



One of the many wildflower meadows of Uplands Park. These meadows are critically endangered, meaning they are at risk of being lost forever. They are extremely vulnerable to trampling during their growing season from October until June. When not in bloom, they can appear as little more than open, grassy fields. To help protect the meadows, park visitors are kindly requested to stay on pathways and established trails.

## Uplands Park: Protecting the Best of the Last

Uplands Park, which includes Cattle Point, is a place of exceptional beauty, featuring superb views of the sea and surrounding mountains and volcanoes, magnificent landscapes, and spectacular displays of flowering meadows in the spring. Ranked as one of the top five birding sites in the Capital Regional District, the park is an important destination for birders from all over the region, and its Garry Oak woodlands and wildflower meadows are famous among naturalists and researchers who flock to the park each spring. Local schools use the park extensively for outdoor classes to educate students about the natural and cultural history of the region, and colleges and universities regularly hold field study courses there. Interesting bedrock features and traces of glacial erosion

carved into the rocks at Cattle Point make it one of Victoria's premier geological sites and a destination for university geology classes. All of this activity puts a big strain on the park's natural values.

What many people might not realize is that the park is also an ecological treasure of national importance. It contains one of the larger remaining fragments of Garry Oak associated ecosystems (GOEs) in Canada and is home to more than 20 endangered species, some found in few other places in the world. These ecosystems, which include Garry Oak woodlands, wildflower meadows, seasonally flooded pools and coastal bluffs, are globally imperilled. In Canada, they occur along a thin coastal strip on southeastern Vancouver Island, in the Gulf Islands and in two locations in the

Fraser Valley. Over the last 150 years, more than 95% of their area has been converted to agricultural and urban uses; in the Capital Regional District, less than one percent remains. If protective action is not taken today, we risk losing this unique and magical part of our natural heritage forever.

The District of Oak Bay is working hard to restore the park and to protect it for future generations. Over the years, it has received more than a quarter million dollars through the federal government's Habitat Stewardship Program (HSP) to support conservation activities in the park. This support has allowed the municipality to hire summer restoration crews to remove invasive species and to install protective barriers around sensitive areas. In 2021, the municipality

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Right: One of the many classes from Willows Elementary School who participated in planting and seeding one of Uplands Park's restoration meadows in the fall of 2019. They planted more than \$12,000 worth of plants and seeds.

will receive additional support through the federal Priority Places program to extend this work to other natural areas of Oak Bay, namely Trafalgar Park and Mary Tod Island. Both of these parks contain significant tracts of rare Garry Oak habitat and a number of endangered species.

Residents from Oak Bay and the larger region have played an important part, too. Spearheaded by Margaret Lidkea of Friends of Uplands Park, the community volunteers thousands of hours each year to remove invasive, non-native plants such as Scotch Broom and Carpet Burweed, and to replant with native species. Local schools use the park as a living classroom to teach children about the natural environment in which they live and to contribute to the park's restoration plan. In 2019, for example, more than 500 children from Willows Elementary School helped reseed and replant an area of the park from which non-native, invasive trees such as One-seed Hawthorn, English Holly and Norway Maple had been removed earlier in the year. The value of this community investment in the park in the form of volunteer labour, public outreach events and school programming is conservatively estimated at \$390,000 since 2014.

The municipality is making every effort to achieve a balance between recreational use of the park and the protection of its endangered species and ecosystem. Park users can contribute to the success of this work by doing their best to stay on trails and out of meadows, particularly during the growing season from October to June. Over the next few years and starting this year, the municipality will be looking at installing wooden boardwalks over the wettest areas to help park goers keep their feet dry during the winter months and split-rail fencing at Cattle Point to protect its rare maritime meadows and the 10 endangered species that grown there from trampling during the wet, winter months.

Participating in the park's restoration work is a great way to get outdoors, meet people and learn about our local natural history. Volunteers are always welcome. If interested, please contact the Oak Bay Parks Department at 250-592-7275 or visit [www.friendsofuplandspark.org](http://www.friendsofuplandspark.org) for information on how to become involved.



## DID YOU KNOW?

- Oak Bay enjoys a Mediterranean-like climate, one characterized by dry summers and mild, wet winters. Unlike the rest of Canada, the growing season here starts in the fall with the return of the rains.
- Our native ecosystem is adapted to extended dry spells in the summer and is home to the highest plant diversity of any terrestrial ecosystem in BC. Named after western Canada's only native oak tree, Garry Oak and associated ecosystems (GOEs) have an unusually high number of endangered species and plant communities.
- The District of Oak Bay manages 40 hectares of parkland that support Garry Oak ecosystems and 25 endangered species. Twenty of these species at risk are found in Uplands Park, the municipality's largest park. The survival of these important pieces of natural heritage is under threat from a massive invasion of exotic species (mainly plants) and intensive recreational use.
- The federal government has invested \$349,000 in the conservation and protection of Uplands Park's rare species through its Habitat Stewardship Program. Oak Bay Parks and the community have each made similar investments since 2014.
- In 2019, Friends of Uplands Park held 183 park-related events that included 111 school programs in Uplands Park, 8 birding events and 15 public outreach events. Volunteers contributed more than 4,328 hours towards restoration of three of the municipality's natural area parks and to the delivery of educational programming.