought the blaze until the early hours of the morning. Tending off flames that were literally sizzling at the base steps of a Pearce Crescent subdivision and Seven Oaks School of Buskinop Road.

Fire Chief Joseph Sutherland and Deputy Chief Glen Robbins were on the job until 3 a.m. this morning.

They directed men from their own department, Central Saanich and Langford, and

hundreds of civilian volunteers who came to save one of Greater Victoria's best-loved beauty spots.

CAME TO LIFE: The many, separate mountain-

It was reported under control about an hour after firemen began fighting it, but winds carried it away in all directions—even against the wind—through the tinder-dry underbrush.

Late in the evening passengers on B.C. Ferries said they could see the smoke from the fire as far away as Active Pass.

From the Fair Bay Highway, drivers could see dense clouds of smoke rising up the side of the black mountain.

READY TO HELP:

Neither the B.C. Forest Service nor the privately owned Max Martin water bomber have been called into service to fight the blaze as yet.

From the Archives - Fire on Mount Douglas

September 7, 1966

"The fire that broke out around 3 p.m. Tuesday near the top of Mount Douglas and was fanned to full bloom by southwesterly winds, still rages today."

On October 19, 1966, it was reported that the "blaze cost \$6500" for damaged equipment, fuel, and overtime wages. Also reported was that the fire covered 40 ha (100 acres) and that, "Two juveniles have been charged with starting the blaze." The park today covers 188 hectares but was smaller in 1966. This fire burned a large fraction of the west and north portion of the park.

The fire was fought for more than a week. Many local residents volunteered, fighting hot spots with wet sacks, and building fire breaks.

“Saanich Reeve Hugh Curtis, who himself spent hours trying to rein in the wild red perimeter of the fire today praised the people who came out to ‘save our park.’” The Reeve singled out teenagers, ““At a time when there is so much criticism of teenagers, these people were marvellous.””



This is the water tank in the parking area at the top of Churchill Dr. The outhouse serves another purpose.

A large impediment towards extinguishing the 1966 fire was the lack of water. The closest hydrants were on Shelbourne Street, so several tanker trucks had to haul water all the way up Churchill Drive to the summit, what the fire department refers to as a tender shuttle. A better system was needed.

It didn't take long to determine that water for fire suppression was needed at the summit, but how to accomplish this? The upper Churchill parking area, at 202 metres, is higher than any of Victoria's water reservoirs. Simply installing a hydrant wouldn't work. There's not enough pressure in the water system to raise the water that high. The solution was to construct a 40 000 litre (10 000 gallon) water tank at the summit to hold water during the fire season.

To fill the tanks, two pipes were installed. One to pump the water half way up the mountain, a second pipe to pump it the rest of the way.

Just off of Cordova Bay Road (near the old quarry) are two hydrants, one near the road connected to the water line running to Gordon Head. The other slightly up the trail is a second hydrant, the bottom end of the lower pipe leading up the mountain. To fill the summit water tank, or to keep it full in case of a fire, a pump truck connects to these two hydrants and pumps water between them.

On the side of Churchill Drive, a little more than half way up the side of the mountain are two more hydrants, the top of the lower pipe and the bottom of the upper pipe. A second pumper truck connects to these two hydrants and pumps the water the rest of the way to the upper water tank. The fire department refers to this as relay pumping.

It takes about 35 minutes to fill the tank. If needed, they can increase the pumping pressure and supply 150 000 litres per hour, which surely would have helped with the 1966 fire.

The tank is drained at the end of October and filled the first week of May.



A bit more than halfway up Churchill Dr., you'll see two fire hydrants close together.



At least once each month we try to set up our information tent in the park. We are always looking for new members or volunteers.



Tiny wildflowers in the park: Woodland stars (left) and Blue-eyed Mary.

Heron Zone

Great Blue Herons have returned to the area near the beach in the park. As many as 10 herons were seen at the site recently. Saanich has imposed a protected area there. During nesting season we encourage park visitors to respect this exclusion zone and give the birds more space as they raise their families. Blue herons are a species of Special Concern in British Columbia. This means they are *vulnerable to extirpation or extinction*. Extirpation is the removal of a species from a local region. Each time a species loses a place where it can thrive the species as a whole becomes more vulnerable to extinction.



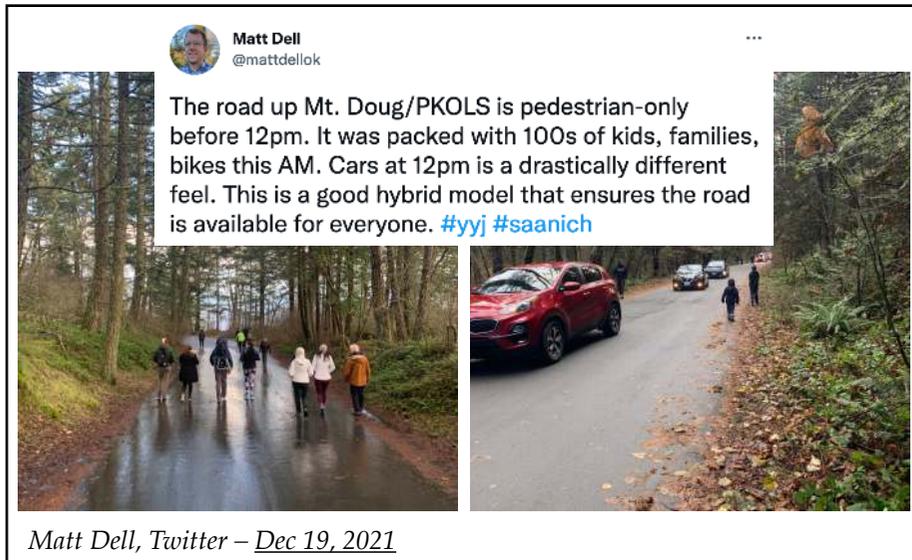
Sign marking the trail closure on Douglas Trail, north of Ash Rd.

Churchill Drive Morning Closures

Since 2009 Churchill Drive has been closed to vehicles until 12:00. This was an initiative of the Friends of Mount Douglas Park Society.

In 1990, when the Friends of Mount Douglas Park Society was established, the park was administered by the City of Victoria. At that time, and for a short while after being transferred to Saanich, Churchill Drive was open all day in the dry season but was closed in winter. Saanich opened the road full time and it remained that way for about a decade.

In 2000, the Society lobbied to close Churchill Drive on Sunday mornings until noon. That proved to be so popular that we asked Saanich to close the road every morning. There was some opposition but Saanich agreed to a six-month trial. During that trial their polling showed strong support. Final approval for permanent morning closures came in the Fall of 2009. Since then the road has become a very popular way to access the summit on foot without being forced to mix with traffic. In 2013 stones marking waypoints along the road, introduced the Churchill Challenge. More recently, the road is busier and more popular than ever.



Park Benches



The new bench recently installed at the Bridge is made from a composite material (recycled plastic) with a similar colour to the old cedar bench style. The cedar benches are no longer available.

The photo at left was taken before the plaque was installed.



Why Protect Mount Douglas Park?

Recently, the Raincoast Conservation Foundation published an interview with Andy MacKinnon, co-author of *Plants of the Pacific Northwest Coast*¹.

Ecologists in British Columbia have developed a system to describe the many different ecosystems in BC. There are 16 Biogeoclimatic Ecosystem Classification zones. Southeast Vancouver Island, and Mount Douglas Park, is part of the Coastal Douglas Fir (CDF) zone.

MacKinnon says,

In the face of development, climate change, introduced species, and other challenges, maintaining any sort of stability is an unrealistic (and likely counter-productive) goal. Maintaining resilience – the ability of species and ecosystems to adapt to environmental change – is important. The best strategy for maintaining and enhancing resilience is likely to maintain the species, ecosystems and landscapes of the CDF in a state as close as possible to ‘natural’. We can’t predict with any certainty how species will react to some of these changes – our ecosystems are simply too complex and too poorly understood. Our best bet is to maintain as many native species as possible, and to maintain some ecosystems in as undisturbed a state as is possible.

Mount Douglas Park is a designated Natural Area in Saanich. As complex pressures from increasing urbanization, and from climate change, build in the region surrounding the Park, the Society believes that the park’s purpose, as outlined in the Park Charter, of *the protection and preservation of the natural environment for the inspiration, use and enjoyment of the public* is best realised by striving to keep the Park in as natural state as is possible.

Each new member strengthens our voice. If you want to help, consider joining us. There’s a small fee of \$5 per year that helps us manage things like this newsletter. See the link on the last page of this newsletter.

¹ Links to articles on the internet tend not to last but while it does here’s the link to the story referred to above.

<https://www.raincoast.org/2022/03/the-story-of-coastal-douglas-fir-forests-the-intrinsic-value-of-forests/>



Pileated woodpecker (above). The male has a red patch at the base of their bill. At right, Red-breasted Sapsucker (top), and Northern Flicker.

Answer to Guess Who

The answer is the **Pileated woodpecker**, *Dryocopus pileatus*.

This is largest of at least five species of woodpecker you can find in Mt Douglas Park. These are the *Pileated*, *Hairy*, and *Downy woodpeckers*, the *Red-breasted Sapsucker*, and the *Northern Flicker*.

In our experience the pileated woodpecker often appears with a partner and has the annoying habit of moving around to the opposite side of the tree from where you are watching.

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Membership, Renewal, Gift Membership Still just \$5/year

Becoming a member helps us advocate for the park.

Join online: <https://mountdouglasspark.square.site/>



Providing information via this newsletter about the Park is an important Society function. We want to reach more Park users and Park neighbours. Why not **give someone you know a gift subscription and include it with your renewal**? A one-year membership isn't much more than the price of a good cup of coffee! You provide the gift, we'll send notification to the recipient of your generosity. We hope you will continue to support the work of the Society for another year. Do this online (above) or with this form.

Gift From: _____

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Membership **4 years \$20** 3 years \$15 2 years \$10 1 year \$5

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