SNOHOMISH COUNTY
HEALTHY FOREST
PROJECT

# Snohomish County Healthy Forest Project— Frequently Asked Questions

February 2023

1. **What is the Healthy Forest Project?**

   The Healthy Forest Project (HFP) is a community stewardship program which aims to restore and care for the forested parks and natural areas managed by Snohomish County. The framework and structure of the program follows Forterra's Green City Partnership model, used in 14 cities across the Puget Sound region, including Seattle, Tacoma, and Everett. This partnership relies on work and input from community member volunteers, our non-profit partners, and Snohomish County staff.

2. **How do I sign up to volunteer?**

   Sign up on CEDAR, the shared sign-up platform for the Green Cities Network. At this website you can sign up for Snohomish County events and other events around the Sound.

3. **Who can participate?**

   Everyone is welcome to participate regardless of ability level. Some events may only be available to people 18 years and older or limit the number of children that can participate due to the suitability of the event's activities or Forest Steward preference.

   For events that accept volunteers under 18, a signed youth waiver form is required unless a parent or guardian is present.

4. **How often does the Healthy Forest Project hold events?**

   Event scheduling depends on Forest Steward availability and the work site. In 2022, Snohomish County's HFP hosted 17 events. We aim to increase the number of work parties held in 2023.

5. **What do volunteers do during the work parties?**

   Work parties can offer a variety of activities depending on the needs of the site and the time of year. Activities include invasive plant removal (mostly blackberry and ivy), planting native plants, watering recent plantings, applying mulch in recently planted or cleared areas, and more.

6. **What should I wear for work parties?**

   Be prepared to work rain or shine! Wear closed-toed shoes and dress in layered clothing that you don't mind getting dirty. Shoes with ankle support, long sleeves, and long pants are strongly recommended as volunteers will sometimes move off trail or encounter prickly plants. Remember to bring rain gear if rain is in the forecast.

7. **What else do I need to bring?**

   Please bring your own water, layers, and snacks. Forest Stewards or staff will bring a first aid kit, tools, and gloves. Feel free to bring your own gloves or hand tools if you have them.

8. **What is a Forest Steward?**

   Forest Stewards are dedicated and trained volunteers who serve as the backbone of the Healthy Forest Project. They build a community of stewardship around public forested parks and natural areas to safeguard their future. Forest Stewards commit to stewarding a specific park or natural area in collaboration with county staff and their community. Some of their responsibilities include serving as a key contact for stewardship activities at a park, coordinating volunteer forest restoration events, and participating in site-planning.

9. **How do I become a Forest Steward?**

   Reach out to the program manager at healthyforest@snoco.org to schedule a 90-minute orientation. This initial training will describe the project, explain the role of a Forest Steward, introduce the project sites, and provide additional resources. After your orientation, you will do a site visit with the program manager; collaborate with the program manager on a work plan for your chosen site; learn how to use CEDAR to track restoration progress and volunteer hours; and begin hosting events!

10. **Where is restoration happening now?**

    The HFP is currently active on 1.957 acres of forested parkland at four sites: Meadowdale Beach Park; McCollum Pioneer Park; Lake Stickney Community Park; and Picnic Point.

11. **Can I suggest another restoration site?**

    The HFP is focused on enrolling restoration at six other sites: Paradise Valley Conservation Area; Lord Hill Regional Park; Evergreen State Fairgrounds; Smith Island Southwest; Kayak Point; and Portage Creek Wildlife Area.

If you are interested in conducting restoration at another site, please contact the Healthy Forest Project. Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) staff will review the request and potential suitability for the program. Your suggestion may be taken into consideration, but this is no guarantee as some parks may be unsuitable for volunteer groups.

**12. How do you prioritize restoration sites?**

The Green Cities Model uses a forest land assessment tool (FLAT) to characterize and prioritize restoration sites. First, a site is assessed and broken up into habitat management units that have similar characteristics. These defining characteristics include species composition, forest stand age, slope, and soil moisture. Then, each habitat management unit is assigned a threat matrix, or tree-iage, value. This value combines data on habitat composition and invasive species cover to indicate the threat that invasive species pose to the forest's health.

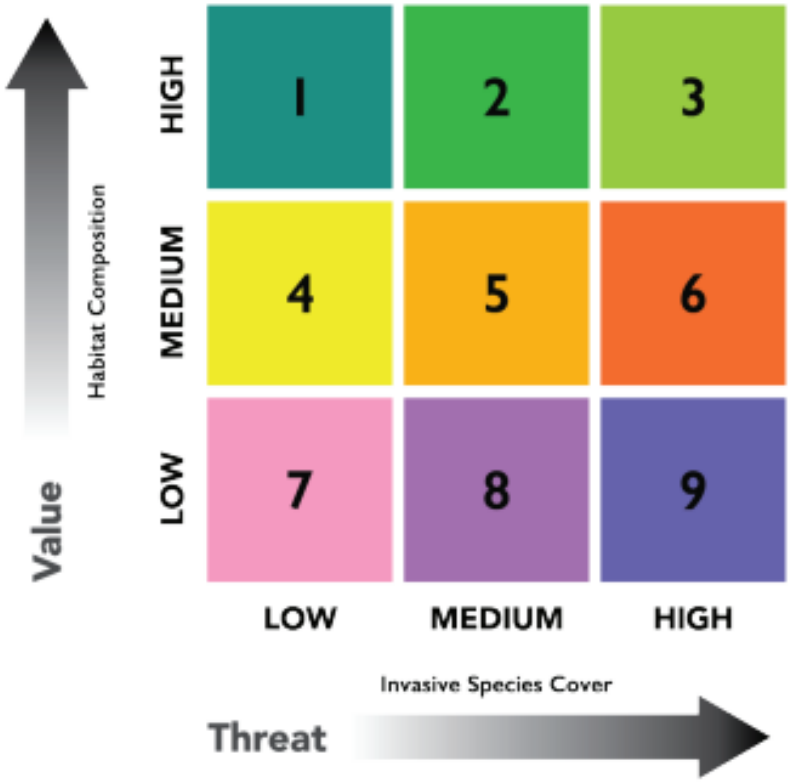


*Figure 1* Forest Land Assessment Tool and Tree-iage legend. Habitat value and invasive species threat create a matrix of 9 different categories.

Habitat value is defined by canopy cover percentage and species composition.

- **Low habitat value**: less than 25 percent native tree canopy cover, or 0 percent evergreen species

- **Medium habitat value**: more than 25 percent native tree canopy cover with evergreen species composing less than 50 percent of all canopy species
- **High habitat value**: more than 25 percent native tree canopy cover with evergreen species composing over 50 percent of all canopy species.

Invasive species threat is represented by the percentage of invasive species cover.

- **Low invasive threat**: less than 5 percent invasive species cover
- **Medium invasive threat**: between 5 and 50 percent invasive species cover
- **High invasive threat**: more than 50 percent invasive species cover.

Once the habitat management units have been defined and assessed for invasive species cover and habitat value, these data are combined within the FLAT matrix and assigned a tree-iage value between 1 and 9. The highest priority management units at a site will have a tree-iage value of 3-6. These units are management priorities because they are most vulnerable to invasive takeover. High value habitats with low or medium invasive cover (1-2) are resilient enough to wait for intervention. Low value habitats with medium or high invasive cover (8-9) are already dominated by invasive species and need intensive and frequent management to make a lasting impact. Meanwhile, if restoration activities occur in those management units, invasive species gain ground at medium value sites. Therefore, the Healthy Forest Project prioritizes sites with tree-iage values of 3-6.

To learn more about the FLAT or the tree-iage matrix, read pages 31-35 of the 20-year plan.

**13. How does the project account for changing climate in its restoration activities?**

Climate change represents much uncertainty, both in daily life and in coordinating future land use and management. The Healthy Forest Project is highly aware of the demands placed on urban forests to protect residents from the dangers of climate change and is committed to encouraging resilience in Snohomish County forests. The HFP accounts for climate change by planting diverse native plant species that match the target ecosystem of their habitat management unit.

Restoration is a process, not an end goal, that focuses on creating a more resilient ecosystem. Resilient ecosystems are diverse. Many different hazards, from drought, flooding, extreme heat, fire, and invasive species can threaten forests. These hazards affect different species in different ways because of those plants' specific genetic and adapted traits. For example, some species thrive in flooded soils, while others prefer dry, rocky soils. When both types of plants live in a forest together, they increase the odds of survival for the entire forest in case of drought or flooding. Forests with a greater diversity of species can survive a greater range of natural hazards resulting from climate change.

When considering what to plant, land managers use reference, or target, ecosystems. By comparing what plants grow together and in what conditions in other forests, land managers can determine which plants to fill in the gaps at a restoration site. For example, red alder and douglas-fir are trees that often grow together. If a forest has red alder, but no douglas-fir,

volunteers can reintroduce doug-fir and alder's other plant associates at the next planting event. Maintaining and enriching the existing ecosystem ensures that the forest community functions as it should and increases resilience to climate-related disturbances.

As the climate changes, the Puget Sound area may begin to look and function like habitats nearby, particularly those in coastal Oregon. To prepare Snohomish County forests for these changes, residents can also plant individuals with a seed source from a nearby planting zone. Plants of the same species in different geographic areas are adapted to a different set of climate conditions. By introducing individuals that are more resistant to extreme heat and drought, restored forests will shift to become more tolerant of these conditions. However, it is also important not to source plants from too far away, as they may not acclimate well. Click here to learn more about USDA plant hardiness zones or go to the Washington Native Plant Society website to learn more about native gardening and seed sources.

14. Where can I find the project on social media?

    You can find us on Instagram and Facebook.

15. Who do I contact to learn more?

    Contact the program manager at healthyforest@snoco.org or call 425-312-0586.