

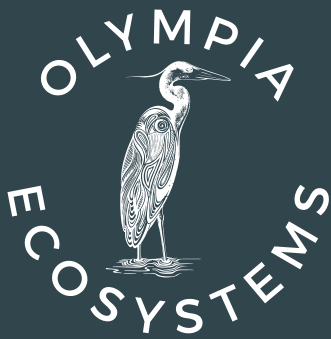
Olympia Ecosystems



Protect. Preserve. Restore.

Annual
Report
2023





Our Mission

Olympia Ecosystems was established in 2014 to protect, preserve and restore diverse ecosystems in and around Olympia, Washington. These include the freshwater, shoreline, tidal waters, grasslands and upland forests that are home to the Pacific great blue heron, cutthroat trout, salmon, and companion species. In coordination with community members, local agencies, and other non-profit groups, we will work to ensure that these ecosystems remain vital in perpetuity.



President's Note

2023 was an eventful, productive, and exciting year for Olympia Ecosystems. We preserved more land, hired our first staff members, and worked hand-in-hand with community members to remove literal tons of invasive species and plant thousands of native plants.

To advance our vision of a protected and healthy lower Deschutes watershed, we pursued and received funding to preserve another 61 acres along the Deschutes River to expand the Deschutes River Preserve to a total of 428 acres of intact wetland, riparian, forest, and upland prairie habitats. We also added a final parcel to the West Bay Woods Preserve, connecting our southern trailhead to the rest of the Woods. This will allow us to build a new trail to create another connection through this treasured urban forest. Keep your eye out for trail maps in the woods to show you the new paths.

Intensive restoration work has continued at all of our preserves: removing invasive species, planting native plants, removing infrastructure and debris (i.e., collapsed buildings, pavement, tires, etc.), and evaluating and enhancing available habitat for rare species. While much of this work is done in partnership with the Washington Conservation Corps and other contracted local experts (shout out to Streamline Earthworks!) and regional agency partners, we value and depend on community member contributions during volunteer work parties to get this all done. So much of our success is due to your efforts!

Our quickly expanding portfolio of conserved lands and growing need for focused restoration led us to hiring our first staff member in 2023. We welcomed Daniel Einstein, past Board President and founder, as our first Land Conservation Director! Daniel has worked tirelessly on conservation, restoration, fundraising, and outreach efforts for the organization. We are eternally grateful for his dedicated efforts and commitment to the mission and vision of the organization. We also welcomed our first Washington State Work Study students, each greatly contributing to our mission with their hard work and rapidly expanding skill sets. And last but not least, we were lucky to have Rob Penney join the Board of Directors. Thank you all!

Finally, thanks to our individual and business donors and grantors, we have been able to steward critical places that provide wildlife habitat, clean water, and accessible spaces for the community to connect with nature. We look forward to continuing this work into and beyond 2024 and we hope to see you out in the woods!

– Sarah Hamman, OlyEcosystems Board President



Meet the Preserves

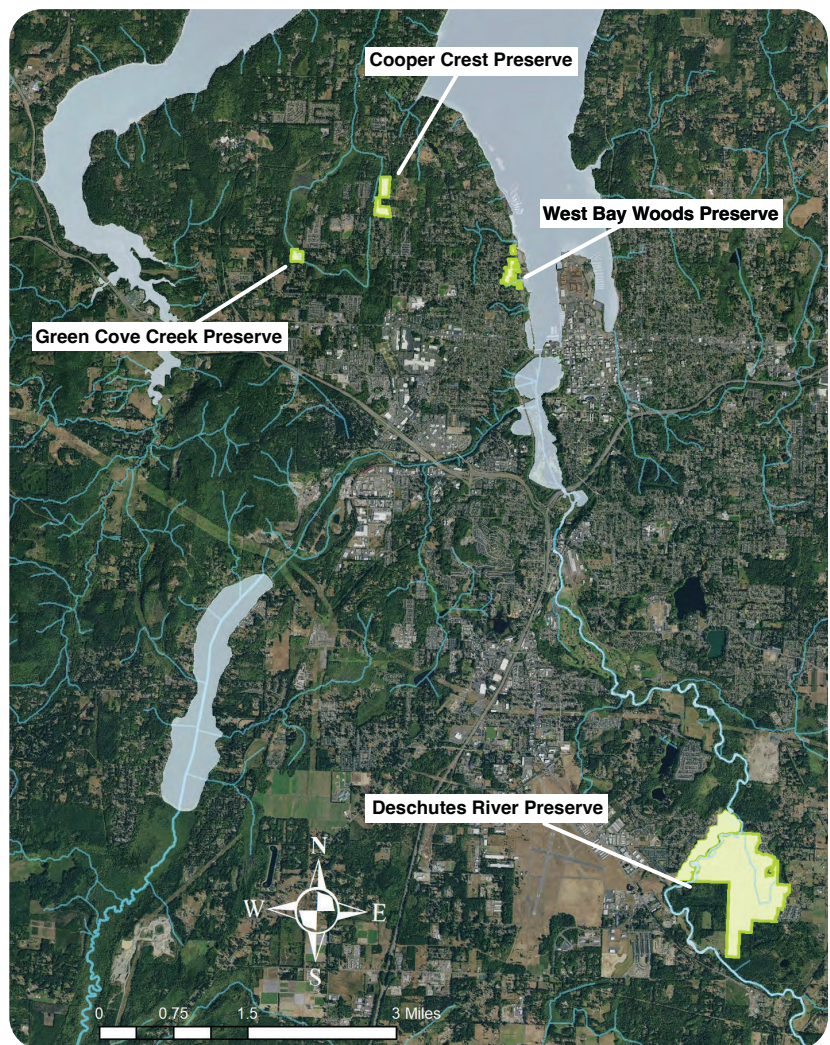
Above, Board of Directors (L to R): Sarah Hamman, Rob Penney, Anne Van Sweringen, Heather Grob, Gabriel Taylor, Diane Carney. Not pictured: Tanya Barnett, Marijean Holland.

Through strategic acquisition and stewardship, we ensure the perpetual protection of these precious lands and waters.

West Bay Woods Preserve
Green Cove Creek Preserve
Cooper Crest Preserve
Deschutes River Preserve

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PROTECT • PRESERVE • RESTORE



OlyEcosystems began as a grassroots initiative in 2014 to safeguard an existing one-acre Pacific great blue heron rookery. Over ten years, we have protected nearly 25 acres of the woodlands along West Bay Drive NW, ensuring a wildlife corridor that supports such varied species as foxes, Pacific tree frogs, and owls.

OlyEcosystems' extensive restoration efforts in this area include removing debris and invasive plants, and planting over 30,000 native trees and shrubs. In addition to its importance as habitat, this land serves as a vital stormwater filtration area for West Olympia neighborhoods before road runoff enters Budd Inlet. Our plans for the West Bay Woods include installing green infrastructure to treat over 700,000 gallons (about the volume of an Olympic-size swimming pool) of urban runoff per day. This will include sediment separation, a stormwater retention pond, and constructed wetlands. It is a necessary measure because when untreated stormwater flows directly into Budd Inlet, it has a direct and negative impact on marine species such as salmon and orcas.

Our work in the West Bay Woods Preserve will also enhance our connection to and appreciation of our natural habitat by providing trails, footbridges, and benches with panoramic views of the city and Mount Rainier.

2023 Accomplishments

- Organized five volunteer work parties to remove invasive species like English ivy and Himalayan blackberry, and planted 500 native trees and bushes
- Worked with Washington Conservation Corps to clear invasive ivy
- Received a donation of 0.63 acres of undeveloped land in the Southern portion of West Bay Woods worth \$240,000, facilitating the development of a new "West Bay Park Connector" trail that will connect West Bay Park to the Dickinson Ave NW trailhead





Green Cove Creek Preserve

In 2020, OlyEcosystems received a donation of 8.5 acres of forested wetlands on Kaiser Road NW, immediately downstream from the City of Olympia's Grass Lake Nature Park. This site consists of the sensitive banks of Green Cove Creek, critical wetlands, and highly sensitive aquifers. It is important for salmon rearing and serves as a safe habitat for beaver and Olympic mudminnow.

Since OlyEcosystems acquired this land, we have worked to remove invasive species from the creek bank and are preparing to plant this area with native trees and shrubs during 2024.

2023 Accomplishments

We continued:

- **Controlling Japanese knotweed, English ivy, and Himalayan blackberry**
- **Monitoring beaver activity**
- **Preparing this area for planting**





Cooper Crest Preserve

This preserve is on the highest ridge in Olympia. It contains artesian springs that feed one branch of Green Cove Creek, an important creek for salmon runs. In 2022, the previous owner clearcut 23 of the 25 acres of this parcel. The logging of the trees and loss of the shade they provided stimulated the massive growth of invasive species which thrive in sunny locations.

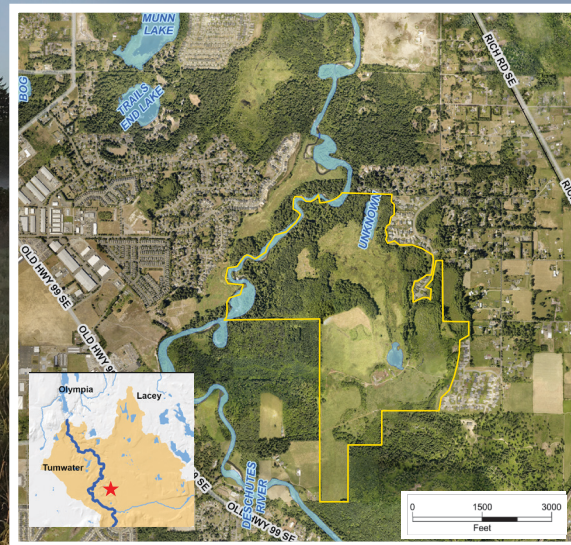
With a generous grant from the Angela J. Bowen Conservancy Foundation, OlyEcosystems purchased the parcel in the summer of 2022 and began the process of replanting the forest. With continued support from AJBCF, we have created a mile of trails for safer public access and planted over 20,000 native trees and shrubs. An extensive number of invasive plants has been removed -- and will continue to be removed -- until newly planted trees and shrubs are established, and their shade discourages invasive species.



2023 Accomplishments

- **Built two large staircases, allowing for safer access to the northern and eastern portions of this parcel**
Thanks to financial support from the Angela J. Bowen Conservancy Foundation, the Olympia Unitarian Universalist Congregation, and donations from many generous individuals during our Give Local Campaign
- **Mulched the 20,000 recently planted native trees and shrubs we have planted to date to protect them from the first summer heat and drought**
- **Removed invasive plants such as Scotch broom, tansy ragwort, and Japanese knotweed**
- **Negotiated a conservation easement with the City of Olympia to further ensure the ecological stewardship of this preserve in perpetuity**
- **Held more than a dozen work parties with the community and Marshall Middle School students**

Deschutes River Preserve



The Deschutes River Preserve, purchased by OlyEcosystems in late 2022, is the largest contiguous conserved natural area in the lower reach of the Deschutes River. This 428-acre preserve includes the entirety of the Ayer and Elwanger Creek and wetland complex, Douglas fir forests, floodplains, upland prairie grassland, and wetlands that support a wide range of fish, plants, and wildlife.

The water quality of Ayer/Elwanger Creek was designated by the State Department of Ecology as impaired. The wetlands in this area are colonized by invasive species, primarily reed canary grass and Canada thistle. The prairies are overgrown by Himalayan blackberry and Canada thistle. Restoration designs, cultural resources studies, wetland delineations, and environmental DNA surveys are currently in process.

OlyEcosystems is working with partners, including the Squaxin Island Tribe, Thurston County, the City of Tumwater, the Thurston Conservation District, Capitol Land Trust, and the South Puget Sound Salmon Enhancement Group to enhance the aquatic habitat of the Deschutes River and Ayer/Elwanger Creek, improve the water quality of the river basin, and increase summer water flows to help salmon migration and rearing.

We are currently engaged in monitoring and alternatives analysis to determine the best way to achieve these objectives. In the meantime, we will continue to reverse impacts from past agricultural use, increase riparian vegetation along Elwanger Creek, and restore native prairie habitat to upland sections of the property. Beaver and bat habitat enhancements are also among our future restoration plans.

2023 Accomplishments

- Planted approximately 20,000 live stakes of willow, cottonwood, red osier dogwood, and ninebark
- Demolished and removed almost 30,000 feet of unsalvageable barns and impervious surface
- Planted approximately 5,000 plants where farm infrastructure once stood
- Mowed over 15 acres of blackberry
- Restored fish passage to the Elwanger Creek basin by removing debris from a washed-out bridge
- Decommissioned and removed a wastewater storage vault from the wetland buffer



Growing Capacity



2022 was a big year of expanding our land conservation with the addition of Cooper Crest Preserve (24-acre clearcut needing replanting) and the Deschutes River Preserve (428-acre wetland complex and upland grasslands needing remediation, demolition, and restoration from decades of farm activity).

To match the new demands of intensive demolition and restoration work – not to mention the increasing need to fundraise and write grant applications – 2023 was a year that we focused on building the organizational capacity of Olympia Ecosystems. Planning for land stewardship in perpetuity is no small task; by necessity, we think strategically and plan carefully for the years ahead. Organizational systems and procedures need to be robust and well-documented to ensure smooth succession to future board members and stewards. For an all-volunteer board, this was a daunting task, but over 2023 we accomplished much that we can be proud of!



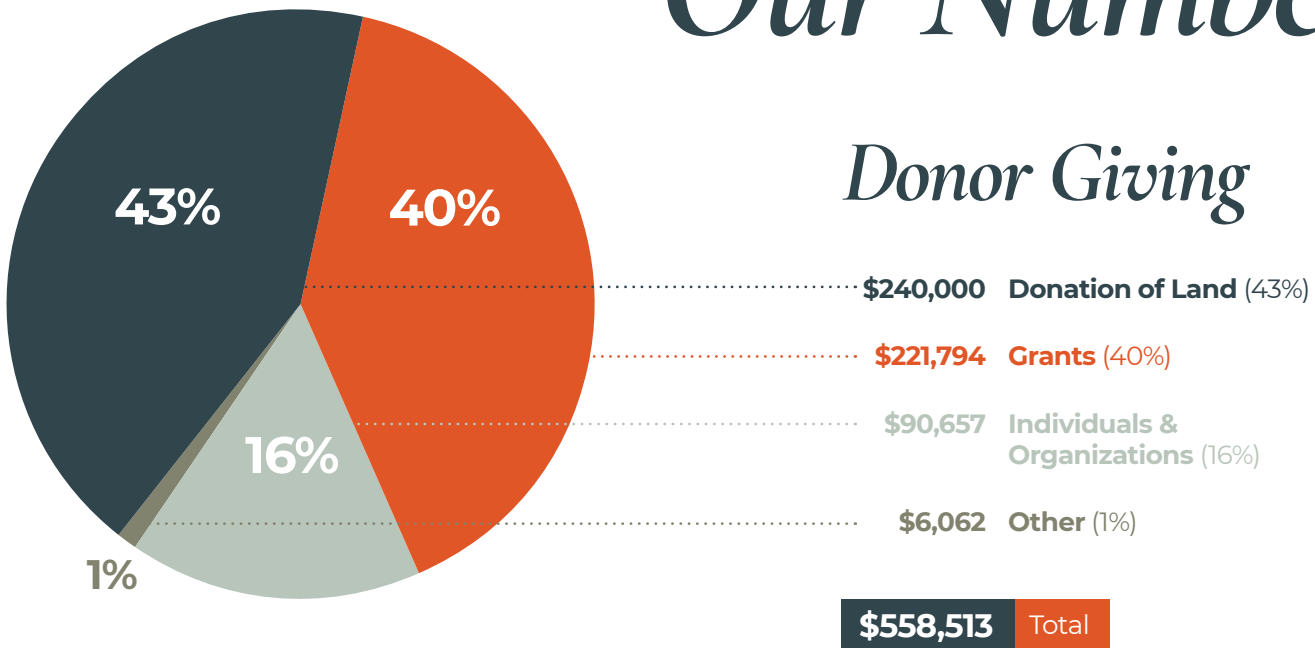
2023 Accomplishments

- Moved into our first physical office space on West Bay Drive NW, near the West Bay Woods Preserve
- Created equal opportunity hiring and employment practices
- Hired our first Land Conservation Director
- Hired our first in-house restoration crew, three Washington State Work Study students
- Hired a consulting firm to assist with organizational development and interim financial management services
- Redesigned our website and all of our materials to reflect our maturity as an organization wrapping up year ten!
- Purchased a work truck

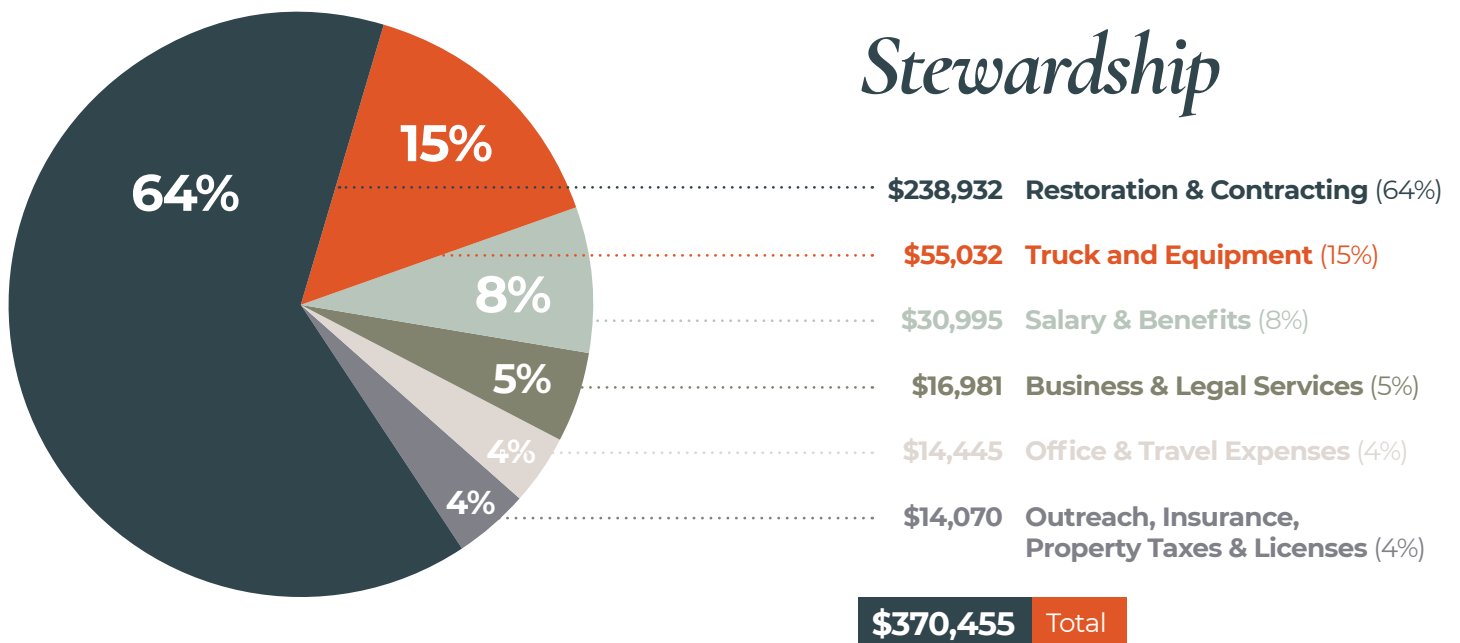


Our Numbers

Donor Giving



Stewardship



2024 Board of Directors

We are fortunate to have a hard-working Board of Directors with the expertise and experience – as well as passion and dedication – to steward our organization.

Sarah Hamman, Ph.D.

President and Conservation Committee Chair

Restoration ecology, non-profit partnerships

Diane Carney, M.S.

Vice President

Biochemistry, organizational development, finance

Heather Grob, Ph.D.

Treasurer and Finance Committee Chair

Economics, policy evaluation

Gabriel Taylor, L.E.G.

Secretary and Restoration Committee Chair

Engineering geology, fish passage, project management

Tanya Barnett, J.D.

Legal Counsel

Environmental and real property law

Marijean Holland, B.F.A.

Founding Treasurer

Program management, education

Anne Van Sweringen, M.E.S.

Grant Specialist

Wildlife biology and environmental planning

Rob Penney, P.E.

Communications Committee Chair

Sustainability, communications, project management

With special thanks to 2023 Board of Director member:

Lynn Geller, M.S., M.Ed.

Full board member bios are available
on our website: olyecosystems.org

Special Thanks to Our Major Contributors and Partners

Angela J. Bowen Conservancy Foundation

Bob Jensen Memorial Fund

Cascadia Law Group

Chris Maynard & Featherfolio

Community Foundation of South Puget Sound

Dawkins Charitable Trust

Keanland Park HOA

Maria Mudd Ruth

Marshall Middle School and the Citizen Science
Institute

Matthew Einhorn

Melissa Wood

Mike Ruth, The Evergreen State College

Olympia Unitarian Universalist Congregation

Panorama Green Team

Promise the Pod - Restoring Habitat to Save our Orcas

The Rose Foundation

Rotary Club of South Puget Sound

Salix Solutions, LLC

Sandra Hoexter

Streamline Earthworks

Thurston Conservation District

Thurston County Conservation Futures

Tri-Element, LLC

U.S. Rake Force

Washington Conservation Corps

*In 2023, Olympia Ecosystems received
over \$90,000 in donations from
organizations and individuals. Thank
you all for supporting our mission!*



Our Gratitude

The conservation and restoration work that we aspire to today, and the stewardship that we commit to for our next generation is politically demanding, expensive, and exhausting, but we are ardent in our commitment.

We would not have been able to accomplish what we did in 2023 without the many levels of support depicted in the photo in the upper right. Left to right: We hired **Daniel Einstein**, one of the founding members of Olympia Ecosystems, as our first employee and Land Conservation Director in September; **Blane Reeves** has been a WCC Restoration Crew member and super volunteer; **Reginald Arberry** was hired as our first Washington State Work Study Ecological Restoration Technician for the 2023-24 school year; **Raphael Garcia** continued to be an enthusiastic volunteer for our organization and so many others in Olympia, and is tireless in his support.

During 2023 work parties, every member of our Board of Directors volunteered with their sleeves rolled up. Volunteers, contractors, and employees alike join forces to pitch in and make a difference. It's amazing what we can accomplish together; we are so grateful to everyone who supports our mission.



Thank you all for helping to restore diverse, functional, and beautiful forests for our future!





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Suite 101A
Olympia, WA 98502

olyecosystems.org

OlyEcosystems has many opportunities for YOU to make a difference:

- **Volunteer:** We host regular work parties to replace noxious weeds with Pacific Northwest trees & shrubs.
- **Join:** Our Board of Directors and Committees welcome your energy and vision.
- **Employment:** Washington State Work Study "Ecological Restoration Technician" positions open this school year!
- **Support:** Your financial contributions help us to fulfill our mission; recurring donations sustain our organization.
- **Partner:** Align your agency or organization with us to achieve common goals.
- **Connect:** @olyecosystems on Facebook and Instagram; sign up for our newsletter.
- **Show up:** Our 10-year anniversary celebration in the West Bay Woods on Saturday, September 14, 1-4pm, at the Dickinson Ave NW trailhead.

Visit OlyEcosystems.org to learn more!



About the Cover Photo

Special thanks to local wildlife photographer Greg Weiter for donating this stunning image of one of our local Pacific great blue herons. While Greg may venture out of state to capture elusive and special migratory moments, his passion is to capture the majesty of common backyard and shoreline birds right here in the neighborhoods and parks of Olympia. Explore more of his compelling work on Instagram @_viewfinderphotography.