Project Completion Report

Reclaiming Parkland Prairie Nature Preserve

Introduction

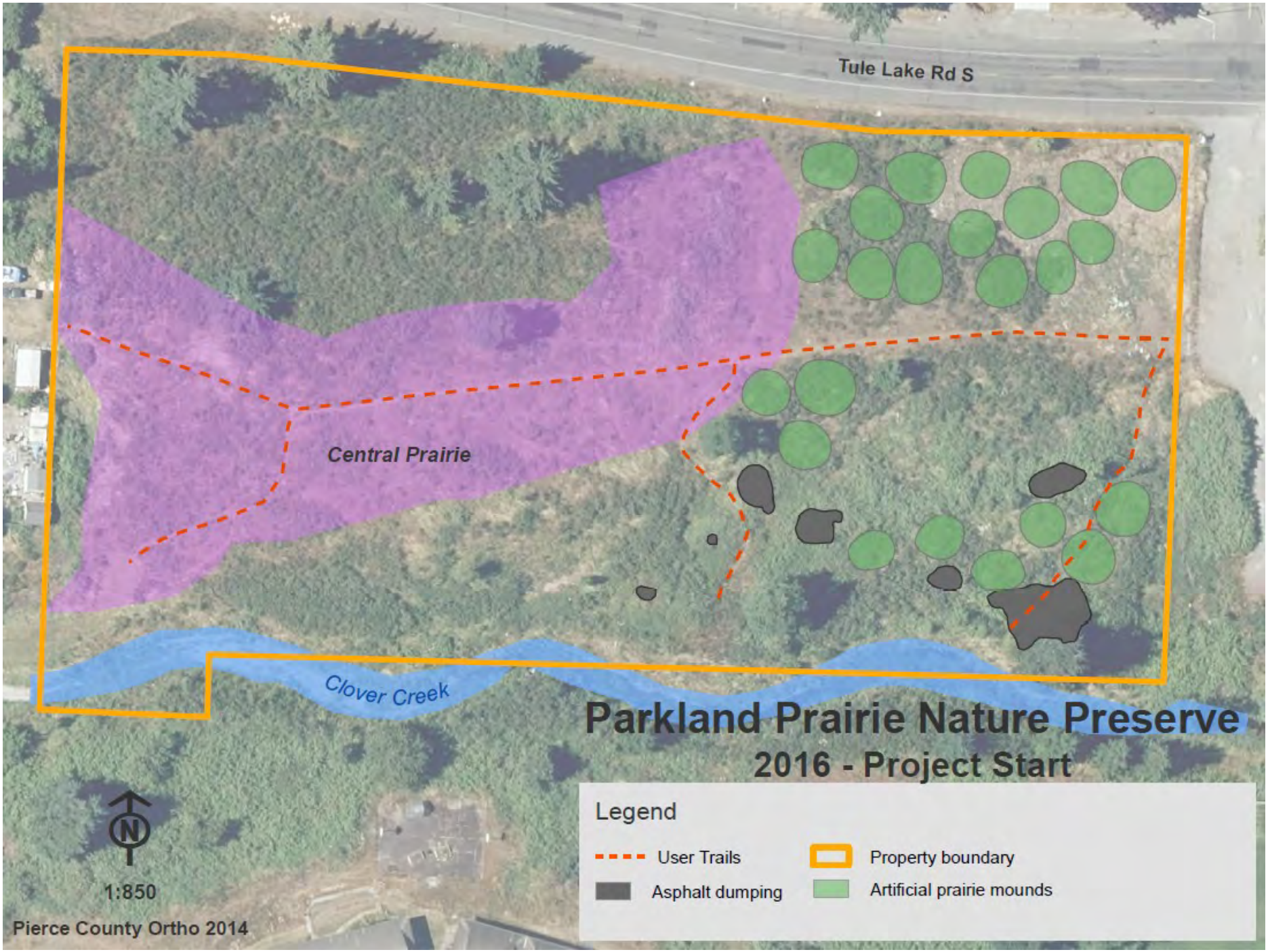
The Reclaiming Parkland Prairie Nature Preserve is a demonstration project by Pierce County Parks and Recreation (Parks) and the Pierce County Beekeeper Association (Beekeepers Association) designed to support pollinators by replacing noxious weeds with native forage plants. The project is funded in part by a grant from the Washington Department of Agriculture (WSDA Contract No. K1939) and a Local and Community Projects Program (CTED 17-93205-030). Additional funding, provided by Pierce County Surface Water Management, expanded the project to include restoration of the on-site Clover Creek riparian area.

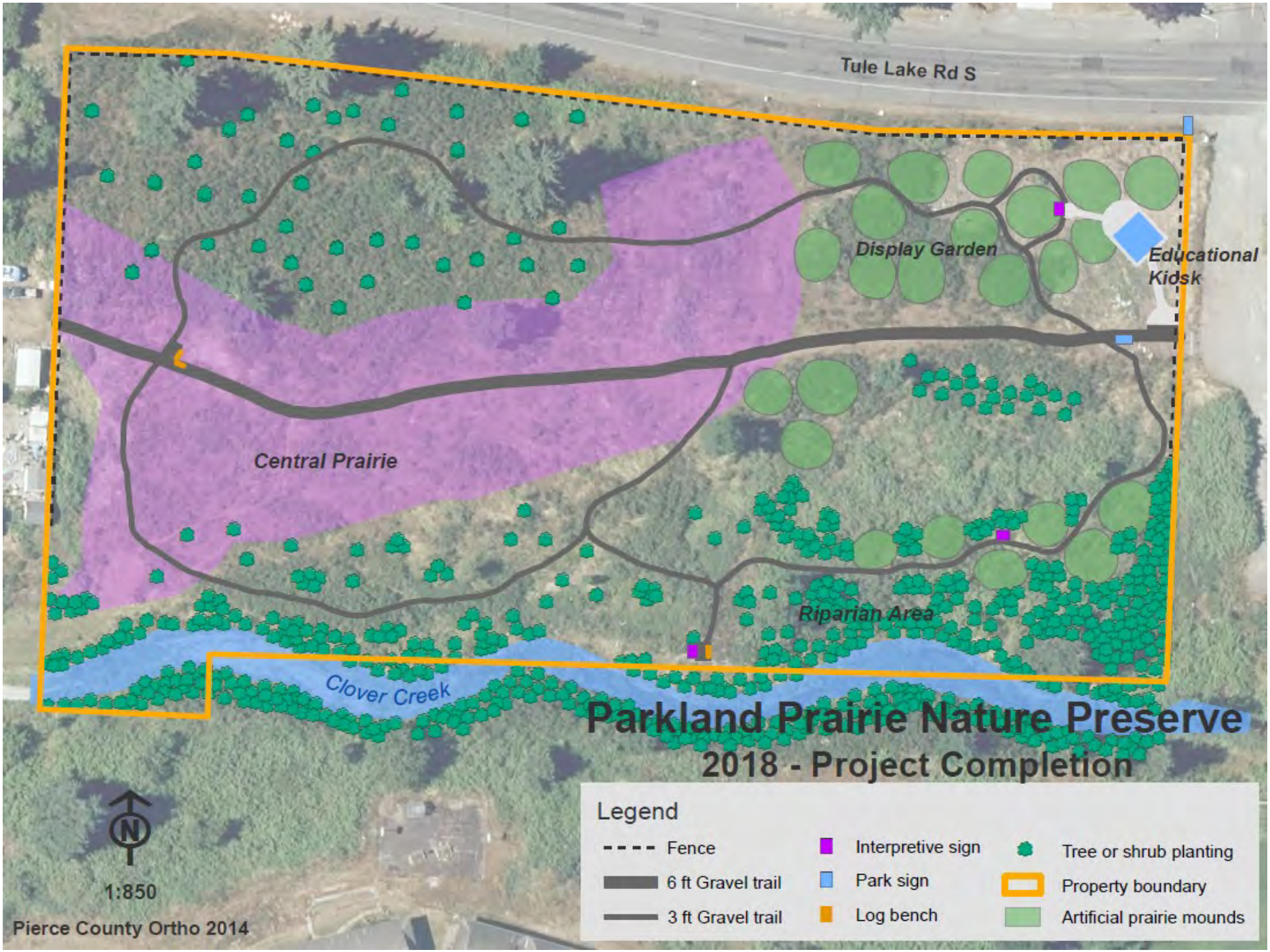
The project's purpose was to test and assesses a model involving multiple interest groups and agencies, and to provide resource materials on restoring habitats to support pollinators. In the process, the project transformed the Parkland Prairie Nature Preserve from a blighted property to a community asset.

This collection of photographs show the site's annual progression starting in February 2016 (Year 0) to its completion in November 2018 (Year 3). It also highlights the public access, habitat enhancement, support, and future plans.

Project Location

The project is located at the Parkland Prairie Nature Preserve (site), a 4.5-acre county-owned open space located at the intersection of Tule Lake Road and Yakima Ave S in the Parkland community of unincorporated Pierce County. Natural site features include a remnant of prairie habitat and Clover Creek, which runs east to west along the southern property boundary.


Tule Lake Rd S
Central Prairie
Clover Creek
Parkland Prairie Nature Preserve
2016 - Project Start
Legend
User Trails
Property boundary
Asphalt dumping
Artificial prairie mounds
N
1:850
Pierce County Ortho 2014


Tule Lake Rd S
Display Garden
Educational Kiosk
Central Prairie
Riparian Area
Clover Creek
Parkland Prairie Nature Preserve
2018 - Project Completion
Legend
Fence
6 ft Gravel trail
3 ft Gravel trail
Interpretive sign
Park sign
Log bench
Tree or shrub planting
Property boundary
Artificial prairie mounds
N
1:850
Pierce County Ortho 2014

Year 0 - Project Start

At the start of the project in early 2016, the Parkland Prairie Nature Preserve was unmaintained, dominated by Scotch broom, and contained dumping and encampments.

Parks and the Beekeepers Association created the Parkland Prairie Advisory Group to provide technical support for the project. The Advisory Group assessed habitat conditions and worked with Parks to developed a work program and concept plan to improve the site.

The goal: to enhance the existing prairie habitat and riparian area, create a pollinator display garden, and provide a space for environmental education.

Google Earth street view of the site from Tule Lake Road and Yakima Ave S

Central prairie prior to site improvements

Clover Creek riparian area (winter 2016) prior to site improvements

Year 1 - Site Preparation

Throughout 2016 Parks and the Advisory Group worked to clean-up the site and prepare it for public access.

Parks installed a new fence, pruned trees for clearance, removed trash and dumping, installed water and irrigation lines, and mowed the Scotch broom in the upland areas.

Volunteers through the Advisory Group and the Pitch-In-For-Parks program manually pulled Scotch broom from the riparian area and started planting native flowering trees and shrubs to benefit wildlife.

The site from Tule Lake Road and Yakima Ave S after mowing and new fence install

Central prairie after Scotch broom removal

Clover Creek riparian area after Scotch broom removal

Year 2 - Site Restoration

Work throughout 2017 focused on opening the site for public use and enhancing the pollinator and wildlife habitats.

Parks installed crushed gravel walking trails, excavated and removed the dumped asphalt, and installed Park entrance and rules signs.

Volunteers and the Washington Conservation Corps focused on installing native plantings. This included seeding the prairie and display garden with native wildflowers, and planting flowering trees and shrubs along the riparian area. Parks Maintenance installed overhead and drip irrigation systems in all planting areas.

Parkland Prairie from Tule Lake Road and Yakima Ave S after planting and sign install

Main trail (ADA accessible) through the central prairie

North riparian area with trail, new plantings, and irrigation system

Year 3 - Project Completion

2018 focused on completing all major site improvements, including a place for environmental education as envisioned back in 2016 by the Advisory Group.

Parks designed and contracted the installation of the educational kiosk. The three interpretive signs were placed in select locations throughout the site. Logs and woody debris salvaged from other Park properties were repurposed into sitting benches and wildlife habitat piles.

Volunteers and the Washington Conservation Corps continued weed control and installing supplemental native plants in the display garden and riparian areas.

Parkland Prairie from Tule Lake Road and Yakima Ave S after project completion

Main trail through the central prairie in the spring of 2018

North riparian area with interpretive sign and bench

Public Use

Parks and grant funded infrastructure improvements created a safe space for the community to connect with nature. This includes passive recreation, such as walking trails, and a sheltered location to conduct educational programing.

Improvements for public use include:

- Black vinyl chain-link fence with pedestrian and maintenance access gates
- 2,200 linear feet of crushed rock trails, with the main and north loop trails being ADA accessible (1,300 linear feet)
- Main entry and rules sign
- Three interpretive signs
- Educational kiosk near the entrance

Educational kiosk connected to the main entry gate

Parks rule sign and crushed rock trail

ADA accessible interpretive sign about pollinators

Habitat Enhancements

Habitat enhancements focused on the prairie and riparian area of Clover Creek. The existing remnant prairie was diversified with locally sourced prairie wildflowers, which were also installed in display garden to create a flowering entryway. A diversity of trees and shrubs were planting in the riparian area to shade the creek and improve water quality.

The project's planting plan, developed by the Advisory Group, includes:

- Only native species
- A diversity of trees, shrubs, annual and perennial forbs
- Species adaptive to site conditions
- Species with overlapping bloom times
- Species known to benefit pollinators

Tree and shrub plantings and prairie wildflowers in the riparian area

Shrub planting with drip irrigation

Prairie wildflowers in the display garden

Partnerships and Support

The partnership and community support for this project has been exemplary. The Advisory Group grew to 39 members from 15 different interest groups and organizations, and included university professors and high school teachers, botanists and restoration ecologists, members of the Parkland community, and even a motorcycle club.

Most members were passively involved, providing technical expertise when asked. Core members were actively involved, they studied the site, did hands-on restoration work, and organized volunteer events.

These volunteers turned the Parkland Prairie Nature Preserve from a place of blight to a place of community pride.

Washington Conservation Corps members installing prairie plants

Native Plant Society and Master Gardener members directing volunteers

Mount Rainier Lutheran High students pulling Scotch broom

Continued Effort

Though the Reclaiming Parkland Prairie Project is complete, the site will continue to receive improvements and connect with the community:

- Pitch-In-For-Parks will hold community volunteer events at Parkland Prairie in the spring and fall
- Parks and the Washington Conservation Corps will continue weed control and site maintenance
- Parks will continue its partnership with local schools and outreach to others in using the site as an outdoor classroom and support nature based programing
- The planned Parkland Community Trail Network will connect Parkland Prairie to local schools, parks, and other destination points within the Parkland and Spanaway community

Pitch-In-For-Parks volunteers at Parkland Prairie