

# *Olympia* Ecosystems



Annual  
Report 2024

*Protect.  
Preserve.  
Restore.*



# President's Note

OlyEcosystems has come a long way in its first 10 years! What started as a small group of determined neighbors with both the vision and the grit to protect an acre of forest inhabited by Pacific great blue herons, has become a conservation land trust responsible for stewarding over 500 acres with a growing staff, State Work Study students, an active Board of Directors, and hundreds of incredible community volunteers.

To help codify and focus our mission to 'protect, preserve, and restore,' we spent a lot of time over the past two years thinking, talking, looking at maps, and dreaming about our long-term goals. With thorough research and careful writing, we pulled together our first Habitat Conservation and Land Protection Plan. This five-year plan summarizes our current conservation efforts, organizes our strategic goals, and outlines our vision for the future. Our focus on the lower Deschutes River and Green Cove Creek watersheds helps to drive our conservation strategies and the plan itself makes us eligible to access new funding sources. Big thanks to the Board of Directors and Land Conservation Director for the heavy lift!

In alignment with our plan, we purchased an additional 8.76 acres of forested wetland and upland in the Green Cove Creek Watershed in 2024. The two parcels we protected represent important pieces of a larger conservation puzzle that will ultimately support a corridor for wildlife and a place for people to connect with the land through stewardship and learning. We also added 61 acres of Deschutes River floodplain to the now 428-acre Deschutes River Preserve.

On the ground, we were hard at work on all our preserves in 2024: removing invasive species, planting native plants, taking down fences, enhancing trails, and evaluating and enhancing wildlife habitat. This work could not be done without our partners: Washington Conservation Corps, Thurston Conservation District, local schools, local, state, and federal agencies, and our steadfast volunteers. You'll see examples throughout this report of the collaborative restoration efforts and remarkable accomplishments across our preserves.

This year also brought changes to our staff and to our Board of Directors. We welcomed Shane Opreescu as our fearless bookkeeper. Shane is helping us grow from an all-volunteer non-profit into a dynamic organization with a growing dedicated staff! The behind-the-scenes administrative work is a huge part of what makes an organization successful, so we're thrilled to have Shane on board. We also want to thank Anne Van Sweringen for her service to the Board of Directors. Anne participated on all our committees and contributed to our five-year plan and grant management. And last, but not least, a big thanks to Marijean Holland, one of the founders of the organization and the longest-serving board member for OlyEcosystems. Marijean shared her business expertise, willingness to learn new things, never-ending wit, and literally thousands of homemade cookies over ten years. Thank you, Marijean, for your service to this organization, to the community, and to the land.

Finally, in 2024, the generous contributions from individual and business donors and grantors again allowed us to create wildlife habitat and accessible spaces for the community to connect with nature. We couldn't do this work without you, so thank you for your ongoing support. We look forward to continuing this work far into the future and we hope to see you out in the woods!

– Sarah Hamman, OlyEcosystems Board President





# Meet the Preserves

West Bay Woods Preserve

Cooper Crest Preserve

Deschutes River Preserve

Green Cove Creek Preserve

*By acquiring land and conservation easements, we ensure the perpetual protection of these precious lands and waters.*



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## 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.





# West Bay Woods Preserve

The West Bay Woods is where Olympia Ecosystems began over ten years ago. At that time, the woods were a dark, ivy-infested area. Few native plants poked through a dense mat of ivy; trees were dying under the weight of massive (up to 8" diameter) vines and walking was an arduous adventure. Abandoned encampments and piles of trash could be found throughout the woods, and stormwater gushed into the woods causing uncontrolled erosion. Today, the West Bay Woods is a popular hiking spot for people from all corners of Olympia. New trails lead through restored areas that are recovering with vibrant new growth.

In 2024, the restoration of the West Bay Woods continued with ivy removal, plantings, and placing wire cages around the young western red cedars to protect them from the local deer population. Olympia Ecosystems hosted a series of work parties, and we met some new 'super-volunteers' who have been regulars at our events in the West Bay Woods. We removed the seasonal closure sign at the old heronry after getting official confirmation from a biologist that the herons have moved out. Most of the herons are currently nested in a tree down by the Olympia Farmers Market, but we would welcome them to return to the West Bay Woods anytime! We also spent most of 2024 continuing to work with the City of Olympia on permitting the future Stormwater Park South, which will collect and treat stormwater runoff from the Northwest neighborhood before it flows into West Bay. We received permits in December 2024 and are now moving toward construction in 2025!



## 2024 Accomplishments

- **Removed ivy from approximately 1 acre and planted hundreds of native trees and shrubs.**
- **Took down the fence enclosing Stormwater Park South. The viewpoint from the newly opened bluff includes West Bay, the Olympics, Mount Rainier and the State Capitol.**
- **Received approval for plans to construct a stormwater pond at Stormwater Park South, the site of a former parking lot on the west side of West Bay Drive NW.**





# Cooper Crest Preserve

Olympia Ecosystems made it a priority for 2024 to improve the trails and facilitate public access at Cooper Crest. The 'Take Down the Fences' campaign was our call for help with this goal, and the community answered! With community support, we completed the second staircase, removed the fence at the entrance to Cooper Crest, and installed a forestry gate. With help from the Tenino Stone Carvers Guild, we installed a series of beautiful mossy sandstone boulders at the entrance to keep vehicles out while allowing pedestrian access. May the boulders grace the Cooper Crest entrance in perpetuity!

We also completed one of the trail connections to Cooper Point Drive and installed bollards at the trailhead. We hosted Marshall Middle School's Day of Service in April and spread more mulch around the young plantings, which will help them to retain moisture through the summer. We watched and worried about the young cedars through the long dry summer and did our best to irrigate them without having a water source. Thanks to mulching by community volunteers, almost all of the new trees survived the long dry season.

In the fall and winter, we replaced approximately 1000 tree protection sleeves with larger wire cages to protect them from deer browsing, while giving them room to grow. While reforestation will take many decades, if you zoom in on the particular, you will see an amazing diversity of native plants emerging. As the young trees mature, be sure to appreciate the lupine, aster, yarrow, foxglove, fireweed, and many other colors coming your way this summer.

## 2024 Accomplishments

- **Built a new staircase, allowing for safer access to the eastern portions of the Preserve.** Thanks to the financial support from the Angela J. Bowen Conservancy Foundation, the Olympia Unitarian Universalist Congregation, and donations from many generous individuals during our fund drive.
- **Installed the 1000 metal cages around thriving young cedars. Removed hundreds of thousands of invasive plants such as Himalayan blackberry, tansy ragwort, Scotch broom, and Japanese knotweed.**
- **Began a series of Eagle Scout projects to improve the visitor experience.**
- **Opened the area to the public, by removing the fence and installing an entrance gate on 20th Ave NW**







# Deschutes River Preserve

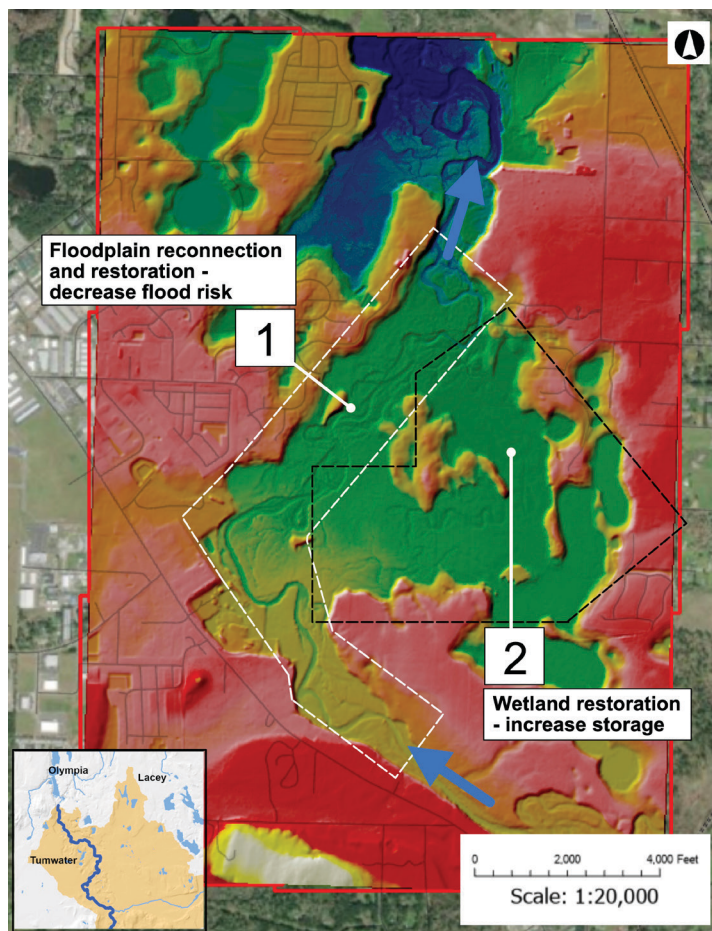
The Deschutes River Preserve is the largest contiguous conserved natural area in the lower reach of the Deschutes River. This (now) 428-acre river-floodplain-wetland complex is critically important to supporting multiple natural resources given its position in the lower watershed and proximity to the growing urban areas of Tumwater, Olympia, and Thurston County. Improvements in water quality, including reductions in temperature and fine sediment transport will support restoration efforts in the Deschutes River Estuary / Budd Inlet ecosystem.

The preserve offers incredible opportunities for high-efficiency, high-value, nature-based restoration actions aimed at enhancing salmon habitat and building system resilience via floodplain reconnection, increasing and enhancing wetland extent and functionality, landscape-scale reforestation, and invasive plant species management. In the near term, restoration efforts at the Deschutes Preserve will provide critical quality rearing habitat for juvenile coho and other salmonids, as well as provide downstream flood attenuation, and local groundwater storage. The preserve will also provide buffering for system-wide shifts in land use and climate change into the future.

In April 2024, we conserved an additional 61 acres of floodplain on the left bank of the Deschutes River, considerably enlarging the possible riparian restoration opportunities in the lower reaches of the river. Soon thereafter, working with partners, we secured significant funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to explore restoration alternatives to reduce winter/spring flood risk, increase summer water availability and enhance salmonid rearing habitat across a 600-acres project area that includes not only the Deschutes River Preserve, but also neighboring preserves, farms and private property. This funding complements ongoing restoration projects and

planning at the site sponsored by the Thurston Conservation District and Thurston County.

On the ground, we repaired approximately 50 acres of neglected former hayfield and treated approximately 70 acres of invasive thistle. We also developed a forestry management plan, planted over 10,000 native willow stakes and riparian trees, mowed approximately 10 acres of reed canary grass, treated approximately 10 acres of invasive blackberry, and removed additional derelict farm infrastructure, farm trash, and 600 abandoned tires.





# 2024 Accomplishments

- Installed a network of trail cams to monitor wildlife.
- Conducted e-DNA survey of Elwanger Creek that confirmed presence of juvenile Coho salmon, Coastal cutthroat trout, Olympic mudminnow, a State Sensitive Species, three-spined stickleback and other fish and aquatic species.
- Acquired an additional 61 acres of Deschutes River floodplain for future salmon habitat restoration.
- Planted approximately 10,000 live stakes of willow, red twig dogwood and ninebark, and planted, mulched and caged approximately 2500 potted plants, including Sitka spruce, cedar, cottonwood, alder, Oregon ash, big leaf maple, black hawthorn, Pacific crabapple, hemlock and others, along with nearly 1000 native shrubs.
- Mowed and treated over 15 acres of blackberry, and removed invasive ivy, holly and scotch broom from approximately six acres.
- Restored approximately 50-acres of pasture.
- Obtained 20 large wood pieces with root wads from Lake Cushman for future use in riparian restoration.
- Began to control invasive plant species in a 5.5-acre clearcut and constructed habitat corrals from slash to protect young trees from elk and deer.
- Received a significant award from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for restoration design and alternatives analysis on a 600-acre project area that includes all of the 428-acres Deschutes River Preserve.
- Worked with the Thurston Conservation District to develop a forest management plan.
- Obtained funding from the National Resources Conservation Services, Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to recreate a seral habitat for deer and elk, and to afforest a 12-acre section of the lower hayfield.
- Concluded Phase II of demolition of the derelict farm infrastructure, removed 600+ tires, and an additional 10 tons of garbage.
- Supported several graduate student projects with students from The Evergreen State College.
- Purchased a 350-gallon water trailer and secured an agreement with Thurston PUD for water for summertime irrigation of new plantings.







# Green Cove Creek Preserve

The Green Cove Creek is one of very few in Thurston County documented by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to support critical habitat for ESA-listed Puget Sound steelhead, and its estuary is identified by NMFS as critical habitat for ESA-listed Puget Sound Chinook salmon. It also supports a small run of coho salmon, and on some years, it supports a spawning run of chum salmon exceeding 3,000 individuals. In a signal to the importance of the watershed, in 2024, the County invested millions of dollars to restore fish passage by removing an undersized culvert at the Country Club Rd. crossing.

Despite its federally protected fish habitat, Green Cove Creek's forests continue to be cleared for development at an alarming pace. Acquisition for conservation in perpetuity is one of the most effective tools available to protect those remaining sensitive and vulnerable forests and wetlands in the Green Cove Creek watershed.

For that reason, in 2020, OlyEcosystems conserved 8.5 acres of forested wetlands on Kaiser Road NW, immediately downstream from the City of Olympia's Grass Lake Nature Park. In late 2024, and very early 2025 we conserved an additional ~9 acres of forest in the watershed that contained two artesian springs that feed minor but important tributaries to the creek. Protecting these groundwater sources, as well as surrounding forest cover, is essential to preserving adequate late summer and early fall in-stream flows that migrating and rearing salmonids rely on. Though our 2024/2025 acquisitions were modest, they were another step in a much larger vision for conservation in the watershed that will remain a focus for 2025 and 2026. Our Cooper Crest Preserve is also part of the Green Cove Creek watershed.



## 2024 Accomplishments

- Continued controlling Japanese knotweed, English Ivy, and Himalayan blackberry.
- Conserved two parcels slated for development in the watershed, preserving important and pristine cold-water inputs to the creek.
- Planted some native plants, with big plans for replanting in 2025.

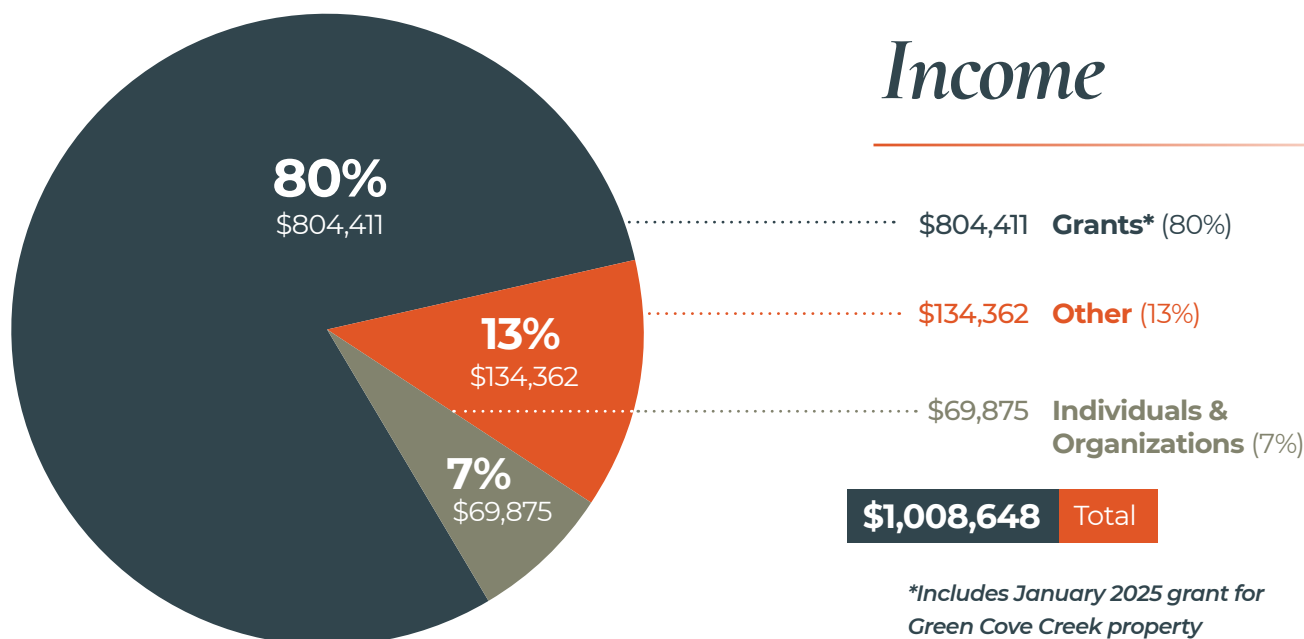




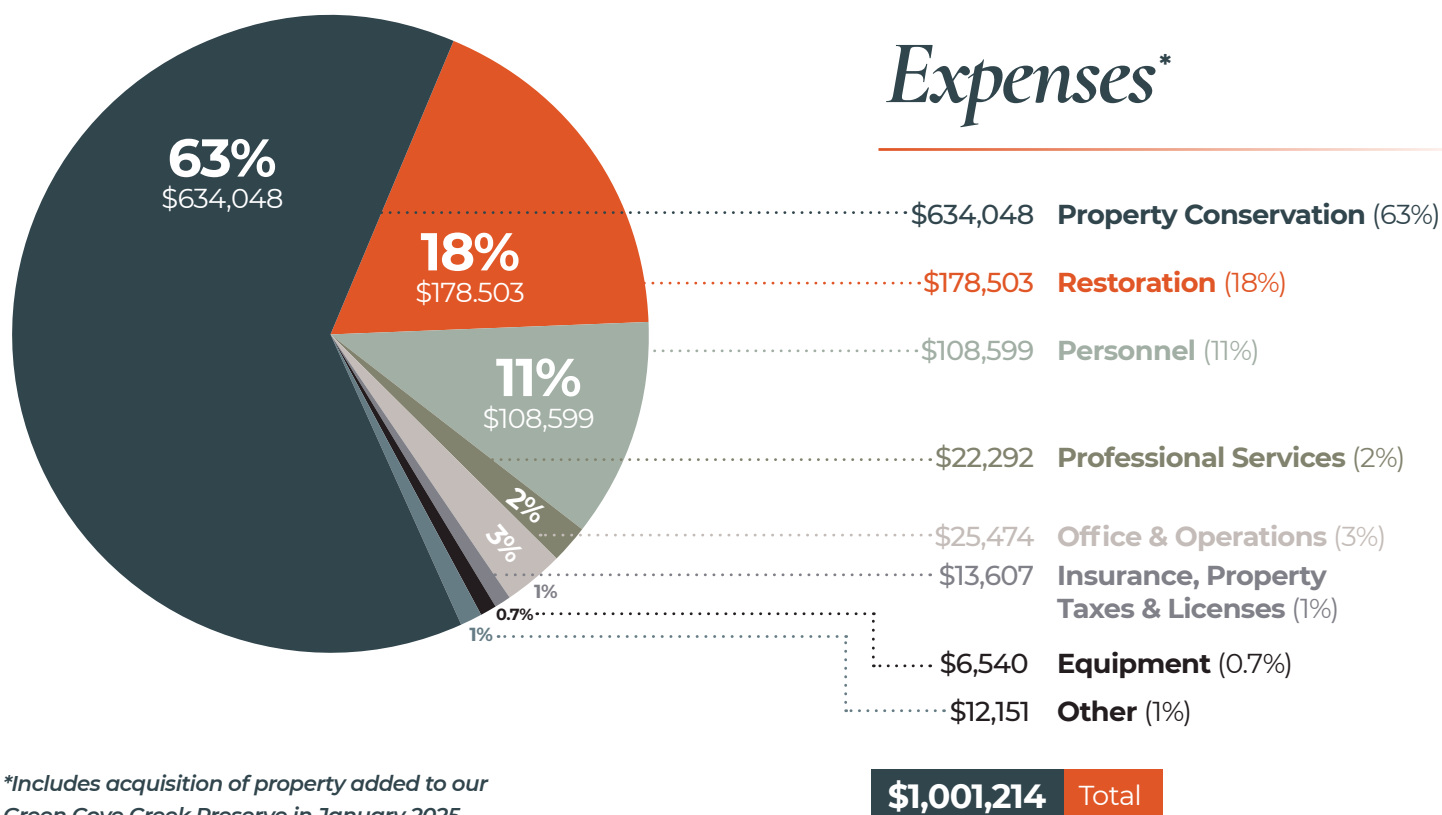
# By the Numbers

Thanks to our 192 donors, OlyEcosystems ended the year in good financial health, despite a busy year of restoring our newly acquired preserves.

## Income



## Expenses



\*Includes acquisition of property added to our Green Cove Creek Preserve in January 2025.



# 2025 Board of Directors

*Sarah Hamman*

Ph.D. in Ecology

*Board President*

*Conservation Committee Chair*

*Diane Carney*

M.S. in Chemistry

*Board Vice President*

*Board and Staff Committee Chair*

*Heather Grob*

Ph.D. in Economics

*Board Treasurer*

*Finance Committee Chair*

*Gabriel Taylor*

Licensed Engineering Geologist

*Board Secretary*

*Restoration Committee Chair*

*Bryan Heller*

MBA, Finance emphasis

*Board Member*

*Finance Committee*

*Rob Penney*

Professional Mechanical Engineer

*Board Member*

*Communications Committee*

Special thanks to former Directors for their past years of service:

*Marijean Holland* (2014-2025)

*Tanya Barnett* (2019-2025)

*Anne Van Sweringen* (2022-2024)

Full board member bios are available on our website: [olyecosystems.org](http://olyecosystems.org)

## Special Thanks to Our Major Contributors and Partners

Angela J. Bowen Conservancy Foundation  
Cascadia Law Group  
Charlotte Martin Foundation  
Capitol Land Trust  
City of Olympia  
City of Tumwater  
Chris Maynard & Featherfolio  
Community Foundation of South Puget Sound  
Cynthia Pyle  
Daniel Einstein & Laura Watson  
Dawkins Charitable Trust  
Deschutes Estuary Restoration Team  
Deschutes Heights HOA  
Deschutes Ridge HOA  
Don Freas  
Finninsula Foundation  
James Kruidenier & Susan Bryant  
Keanland Park HOA  
Ken Bevis, Department of Natural Resources  
Lowell Park  
Maria Mudd Ruth Foundation  
Marian Mehegan  
Marshall Middle School and the Citizen Science Institute  
Mason Conservation District  
Matthew Einhorn / Melissa Wood  
Michelle Burke  
National Fish and Wildlife Foundation  
North Thurston Public Schools  
Olympia Unitarian Universalist Congregation  
Puget Sound Estuarium  
Rose Foundation  
Ruth Einstein  
Sandra Hoexter  
South Puget Sound Salmon Enhancement Group  
Squaxin Island Tribe  
Streamline Earthworks  
Tenino Stone Carvers Guild  
Thomas Gruner  
Thurston Conservation District  
Thurston County  
Ty Lin Engineering  
Washington Conservation Corps  
Wild Fish Conservancy  
Wonder Valley Farm

Special thanks to our Super-Volunteers who donate their time above and beyond our regular volunteer work parties:

Fran Kammerer, Volunteer Coordinator  
Aimee de Ney, Communications Committee Chair  
Emily Pham, Social Media  
Makena Lang, Restoration  
Amalia Tamone, Restoration  
Oonaugh Foher-Bill, Restoration



# Gratitude

For years, Olympia Ecosystems has cultivated partnerships in the Deschutes River watershed, refining and expanding our geographic and strategic focus to first understand and then act on transformative restoration opportunities. In 2024, we achieved a key milestone in that effort by securing significant federal funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to design restoration actions along a 3-mile stretch of the Deschutes River and across a 600-acre project area. This restoration planning project is the first of several phases of floodplain and wetlands restoration that will bring large-scale improvements in fish habitat and river health to the lower reach of the Deschutes River, from Deschutes River Preserve downstream to the Deschutes Estuary. In 2025, and beyond, we will continue to seek conservation projects that open up new and exciting restoration opportunities in the Deschutes and Green Cove Creek watersheds.

**With only the equivalent of two paid staff members, our accomplishments are not possible without many generous contributions.**

- **Work party volunteers**, from toddlers to retirees, show up in any weather to restore the habitat of our preserves one square foot at a time.
- **Grants** from private foundations as well as local, state, and federal agencies provide the majority of our funding needed to purchase and restore our preserves.
- **Private donors** provide funding for vital resources, a tangible legacy of their commitment to the future of natural spaces in our communities.
- **Board and committee members** plan and lead our organization in addition to working alongside community volunteers at work parties, mostly on top of full-time jobs. One of our hard-working volunteers stepped up to be our much-needed Volunteer Coordinator this year.
- **Community partnerships** are essential to both our current efforts and long-term goals. While addressing today's needs, we also aim to inspire the next generation of naturalists and conservationists. At Marshall Middle School's Citizen Science Institute and native plant nursery, enthusiastic students help grow and propagate native species for our preserves and local restoration projects. In 2024, students from three North Thurston high schools spent a day planting trees at Deschutes River Preserve. Additionally, restoration crews from the Washington Conservation Corps and The Evergreen State College's Work Study program handle much of the labor-intensive work involved in our restoration projects.

Over the past ten years, we've grown into a thriving organization thanks to the incredible support of our volunteers, donors, partners, and crews. From dedicated volunteers and engaged board members to generous private donors and vital grant funding, each contribution has made a difference. Community partners like local schools have inspired the next generation, while skilled crews from the Washington Conservation Corps and The Evergreen State College have taken on the heavy lifting. We're deeply grateful to everyone who's helped us protect, preserve, and restore our shared diverse ecosystems – thank you! To all who've participated in this collective journey – thank you!







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[olyecosystems.org](http://olyecosystems.org)

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## *How You Can Support Our Mission!*

**Donating** can take many forms such as writing a check, donating property or equipment, setting up monthly transfers, or including a charitable donation in your estate planning—a great way to create a tangible legacy without affecting current financial security.

**Volunteering** is an invaluable way to make a difference. Our restoration work party volunteers demonstrate time and again, commitment to rehabilitating urban ecosystems, creating a lasting impact while learning about their local ecology. Many enjoy the added benefits of socializing with like-minded individuals and reconnecting with nature.

**Serving** on a committee or joining the Olympia Ecosystems Board of Directors are two deeper ways to support our work and become involved in developing and implementing our plans for the future. In the past three years, we have added significant acreage to our preserves; to restore and steward conserved lands in perpetuity, we need the support and involvement of engaged community members like you!

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*Visit [OlyEcosystems.org](http://OlyEcosystems.org) to learn more about how you can support our mission!*



### *About the Cover Photo*

Special thanks to local wildlife photographer and Avanti High School Junior **Liam Hutcheson** for sharing this stunning image of a Northern Pygmy-Owl. In 2023, Liam set a new state record for the “Big Year” by spotting 378 bird species in Washington State. Explore more eye-catching work by this young photographer on Instagram [@liamhutchesonwildlife](https://www.instagram.com/liamhutchesonwildlife)