

Achieving Global Standards through Urban Biodiversity Conservation & Community Stewardship



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We acknowledge the **lək'wənjən**-speaking Peoples (Songhees and Kosapsum) on whose territory the Nature Sanctuary stands, and the **lək'wənjən**-speaking and **W̱SÁNEĆ** Peoples — including the **W̱JOŁEŁP** (Tsartlip), **BOŖEĆEN** (Pauquachin), **STÁUTW̱** (Tsawout), **W̱SIKEM** (Tseycum) and **MÁLEXEL** (Malahat) — whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day. We respect the vital relationships of First Peoples with these lands and waters for countless generations. We are honoured to receive Indigenous guidance and welcome collaboration in stewardship and appreciation of the Nature Sanctuary.

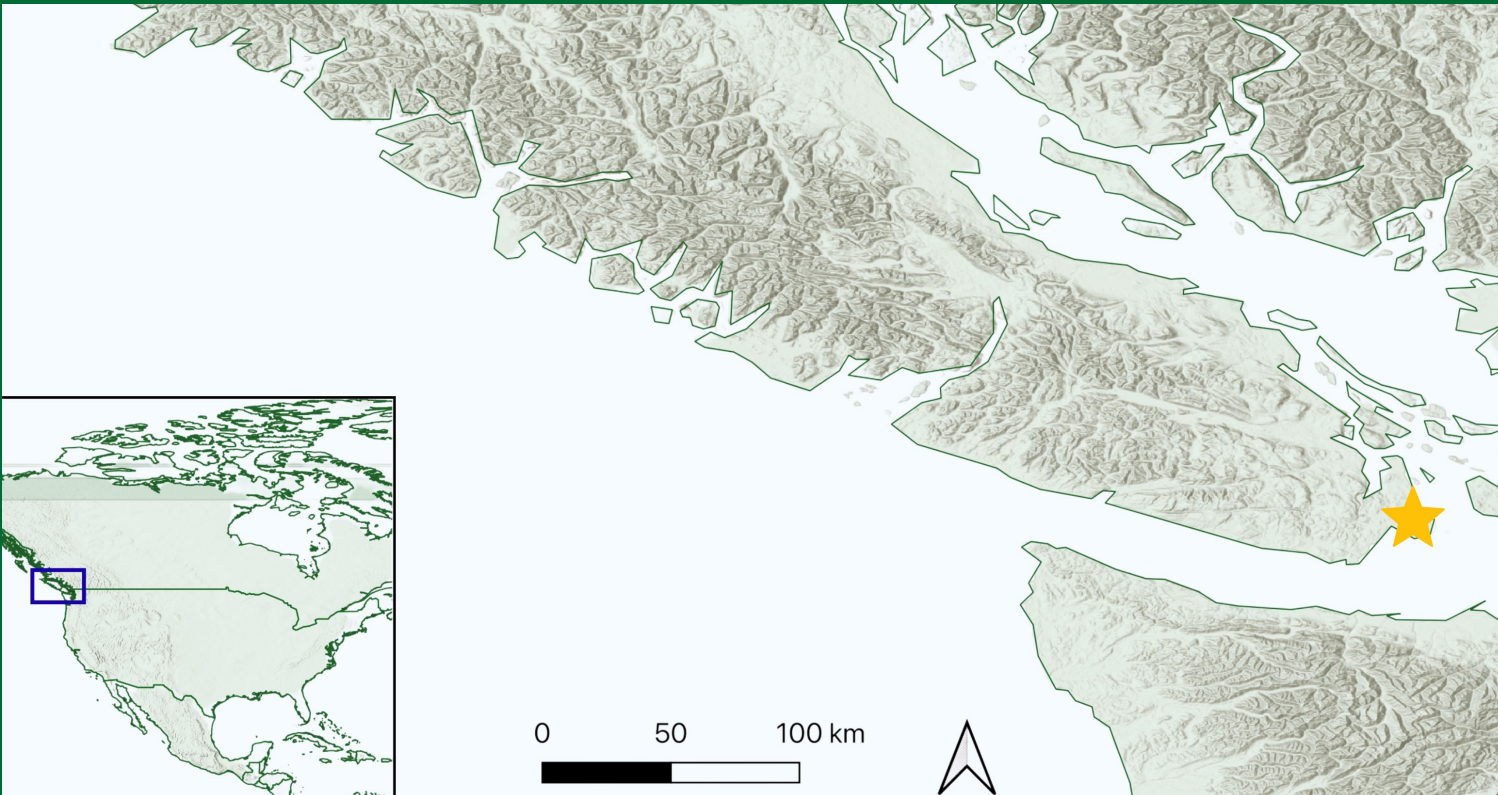


Context

Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary At A Glance

Established in 1975, Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary is a non-profit charity organization that stewards 69 hectares (171 acres) of urban protected area, 6 km from downtown Victoria, British Columbia, Canada.

- **Critically Imperiled Ecosystems:** Protects an urban wetland and endangered kwetlal – oak meadow ecosystem.
- **Key Biodiversity Area (KBA):** Christmas Hill was designated in 2024 for global biodiversity conservation significance.
- **High Biodiversity:** Supports 231 bird species along the migratory Pacific Flyway and 33 other species at risk.





100,000 Annual Trail Users



15,000 Learners



5,000 Native Plants Sold



8 FTE Staff



300+ Volunteers

The Challenge

Ambitious global restoration targets are often hindered by high costs, short-term grant funding, anthropogenic pressures, and limited staff capacity in urban protected areas.

The Relational Ecology Solution

By viewing communities not as passive visitors but as active social infrastructure, we build reciprocal care between people, place, and biodiversity, creating self-sustaining, long-term stewardship and community wellbeing.

Socio-ecological Programs

We integrate relational ecology principles through five cost effective, locally adaptive programs that weave together Indigenous Knowledge, Western science, and community care.



Adopt A Patch

A long-term place-based stewardship program that empowers community groups to actively restore a patch of their local ecosystem. By combining hands-on ecological restoration learning and repeated engagement, participants develop lasting connections with the land while contributing to biodiversity recovery.



Established in 2022
Participants: Schools, community groups, businesses, & families
Activities: Invasive species removal, species identification, native flora planting, environmental monitoring, Indigenous connections
Outcomes: Long-term stewardship, youth empowerment, improved ecosystem integrity, lasting connections with the land, improved ecological literacy

Ecological Restoration Meet-ups

Weekly hands-on opportunities for community members to develop ecological restoration skills while actively improving habitat through invasive species management and native plant recovery. Regular stewardship activities foster ecological knowledge, community connection, and long-term engagement in biodiversity conservation.



Established in late 1970s
Participants: Individual community members
Activities: Plant species identification, invasive management techniques, tool safety training, native planting and cultivation, place-based environmental education
Outcomes: Improved ecosystem integrity increased ecological literacy and community capacity for restoration, community building, and long-term invasive species management

Sanctuary Nature Ambassador Program (SNAP)

Volunteers provide a regular presence on the trails, reporting hazards, ecological changes, and engaging visitors to encourage respectful, sustainable use of the Nature Sanctuary. This program builds lasting connections between people, place, and biodiversity through community-based monitoring and visitor engagement.



Established in 2015
Participants: Individual community members
Activities: Species observations, hazard reporting, litter removal, visitor education, ecological monitoring
Outcomes: Long-term ecological monitoring, early detection of threats, enhanced visitor experience, reduced sources of degradation, increased community connection, and sustainable site use

Seed Sowers

Participants cultivate plants at their own homes for habitat restoration projects at the Sanctuary and to sell at the annual Native Plant Sale fundraiser. This program expands restoration capacity beyond Sanctuary boundaries while strengthening biodiversity, ecological resilience and empowering volunteers with the skills, materials, and mentorship needed to grow and propagate local native species.



Established in 2023
Participants: Community members, gardeners, & native plant enthusiasts
Activities: Native plant propagation, seed collection, growing and caring for native plants, mentorship, knowledge sharing
Outcomes: Increased community capacity for restoration, expanded access to locally appropriate native plants, enhanced biodiversity protection, low-cost plants for restoration, funds raised through annual Native Plant Sale

Silver Swans

A community of textile artists who transform their skills into fundraising and outreach impact by donating and selling their handmade goods at the Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary Gift Shop. Participants support habitat restoration and environmental education while fostering social well-being and lifelong engagement with nature.



Established in 2011
Participants: Seniors, fabric artists, crafters, quilters, and community members
Activities: Textile arts, selling handcrafted items, peer mentorship, social connection, supporting conservation through creative expression, inventory, and sales display
Outcomes: Funding for habitat restoration and environmental education, increased community belonging and well-being, sustained volunteer engagement, reduced barriers to participating in conservation, empowerment of seniors

Testimonials

"I leave Swan Lake in a better mood than I arrive in. I feel calmer and more in sync with my local environment after spending time helping out in our patch or just walking and watching" – High School Teacher in Adopt A Patch Program

"I'm a 35-year veteran of the Royal Canadian Navy, and volunteering at Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary has improved my mental health. It's a very calming experience each time I walk the trails, my interaction with people has improved since volunteering at Swan Lake. Thank you to all the staff." – SNAP Volunteer

"You continue to wow me with how well organized you are and the regular, meaningful support ... provided to us volunteers. It goes a very long way towards helping me feel like I am truly part of a team, doing work that matters. Thank you!" – Seed Sower Volunteer

Impacts, Outcomes, & Global Alignment

Participatory, Adaptive and Eco-cultural Methods

Adaptive Management: Regular volunteer feedback informs program management and ensures high retention rates.

Indigenous Relationships: Ongoing work toward Truth and Reconciliation includes collaborative learning on-site with local Nations, reciprocal relationship building, and respectfully weaving Indigenous Knowledge alongside Western ecological restoration practices.

Health and Social Wellbeing: Volunteers report a strong sense of community belonging, lower stress levels, as well as mental and physical health improvements.

Cost Effective Capacity

Community stewardship multiplies restoration capacity beyond what staff could accomplish alone, delivering more ecological recovery per dollar invested.

Programs	Participants Per Year	Yearly Grant Funding Invested	Yearly Volunteer Value	Impact per dollar Invested
Adopt A Patch	167	\$12,500	\$85,419	\$6.83
SNAP	18	\$2,500	\$19,896	\$7.96
Seed Sowers	45	\$10,000	\$23,344	\$2.33
Ecological Restoration	286	\$12,000	\$59,933	\$4.24
Silver Swans	20	\$5,000	\$93,536	\$18.71

Local Action to Global Goals

SER Standards: Aligned with global ecological restoration best practices and initiating certification through The Global Biodiversity Standard.

Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework: 16 of 23 targets directly advanced through local community stewardship.

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Swan Lake Nature Sanctuary demonstrates that urban community stewardship nurtures relationships between people and place, successively promoting local action that can help achieve global restoration goals.

