

## SOUTH PUGET SOUND PRAIRIES

**Say “prairies” and Puget Sound is not usually the first place that comes to mind.**

Yet the South Puget Sound is home to some of the most distinctive—and threatened—prairie ecosystems in the country. Here you’ll find rare butterflies fluttering among uncommon wildflowers with enchanting names like golden paintbrush and rose checkermallow.

It’s also where an unconventional partnership is developing between The Nature Conservancy and Evergreen Sportsmen’s Club in Littlerock, south of Olympia. The two have agreed to a Scotch broom removal project taking place on 30 of the club’s 300 acres of prairie land.

The venture is part of the Mima Corridor Project, which aims to improve the biological link between Glacial Heritage Preserve and Mima Mounds Natural Area Preserve by working with private landowners to restore their properties between and near the preserves.

After three years of talks, the Evergreen Sportsmen’s Club has agreed to allow the Conservancy to remove invasive Scotch broom from its property using three types of removal techniques: the traditional method of using a rotary mower, using a flail mower, and hand cutting with brush cutters.

The removal was conducted in December, and the first data collection took place last spring, says Eric Delvin, the Conservancy’s Thurston County project manager. It will take at least one year for results, he adds.

While the Conservancy has not planted wildflowers on the site, a number have returned from the seed bank, “including



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an impressive showing of Camas” in their vibrant blue hues, Delvin says.

Beyond testing which removal techniques are most effective, the Conservancy also hopes to learn how the various methods affect soil quality, growth of native plants, and the viability of rare species, says Peter Dunwiddie, senior ecologist for the Conservancy.

Coy Chappell, president of the club’s board of directors, says he was at first concerned about what responsibilities the club might be taking on in the partnership.

The club has agreed to not engage in activities that hurt the restoration work, which Chappell says is not difficult since the club does not allow hunting on its land.

The partnership is going well, Chappell adds. “I’m not a big Scotch broom fan. The less of it I see, the happier I am.”



PHOTOS BY JOAN FISH



## PUGET SOUND

**Conservancy crews recently placed empty shells of Pacific oysters** (a species introduced to Puget Sound for commercial harvest) on test plots in Woodard Bay, Henderson Inlet. The shells are meant to provide places for Olympia oyster larvae to attach and grow. Olympia oysters, the only oyster native to Washington, once were abundant but are now seriously depleted by pollution, habitat loss, and overharvest.

The Conservancy is partnering with the Puget Sound Restoration Fund, a nonprofit group that works on shellfish and

habitat projects throughout the Sound, to restore habitat in areas where oysters and larvae are already present.

Such collaborations are part of a much larger effort to restore hundreds of miles of shoreline and create new waterfront parks throughout Puget Sound: a three-year, \$80 million campaign led by the Conservancy, The Trust for Public Land, and People for Puget Sound.