

# A Tale of Three Cities

## Green Cities Case Studies



**Eric Sterner**  
 he/him/his

Plant Ecologist  
 Seattle Parks and  
 Recreation

Green Seattle  
 Partnership



**Margaret Wagner**  
 she/her/hers

Natural Resources  
 Coordinator

Green Kent  
 Partnership

**Gabbi Gonzales**  
 she/her/hers

Recreation  
 Coordinator

Green Burien  
 Partnership



# Era of Open Space Acquisition & GSP "Baseline"

## 1960's -1990's Developing New Parks & Preserving Open Space

### Visionary Leadership: Forward Thrust & Beyond

A dramatic increase in park acquisition and development activity began in the 1960's. Organized by civic leader Jim Ellis, the Committee of 200 reviewed Seattle and King County's needs and proposed the Forward Thrust Bond Program with the goal of furthering the equitable distribution of park resources throughout Seattle and King County. As a result, Seattle park area grew by over a third, including many new neighborhood parks. Forward Thrust provided an opportunity to recognize and celebrate Seattle's cultural diversity with new parks, such as William Grose, Alvin Larkins, Edwin T. Pratt, Jose Rizal and Hing Hay Parks and Kobe Terrace.



JIM ELLIS c1965

Jim Ellis, father of METRO and Forward Thrust, has led many visionary efforts, including reuniting Downtown with First Hill by bridging Interstate 5, and establishing the Mountains to Sound Greenway, linking Seattle to the mountains by means of a regional open space corridor along Interstate 90.



FREWAY PARK - FIRST OF ITS KIND IN THE NATION - 1976

### Planning Ahead: Acquisition of Park Land



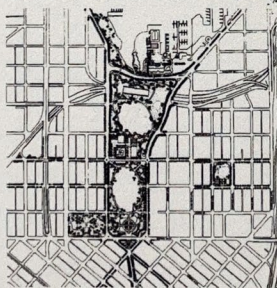
SKETCH OF THE PROPOSED COMMONS - 1994

*"...sections of a city in which the population is most dense and most in need of playgrounds and local parks, are almost wholly devoid of these advantages because no well-balanced system has been carried out while land was sufficiently cheap..."*

Olmsted Brothers - 1903

On John C. Olmsted's first day in Seattle in 1903, after viewing the city from the top of the Courthouse and Denny Hotel, he noted that "there do not appear to be many spots which could be taken for local playgrounds, at least in the thickly populated districts." Ninety years later, citizens renewed efforts to establish park land in the Downtown and South Lake Union areas. However, the funding proposal for the Seattle Commons project was turned down by the voters in 1995 and 1996.

Acquisition of open space was undertaken as a result of the 1989 King County Open Space and Trails Bond Issue and supplemental funds from federal, state and county programs. Greenbelts, natural areas, neighborhood spaces and riparian corridors were preserved throughout the city.



PROPOSED SOUTH LAKE UNION PLAN - 1995  
CONNECTING DENNY PARK TO LAKE UNION

**1976** ♦ Freeway Park was dedicated as the nation's first park created over a freeway.

**1983** ♦ Friends of Seattle's Olmsted Parks was formed to help preserve the Olmsted legacy in the Pacific Northwest.

**1984** ♦ National Association of Olmsted Parks annual convention was held in Seattle.

**1989** ♦ King County voters approved the Open Space and Trails Bond Issue for \$117 million, of which Seattle received \$41 million and leveraged another \$55 million toward the goal of purchasing 386 acres of open space.

**1997** ♦ After a defeat of a bond proposal in 1996, civic leaders begin planning the next park and open space initiative for the region.

### Management Challenge Non-native Invasive Plants



English ivy threatens Carkeek Park.



English ivy carpets another park.



### Seattle's Invaded Public Forest

Public Lands  
With  
Invasive Plants

■ Invasives Present  
■ No Invasives

Data from  
Habitats of Seattle Public Lands  
2000  
Seattle Urban Nature Project

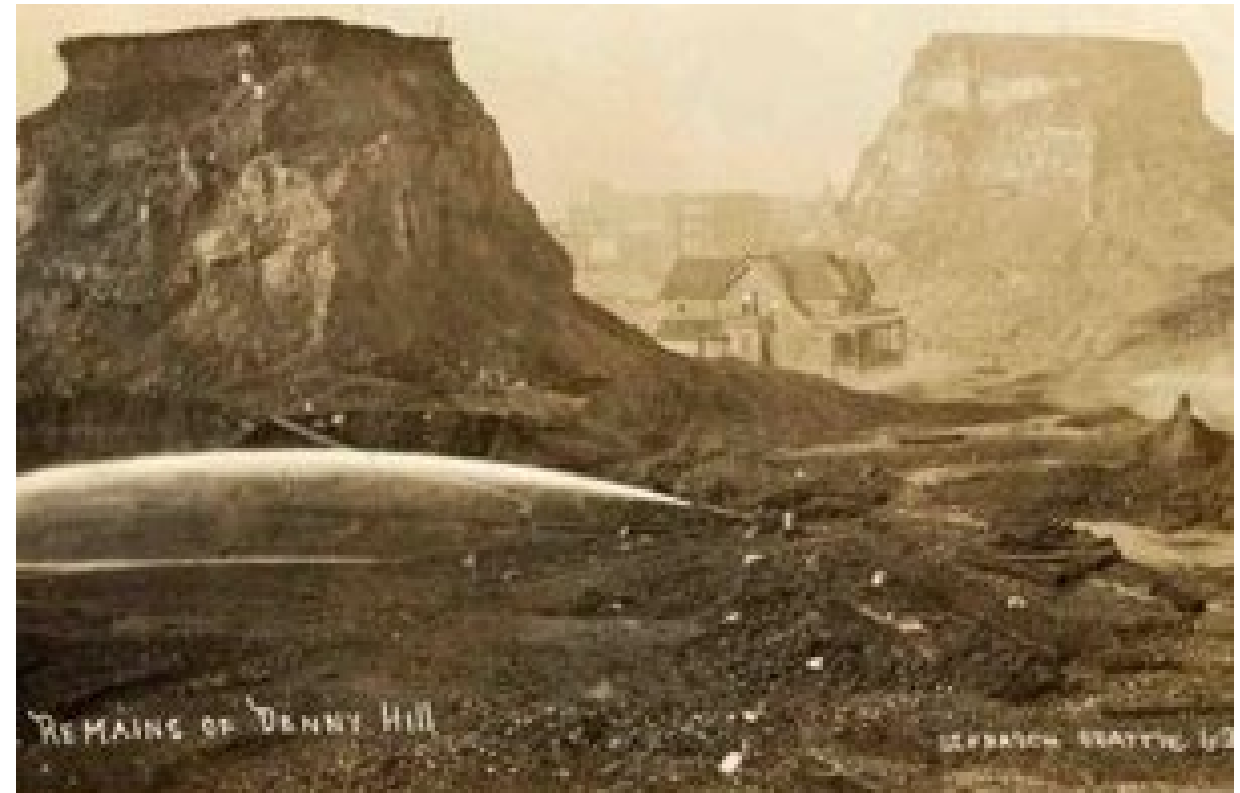


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# The Origins of the Green Seattle Partnership

Today, Seattle's forested parks and greenways are remnants of a once-vast forest that covered the entire Puget Sound region. After 150 years of logging, view-clearing, and passive management, these remnant forests became sick. Seattle's trees are aging and inundated with weeds that threaten the health of the entire forest. Most of our trees are now near the end of their natural lifespans.

Drive on Westlake Avenue along Lake Union, on Lakeview Boulevard below St. Mark's, on Cheasty Boulevard South in the Rainier Valley, or along parts of Lincoln Park in West Seattle and you may see what looks like a very picturesque scene: trees and ivy growing together to make a green landscape. But looks can be deceiving, and this pleasant green view hides a potentially devastating problem.



# It all started in 2004

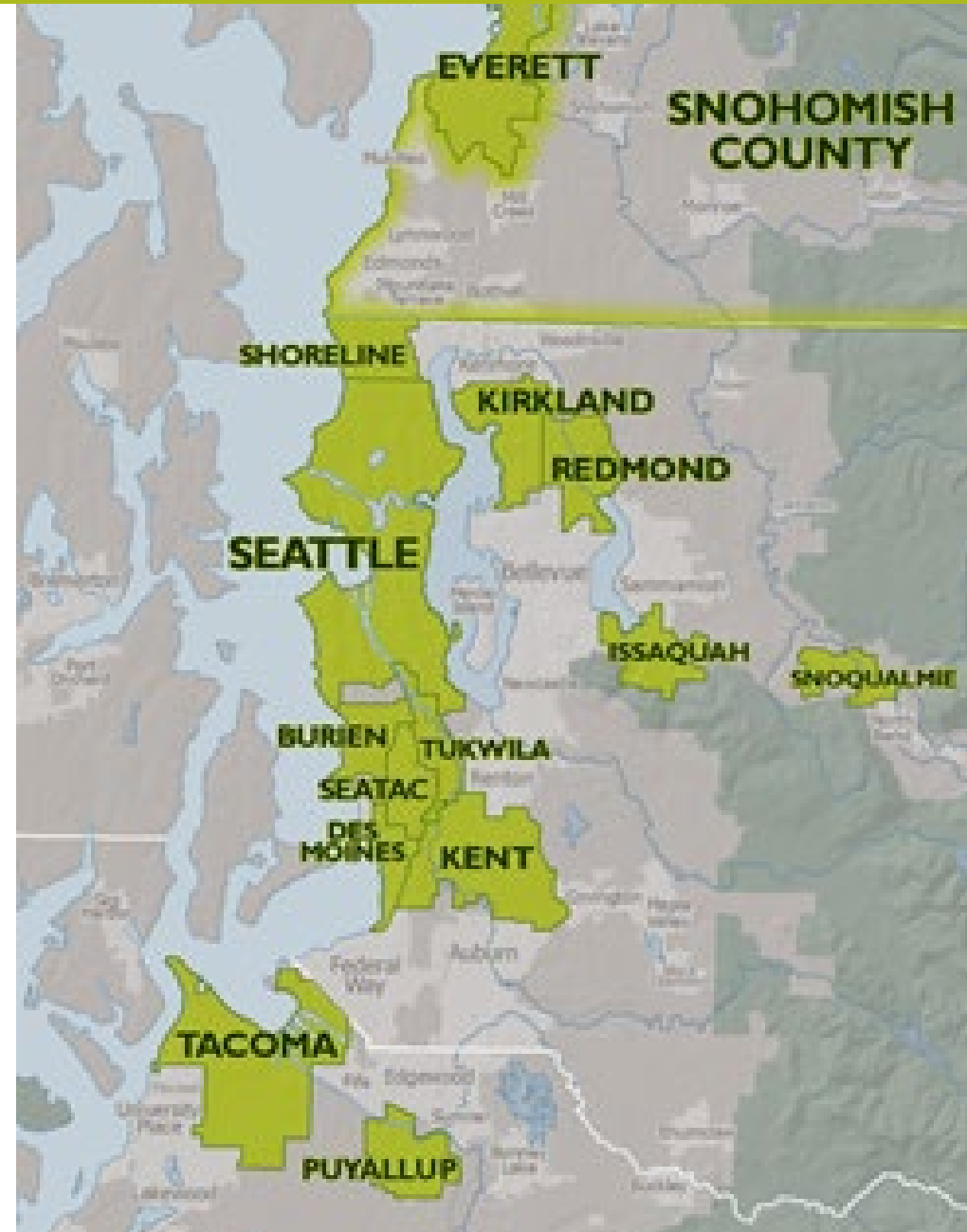


- City of Seattle
- SPR, SPU, OSE
- Forterra
- City Residents

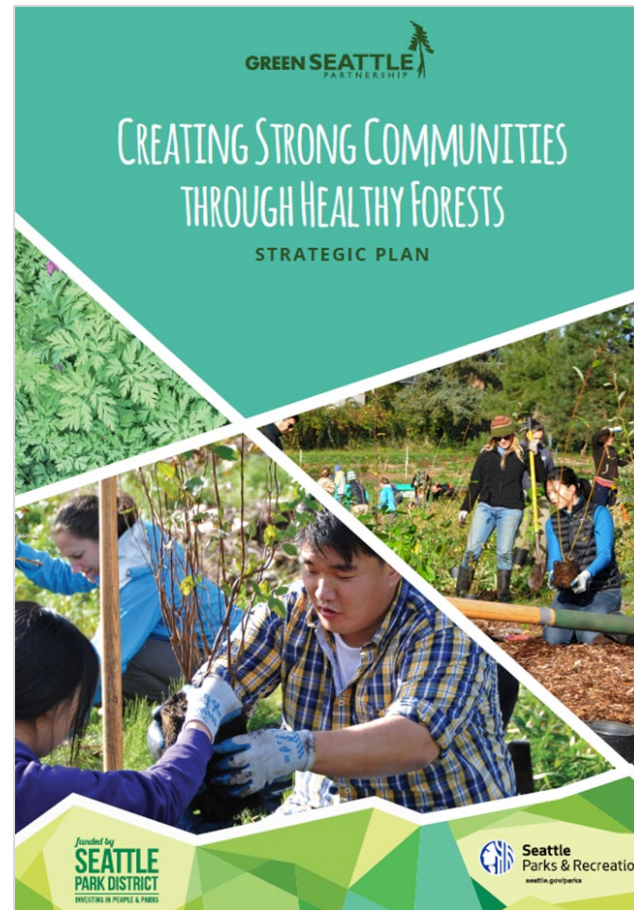
# Green City Partnerships: A Regional Network

## 2005 – 2021 Impacts:

- 15 Green Cities / Counties
- Combined Goal: ~ 13,000 acres
- Serving more than 1.6M People
- 1.5M hours of volunteer service
- More than 3,360 acres in restoration
- 1.5M forest trees and shrubs planted



# How It Started, How It's Going



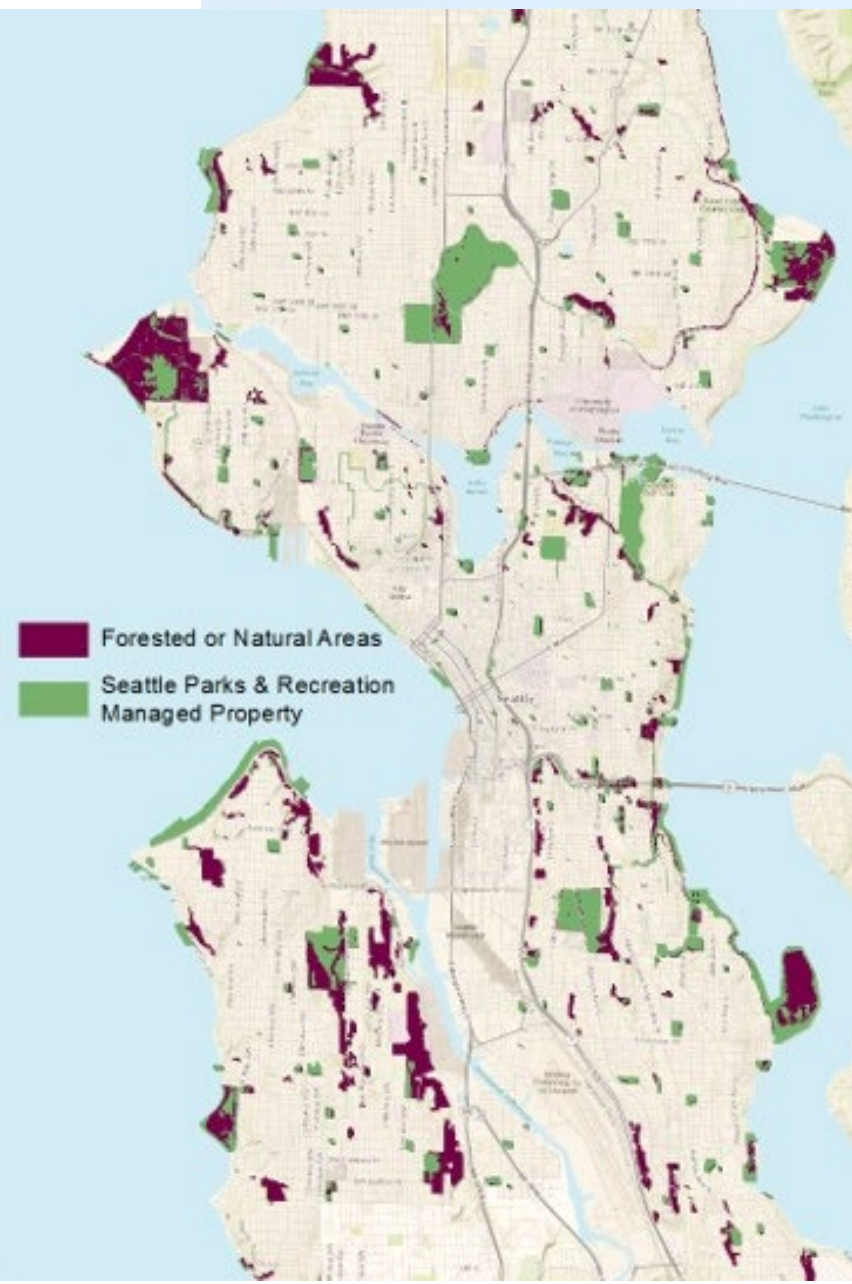
- **20-Year Plan** set stage for 2,500 acres by 2025 with two-fold goal: *Restore and maintain the forested parklands and designated natural areas of Seattle AND expand and galvanize an informed, involved, and active community around forest restoration and stewardship.*
- **2019 budget reduction** spurred **thorough evaluation of GSP** (2020 SLI response to City Council)
- **2024 Re-visioning:** longer enrollment and maintenance timeline to match ecological processes, along with programming re-visioning



#SeattleShines



# Where We Work



**6,441+** acres in park system

**12 %** of city's land mass

**2,754** acres destined for restoration

**40%** of SPR lands



# GSP Objectives



Improving human health through access to nature



Building wildlife habitat and improving Puget Sound health



Strengthening neighborhood cohesion



Increasing climate adaptation and resiliency



#SeattleShines







Dirt Corps staff and participants, Little Brook Natural Area

## Partner Organizations

Play a critical role in sparking community support through their unique missions. 16 contracted partner organizations in 2024. Scopes focus on engagement in restoration through paid job pathways programs, volunteer opportunities, educational activities, and other community-driven programming.

## Community Members

Come as individual or group participants, in volunteer or paid roles. Forest Stewards are volunteers that lead restoration and other volunteers at a dedicated site

## Professional Crews & City of Seattle

Crews support large-scale projects, work on steep slopes, wetland, and riparian restoration efforts across the city Partnership coordination from Ecology Team at SPR, extensive coordination within SPR and other City depts

# 19 Years of Transformative Programming



- 2,008 acres in ongoing restoration seeing weed management and planting
- 1.37M volunteer hours since 2005
- 1.4M plants including 339K trees
- Nearing 50K trees freed from vines
- 164 active Forest Stewards in 75 parks leading their communities 75 Forest Stewards have provided 10+ years of service
- In 2023, 132 paid and stipend participants received on-the-ground restoration and community-building experience

# Regional, National, and Int'l Networks



# 2023 YEAR IN REVIEW

SEATTLE WAS SELECTED BY UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAM AS 1 OF 18 GLOBAL ROLE MODEL CITIES TO SUPPORT GENERATION RESTORATION.



CELEBRATING 18 YEARS

## GREEN SEATTLE

PARTNERSHIP

2,008 TOTAL ACRES IN RESTORATION

### RESTORE AND MAINTAIN FORESTED PARK-LANDS AND DESIGNATED NATURAL AREAS

**32** NEW ACRES ENROLLED IN RESTORATION

**85%** RESTORATION-WORK ACREAGE WITHIN RACE AND SOCIAL EQUITY PRIORITY AREAS\*

**132** PAID AND STIPEND PARTICIPANTS RECEIVED ON-THE-GROUND RESTORATION AND COMMUNITY BUILDING EXPERIENCE

**289** ACRES OF FOREST MAINTENANCE AND ESTABLISHMENT WORK

**118** PARKS SAW RESTORATION ACTIVITY, 57 PARKS WERE IN PRIORITY RACE AND SOCIAL EQUITY AREAS\*

**63k** NATIVE PLANTS INSTALLED INCLUDING 9914 TREES, 5414 PLANTED IN CITY-DEFINED RACE AND SOCIAL EQUITY PRIORITY AREAS\*

**39k** PAID PROFESSIONAL CREW HOURS

\* PRIORITY RACE AND SOCIAL EQUITY AREAS INCLUDE HIGHEST- AND SECOND HIGHEST-RANKED LOCATIONS

### EXPAND AND GALVANIZE AN INFORMED, INVOLVED, AND ACTIVE COMMUNITY

**166** ACTIVE FOREST STEWARDS ORGANIZED 1644 VOLUNTEER EVENTS, 433 OF THESE EVENTS OCCURRED WITHIN RACE AND SOCIAL EQUITY AREAS PRIORITY AREAS\*

**33k** VOLUNTEER HOURS, 22% BY YOUTH #GenerationRestoration

**6** WEBINARS AND WORKSHOPS

**22** K-12 SCHOOLS AND SUMMER CAMPS INVOLVED IN RESTORATION ACTIVITIES, CONTRIBUTING 1373 HOURS OF TIME

**3** GREEN SEATTLE PARTNERSHIP AND TREES FOR SEATTLE HOSTED THE 3RD ANNUAL SEATTLE FOREST WEEK

**\$1.3 mil.** THE VALUE OF VOLUNTEER TIME INVESTED IN NATURAL AREAS

**\$100k** IN-KIND SUPPORT CONTRIBUTED BY PARTNERS

LEARN MORE

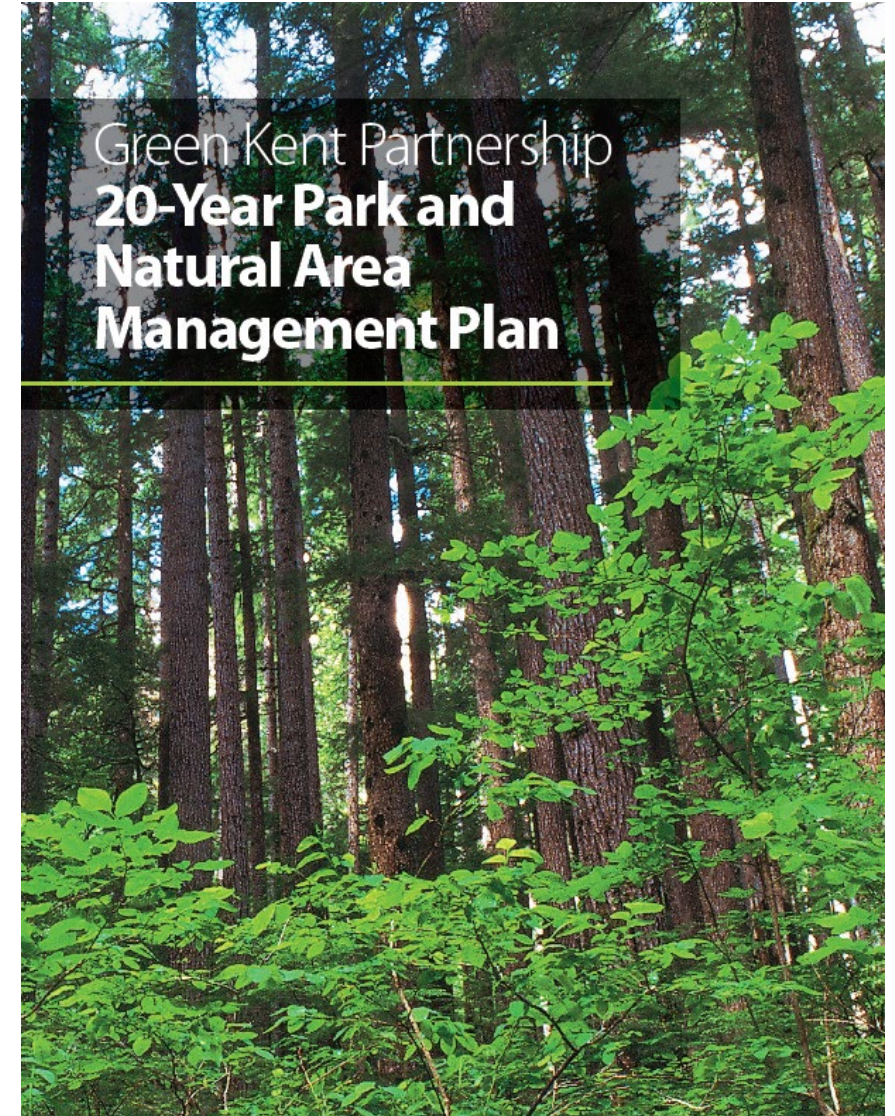


**THANK YOU!**



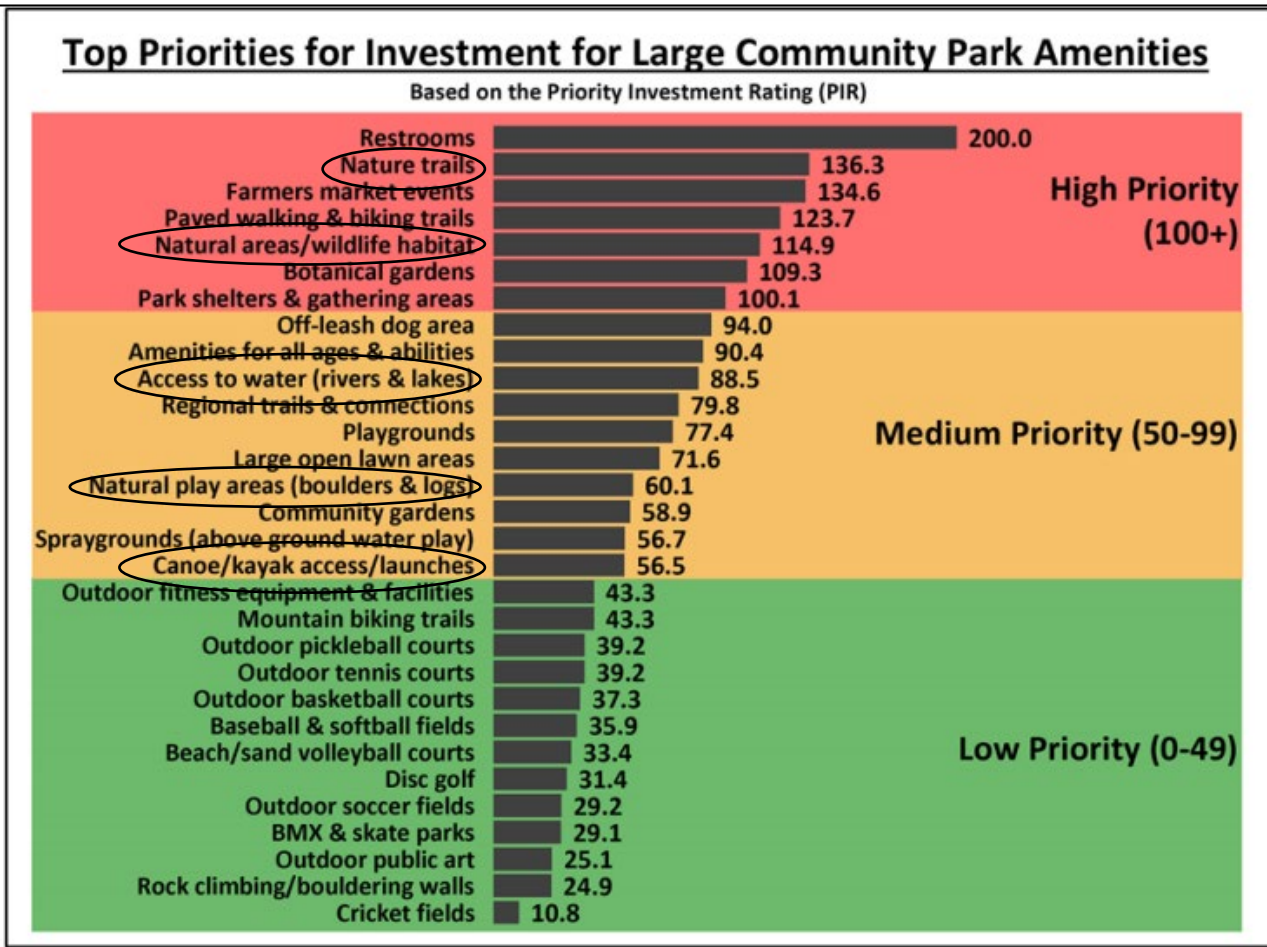
# Green Kent History

- Green Kent Partnership kicked off in 2009 with the development of a 20-Year Park and Natural Area Management Plan.
- Primary goal was to actively manage all **1,189 acres** of Kent's parks and natural areas in 20 years –
  - **500 acres** managed by Parks, rest by Public Works.
- Full time staff positions/program budget weren't funded to support goals outlined in 20-year plan
  - System-wide sustainability goals without adequate funding for basic property/program management.
- Relying almost entirely on volunteers the Green Kent Program wasn't achieving acreage enrollment goals after 9 years.
- **In 2019 we hit pause on Green Kent**
  - No Volunteer Stewards
  - Only 5 Parks Conservation events a year from 2019-23



# Community Support: Desired outcomes require investment

## 2022 Park and Open Space Plan



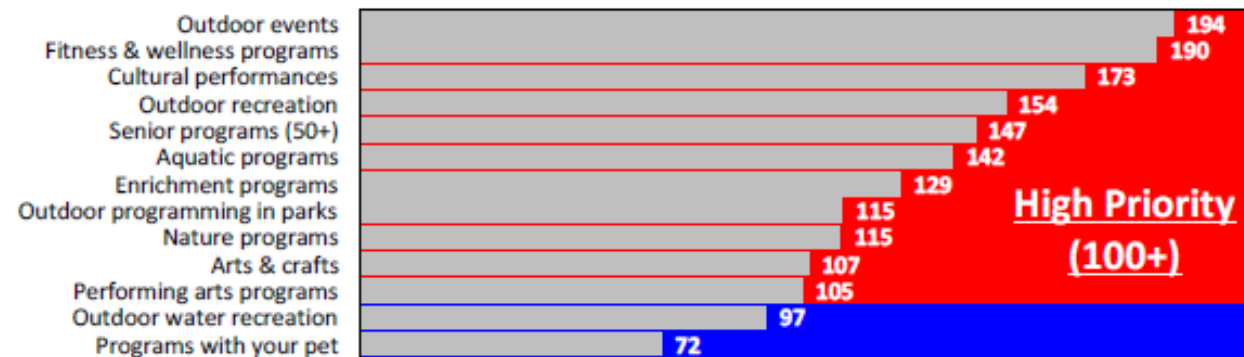
Source: 2021 Kent PRCS Community Interest & Opinion Survey – Findings Report

## 2019 Comprehensive Recreation Program Plan

Based on the Priority Investment Rating (PIR), 3 of the top 11 programs rated as high priorities for investment depend on safe and easy access to Natural Areas:

- Outdoor recreation (PIR=154)
- Outdoor programming in parks (PIR=115)
- Nature programs (PIR=115)

## Top Priorities for Investment for Recreation Programs Based on the Priority Investment Rating

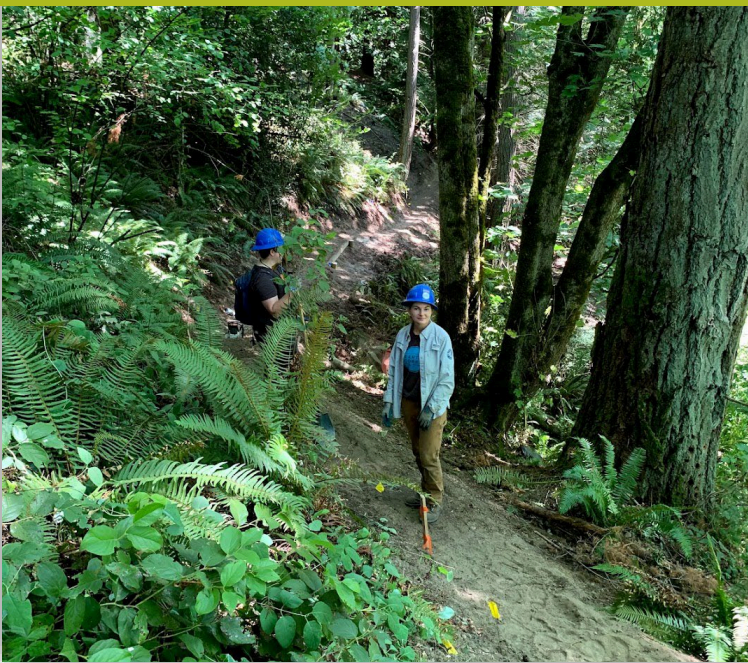


# Ecological function and recreational function overlap





## Making the case for a well rounded and sustainable natural resources management program





# Park Operations Natural Resource Program 2024

## Manage 3 Program Areas

- Park Natural Areas
- Park Urban Forestry
- Community Engagement

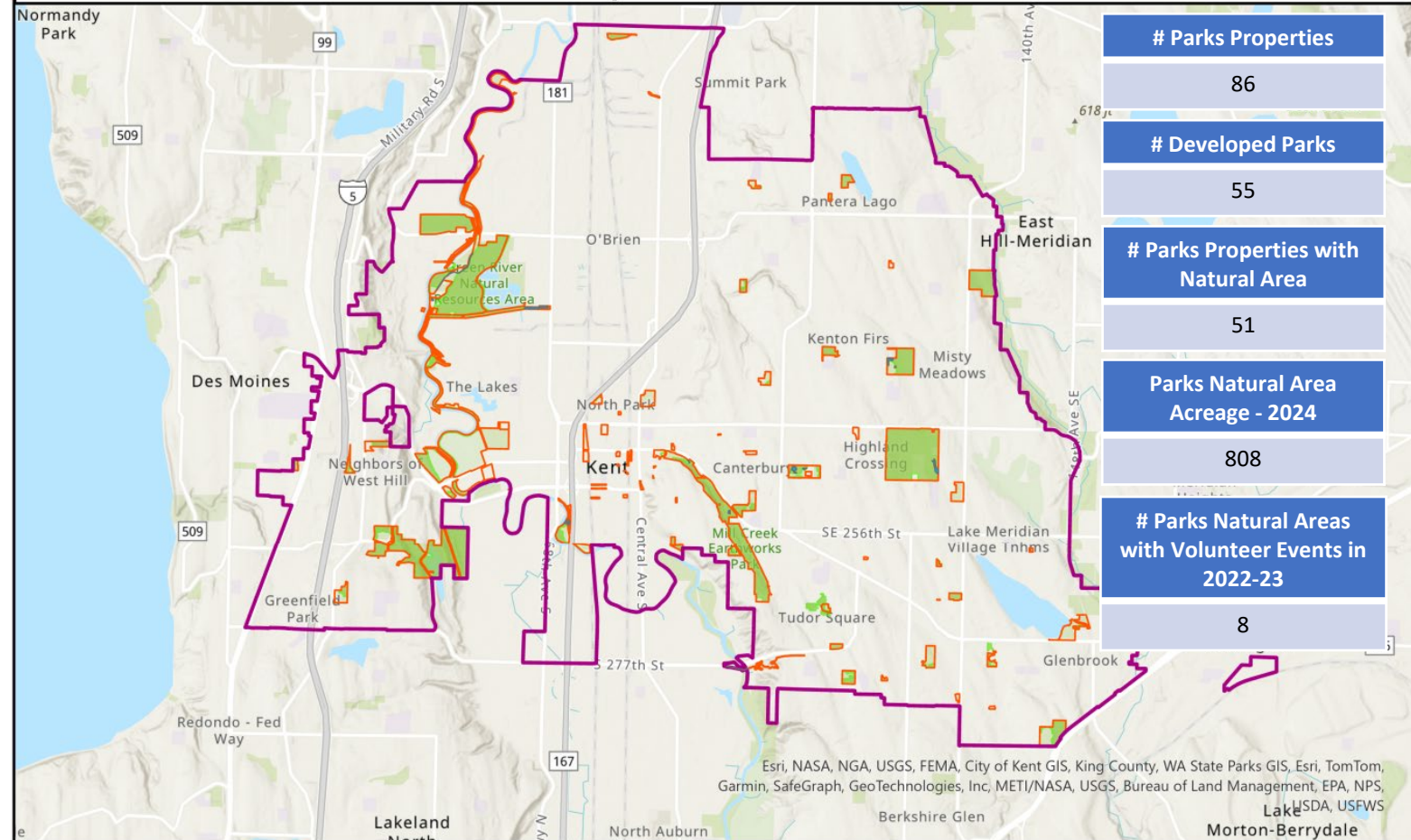
## To Achieve Outcomes

- Ecological Stewardship
  - Environmental Benefits
  - Climate Sustainability
- Access to Nature
  - Health and Wellness
  - Active Transportation
  - Social Equity and Inclusion
  - Youth Development



# How do Natural Resources Fit into Park Operations?

## Kent Parks Properties and Natural Areas



# Parks Properties	86
# Developed Parks	55
# Parks Properties with Natural Area	51
Parks Natural Area Acreage - 2024	808
# Parks Natural Areas with Volunteer Events in 2022-23	8

- ▭ Kent Parks
- ▭ Natural Areas
- ▭ 2022-23 Conservation Event Areas
- ▭ City Limits



### Developed Parks Maintenance Teams

- Paved and Regional Trails
- Recreation/Events Support
- Standalone Tree Pruning and minor removals

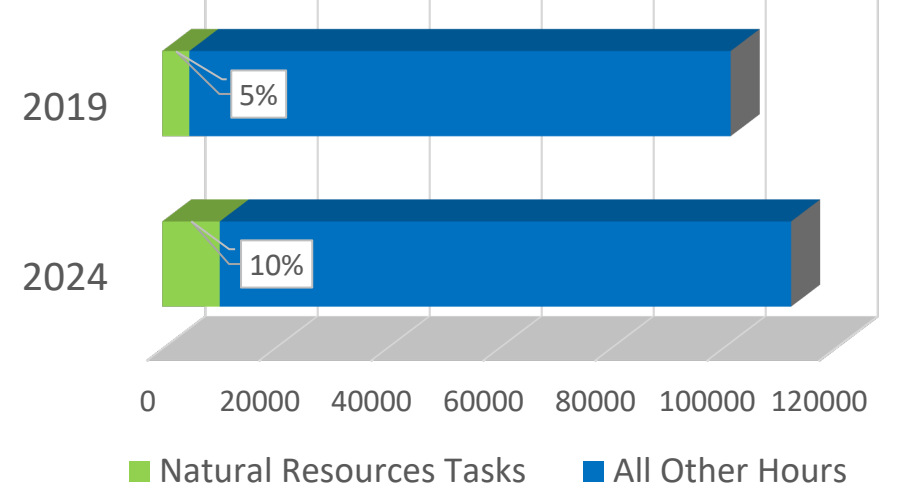
### Major Maintenance Team

- Parks NPDES/MS4 plans
- Park Ops Capital budget

### Natural Resources Management Team

- Urban Forestry Planning, Tree work Contracts, Forested Stands
- Natural Area Stewardship
- Managing Public Access for Nature-based recreation
- Environmental Education Access
- Volunteer Event coordination

### Parks Operations Staff Hours



■ Natural Resources Tasks    ■ All Other Hours

# Natural Resources Ops + Green Kent Re-Launch

- Original goals still exist and are valid, but we know more about urbanization pressure, climate change, environmental justice, and the challenges of managing natural areas at scale.
- Proactive natural resource management is now generally seen as core business of cities that supports overall community Health and Equity ...
- ...saves financial resources from invasive species impacts, tree failures, and costly cleanups in the long run,
- and leverages regional funding to our city while ensuring we have a seat at the table as permit requirements change to advocate for alignment with Kent's needs and goals.



# Broad Spectrum of Community Engagement:

Balancing Work, Learning, and Fun



**Emphasis on Natural Areas Benefits**

\*Site Adoption and Training Crews

**\*Monthly Green Kent Work Parties**

\*Environmental Education with planting, invasive removal, data collection

\*Trained "Super Volunteers" like Green Kent Stewards



**Emphasis on Participant Education**

\*Signage and Communication that makes our Natural Areas more available for self-directed recreation, exploration, relaxation

\*Nature-based Field Trips

\*Parks NR Staff at Partner Events



# Green Kent: Hands-on Stewardship



**GREEN KENT** 

**NEW LOOK.  
NEW PROGRAM.  
SAME MISSION.**

REGISTER TODAY!

## 2024 EVENT SCHEDULE

- ARBOR DAY: April 6
- EARTH DAY: April 20
- KENT KIDS TO PARKS DAY: May 18
- JUNE GREEN KENT WORK PARTY: June 15
- CONSERVATION DAY: July 20
- AUGUST GREEN KENT WORK PARTY: August 17
- SEPTEMBER GREEN KENT WORK PARTY: September 21
- ORCA RECOVERY DAY with  GREEN RIVER COALITION: October 19
- NOVEMBER GREEN KENT WORK PARTY: November 16

[MYKENTPARKS.COM/GREENKENT](https://mykentparks.com/greenkent)



Arbor Day 2024



# Green Kent: Lessons Learned

- Focusing on Priority Sites
- Planning for long term maintenance
- Events as part of NR team site maintenance plans
- Stewards (“super volunteers”) will be coming back in 2025, with some updates and more staff support



First 2024 Event was Arbor Day on April 6<sup>th</sup> at Riverview Park

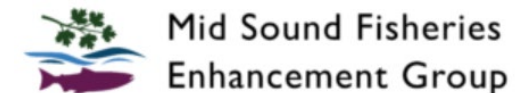
# Partners

## Kent Parks Natural Resource Team

- Intentional Outdoor Classroom Spaces
- Restoration Project Site Selection, Prep, and Maintenance
- On-Site Logistics
- Site Stewardship Lessons
- Careers in STEM examples
- Partnership Convening Potential

## Partners

- Students or Community Groups
- Interpretive Education Expertise
- Transportation and Scheduling
- Curriculum Alignment
- Regional Grant Funds
- Training Crews
- Professional Contractor Expertise



## From former youth involved in Green Kent...

“ To this day I hold the values and lessons learned from being in Green Kent for four years. My hope is to see this program continue and evolve for the wellbeing of everyone—to support themes of biocultural conservation, connection, and environmental justice—because the wellbeing of the earth and people are deeply intertwined; we can't live without one another.”





# GREEN BURIEN

PARTNERSHIP



# How We Got Here



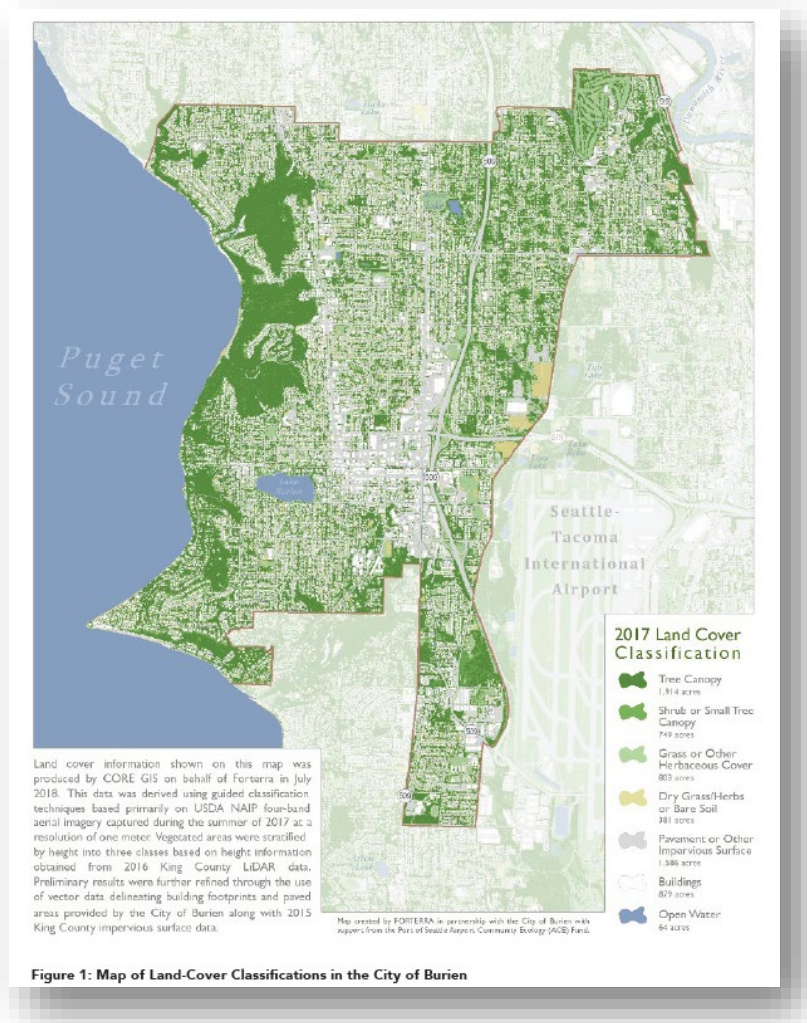
Adopt-a-Park  
Program Started  
in Burien

20 Year Plan  
Development  
Goal: Restore Burien  
Urban Forests

Burien City Council  
Adopted Green  
Burien Partnership  
Urban Forest  
Stewardship Plan

- 95% of program funded partnerships and existing staff time
- Award winning program
- Recognized statewide as an environmental justice leader

# Equitable Time and Resource Investment

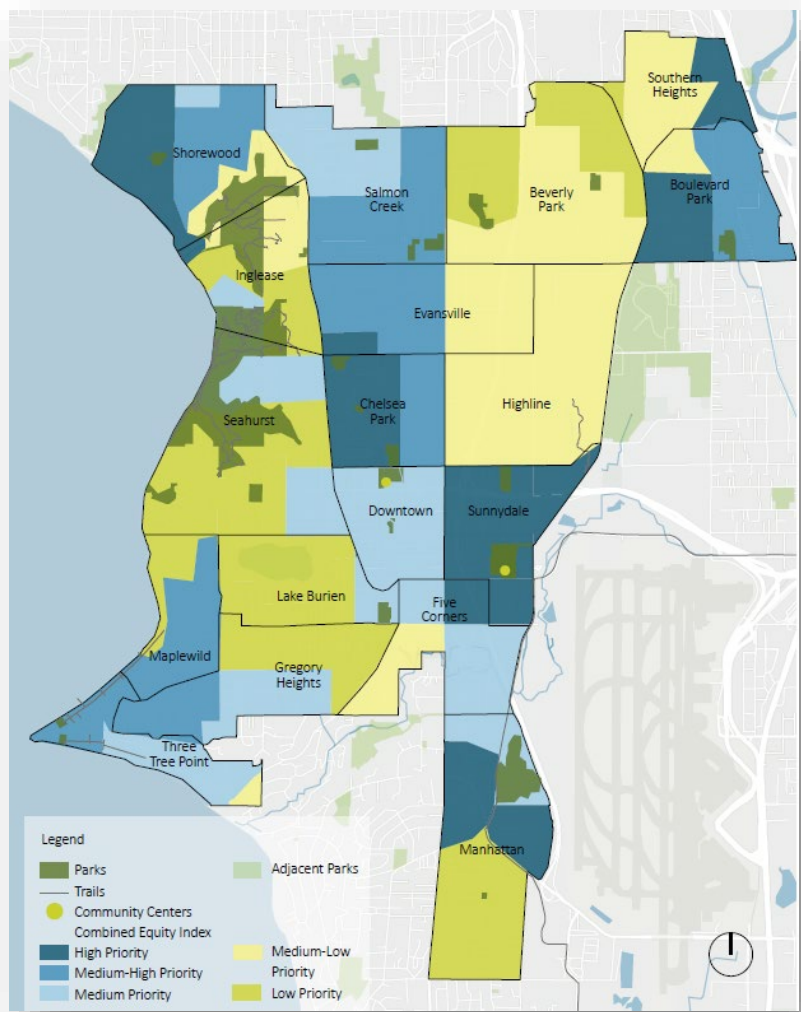


Land Cover Map (2017)

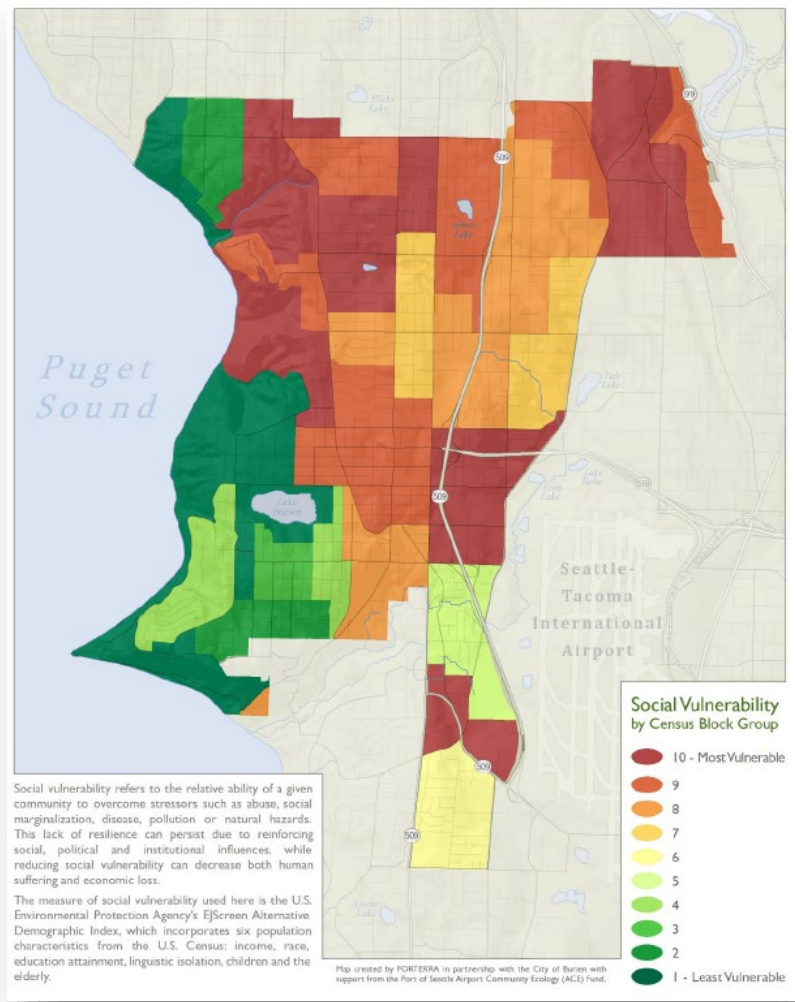


Green Burien Urban Forest Stewardship Guide

# Equitable Time and Resource Investment



Parks Recreation and Open Space (PROS) Equity Map



Social Vulnerability Map by Census Block Group

# Equitable Forest Stewardship Program



# Green Careers Internships for Youth



# Partnering Organizations



Urban Forest Stewardship Guides  
Forest Management Plans  
Maps  
Staffing  
Green Space Stewardship Support  
Community Specific Programming  
Youth Programming  
Professional Crew Work  
Community Engagement  
Stipends  
Grant Writing Support  
Communications  
Marketing  
Program Visibility  
Signage  
Food  
Clothing  
Supplies



# Summary/Themes

- Addressing regional and ecological challenges
- Needs, limitations, and opportunities of particular cities and landscapes
- It takes time to adapt and grow, and can go different ways
- Any parks department can find some crucial benefits of being a Green City

## Keep in mind:

- Partnerships
- Need for balance between Staff, Volunteers, Community Partners, and Professional Crews
- Need to prioritize and phase projects
- Need to consider long term stewardship



# Questions?

## Learning Objectives

1. The participant will be able to analyze the drivers for the initial creation of Green Cities programs within various Parks departments, as well as the motivations and challenges that have led to programmatic evolutions.
2. The participant will be encouraged to evaluate how their city or team could benefit from an integrated and actionable focus on resource management and community engagement if they don't have one, or evaluate how their organization is doing if they do.
3. The participant will be empowered to discuss the importance and urgency of incorporating natural resources management into business as normal while redefining business as usual to include an ecological equity lens.

Eric Sterner [eric.sterner2@seattle.gov](mailto:eric.sterner2@seattle.gov)

Gabbi Gonzales [GabbiG@BurienWA.gov](mailto:GabbiG@BurienWA.gov)

Margaret Wagner [mwagner@kentwa.gov](mailto:mwagner@kentwa.gov)