Mountaineers Foundation Rhododendron Preserve
Management Plan – A Vision for 2020

Prepared by the Mountaineers Foundation Preserve Committee:
Mindy Roberts (chair), Rick Gillatt, Gardner Hicks, Katha Miller-Winder, Eugene Radcliff, and Lisa Shanafelt

November 4, 2014

Purpose: Guide the management of the Mountaineers Foundation Rhododendron Preserve through 2020 and beyond
# CONTENTS

1.0 Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 3

2.0 Natural Resource Conditions and Management .................................................................................... 5

3.0 Infrastructure and Access ...................................................................................................................... 7

4.0 Education, Outreach, and Community Engagement .............................................................................. 9

5.0 Implementation Strategy and Long-term Management Sustainability .................................................. 10

Tables and Figures ....................................................................................................................................... 12
1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Mountaineers Foundation owns and manages the Rhododendron Preserve (Figure 1), located on the Kitsap Peninsula, Washington. The purpose of the Preserve is to protect a healthy, vibrant natural community of plants and wildlife and to provide for the enjoyment of future generations. The Preserve includes stands of rare old growth Douglas fir, western red cedar, and western hemlock, in addition to other mature forest species, including the eponymous Pacific rhododendron. In addition to supporting healthy salmon runs, the Preserve is also home to black bear, beaver, eagles, heron, and other wildlife. Many human visitors enjoy the Preserve, primarily by hiking to Big Tree, one of the largest trees on the Kitsap Peninsula, or visiting the streams during salmon spawning.

The Preserve lies within the Chico Creek watershed in Kitsap County. The area is part of the Suquamish Tribe’s usual and accustomed areas. The Tribe does not indicate a high likelihood of archaeological evidence associated with settlements in the Preserve. Hidden Valley, at the confluence of Wildcat and Lost Creeks where they form Chico Creek, was claimed by Alfred Taylor who sold it to John Lewis. Lewis settled in 1890 and later sold it to John McClain. Edward Paschall purchased Hidden Valley from McClain in 1907 and settled with his family. A 1909 Mountaineers hiking party of 66 people from Seattle, on an outing to view the rhododendrons between Chico and Wildcat Lake, encountered the Paschall family and established close friendships. Many enjoyed staying overnight in the natural setting and they began performing plays. Buildings were constructed for a clubhouse and shelter.

Areas surrounding Hidden Valley were extensively logged in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Members of The Mountaineers recognized the unique value of the unlogged forest of Hidden Valley. They began by purchasing 74 acres in 1915 to protect old growth and natural habitat systems and to buffer Hidden Valley from changes occurring nearby. Mountaineers members also privately purchased lands and later donated them to the Mountaineers. The daughters of Edward Paschall, Patience Paschall and Mary Remey, donated Hidden Valley to the Mountaineers with the stipulation that the caretaker could live out his life there. Their 1955 letter, published in the Mountaineer bulletin, communicates their desire to protect the last of the great trees as a wilderness area for many years to come and to interpret the forest to coming generations of young people.

The Mountaineers transferred the property, consisting of 170 acres, to the Mountaineers Foundation in 1985 to decrease tax burden and ensure the property would be preserved in perpetuity. The caretaker Harry Murray died in November 2009, and the Mountaineers Foundation began managing Hidden Valley in 2010.

The Preserve has since grown to 386 acres, as of November 2014, and includes both natural lands, areas formerly used for logging, and two parcels with buildings. The Mountaineers Foundation also manages 61 acres of conservation easement granted by the Ueland Tree Farm in 2009. These conservation areas include a mix of mature forest on steep hillslopes and gullies and regenerating forests on the upland plateau. The conservation areas are currently identified by metal tags and pink flagging on trees located
nearest the boundaries. The Foundation must monitor conditions within the easements and report to
the Ueland Tree Farm on an annual basis to check for intrusions and other threats and to assess the
conservation values of these areas.

In 2012, the Foundation purchased three parcels from the Ueland Tree Farm; the Suquamish Tribe
provided a grant for nearly all of the funding. As a condition of the purchase, the Foundation must
monitor conditions within those parcels and report conditions to the Suquamish Tribe. At present, the
Foundation has drafted a Conservation Area Stewardship Plan and submitted it to the Tribe. We await
concurrence.

The desired future condition for the Preserve is resilient, mature native vegetation and healthy streams
supporting native wildlife populations. In addition to maintaining mature vegetation, we will restore
disturbed areas and balance the needs of natural systems and people according to the mission of the
Preserve:

- Protect and restore critical habitats (salmon-bearing streams, mature conifer forest, riparian
  forests, dry landscapes, wetlands) and the biodiversity they provide
- Provide educational opportunities for children and adults on the Kitsap Peninsula and beyond
- Promote community connection to nature.

Threats we consider in management decisions include:

- Human activities within and beyond the Preserve that conflict with conservation values, vandalism, prohibited access, overuse by people, fragmentation of surrounding habitat, residential development to the north and east, forest management to the south on the Ueland Tree Farm and to the west on Department of Natural Resources lands, increasing population, illegal drug activity, erosion around Big Tree, and activities that impede the enjoyment of other users now and into the future.
- Climate factors such as changing precipitation, air temperature, changing fire regimes, flooding in Hidden Valley, erosion along creeks, and insect infestations.
- Other changes include invasive plant and animal species such as the bark beetle, loss of large predators, and dogs that interfere with wildlife activities.

Conservation values include the unique natural resources of mature and old growth forest, native
vegetation, abundant salmon streams, immersion in natural soundings away from sights and sounds of
civilization, cultural values, natural history, human history, and wildlife corridors.
The Rhododendron Preserve protects a rare piece of forest that is almost unchanged from pre-European settlement conditions. Few areas of mature and old growth Douglas fir forest remain in the Puget Lowland today. The Chico Creek watershed remains over 80% forested and hosts the largest natural runs of chum salmon (*Oncorhynchus keta*) in eastern Kitsap County (Kitsap County, 2000). A coho salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*) run also exists. Suquamish Tribe biologists count salmon returning to the Chico Creek watershed to spawn in the fall, averaging 30,000 adults, and have installed smolt trap weirs in Hidden Valley to count the young smolts that migrate to estuaries in the spring. Mature forest cover and the lack of development contribute to these regionally significant salmon runs. The Preserve protects critical portions of the Chico Creek watershed, including upland plateaus, steep hillslopes, Chico Creek and its floodplain, and gullies with tributaries to Lost and Wildcat Creeks. Wildlife include black bear, beaver, coyote, bald eagles, osprey, owls, a variety of woodpecker species, raccoons, herons, gulls, and red squirrels.

Over the years, the Preserve has expanded beyond the core mature forest to include adjacent land disturbed by human use and some of these new acquisitions will require proactive management to return to resilient habitat. Climate forecasts indicate that Douglas fir may have difficulty establishing new forests as soon as 2050. The warming Puget Sound climate makes restoration of the heavily impacted areas a high priority. A healthy forest buffer will support resilience in the beautiful interior of the Preserve. Restoration of native plant communities should be initiated in severely impacted areas while the climate is still favorable. This should include thinning densely planted trees to more natural and random spacing, aerating compacted road soils, mulching, and planting resilient native species propagated from the Preserve and adjacent conservation easement areas. Thorough documentation and partnering with other organizations will be essential. As the Preserve grows and includes more areas heavily invaded by non-native species, we need to re-evaluate and improve our methods for eradicating and controlling their spread.

We protect the Preserve by limiting visitor impacts, annual monitoring for unauthorized uses, and annual removal of non-native plant species. The frequency of walk-through monitoring for unauthorized uses, non-native species, and general conditions should increase to a quarterly activity as we expand our volunteer base. We will track visitor access with a trail register. Impacts on wildlife and habitat will be limited through the use of boundary signs, educational signage, outreach to users, activity zoning, and seasonally appropriate timing of events and access to sensitive locations including the streams. We will communicate a clear policy that nothing is to be added or removed from the Preserve without prior approval from the Preserve Committee to reduce the risk of unauthorized animal or plant relocations.

Our conservation goal is to establish and maintain healthy, resilient mature forests throughout the Preserve, including upland forests that are currently regenerating and disturbed areas. Our conservation policy is to promote the long-term sustainability of natural systems so that systems repair themselves.
with minimum intervention from human activities. Figure 2 identifies recommended usage zones for the Preserve that balance conservation values and human use.

Desired Future Condition for natural resources and recommended actions:

- **Mature forests** – Promote resilience to address factors associated with climate change, including invasive pests, fire, changing precipitation, and changing rainfall. Allow downed trees to remain in place except where they interfere with Preserve infrastructure. Limit off-trail travel to Foundation-approved educational programs that agree with Foundation policies.

- **Young, regenerating forests** – Contract with professional services to assess options for managing disturbed areas to enhance habitat and to establish healthy forest stands quickly.

- **Invasive species** – Contract for invasive species cruises in Preserve regions not served by trail networks. Supplement with volunteer-led efforts where appropriate. Rely on physical controls to the extent possible and resort to chemical controls in limited situations. Cooperate with county noxious weed coordinator for invasive species such as Japanese knotweed.

- **Mammals and birds** – Establish and communicate policies to protect terrestrial species diversity now and into the future, set aside areas to minimize human impacts on wildlife, and eliminate the potential for disease transmission and impacts from dogs by prohibiting dogs on the Preserve other than developed areas by Seabeck Highway.

- **Fish and other aquatic life** – Establish and communicate policies to protect healthy streams and aquatic species diversity now and into the future. Prohibit creek access during sensitive times or releases of hatchery-raised fish. Prohibit felt-soled boots or waders and require approved equipment decontamination. Limit creek access to Foundation-approved education programs that agree to decontamination policies. Define and communicate appropriate instream access that protects aquatic life and stream conditions.

- **Foraging and hunting** – Establish and communicate policies to prohibit the removal or introduction of plant or animal materials from the Preserve without approval of the Preserve committee.

- **Monitoring** – Monitor natural resource conditions throughout the Preserve through volunteer programs. Intensify from annual to quarterly monitoring cruises with centralized reporting and tracking of conditions. Install a trail register to monitor human use. Initiate a BioBlitz program in 2015 and 2020 to establish a species inventory for aquatic biota, insects, birds, reptiles, amphibians, mammals, plants, and fungi. Use the opportunity to expand the existing monitoring program and appeal to a larger community of volunteers.

- **Research** – Encourage and fund research into natural systems at the Preserve, particularly related to human activities and climate change.
Future land purchases – Expand the Preserve through strategic purchases that protect the conservation values of existing and future lands and provide a buffer from future climate change and human activities.

3.0 INFRASTRUCTURE AND ACCESS

The Preserve currently includes only limited infrastructure, primarily centered on the Seabeck Highway access points (Figure 3). These include driving and walking access to the Preserve through roads, parking, driveways, gates, bridges and trails. The Lea Addition (Figure 4) currently includes an apartment above garage, propane heat, and electricity. The drinking water well is no longer connected and onsite sewage system status is unknown.

The driveway to Hidden Valley has a locked gate at the top with a sign indicating the driveway and valley are closed to access. Hidden Valley currently includes the abandoned Paschall house, garage, and several small outbuildings in varying stages of disrepair (Figure 5). The Puget Sound Energy service to Hidden Valley was disconnected in 2013. The pump for the drinking water well is not currently functional. We have been unable to locate the underground sewage disposal system in Hidden Valley. Two large buildings (the caretakers house and barn) plus several smaller buildings have been demolished and the site naturalized since 2010. Hidden Valley is currently closed to public access and is marked with No Trespassing signs at the top of the driveway and abandoned trail from the Forest Theater as of May 2014.

Roads in the adjacent Ueland Tree Farm provide access to the parcels south of Chico and Lost Creeks including the conservation easements granted by the Ueland Tree Farm. An access gate requires a combination. The Ueland Tree Farm roads are popular with hikers, dog walkers, mountain bikers, foragers, and hunters. The road network also connects with roads owned by the Department of Natural Resources. Abandoned logging roads reach the upland plateau between Lost and Wildcat Creeks from the Huber property.

The Big Tree trail serves visitors who park near Kitsap Cabin. Trampled vegetation and soil erosion surround Big Tree where visitors have encircled the tree. Previously a trail connected Hidden Valley with the Mountaineers Kitsap Forest Theater. That trail is closed because of hazards in Hidden Valley and continuing erosion from Chico Creek. The boundaries of the Preserve are not fenced and have very little signage. Some parcel corners have been surveyed professionally, including the 2012 purchase, while others have been located using acceptable survey methods by volunteers.

Desired Future Condition for infrastructure and access and recommended actions:

- Driveways, parking, gates, and access – We have no immediate plans to alter the Hidden Valley gate and driveway, Hansen driveway and gate, Lea Addition driveway and parking, or meadow
parking. We will develop written agreements with the adjacent Mountaineers and Hansen property owners regarding access through our combined properties and maintenance of shared infrastructure.

- Old logging road network through Ueland Tree Farm – We will evaluate whether some portion of the logging roads could be considered for trails in the future. All other roads will be restored to natural vegetation conditions using science-based restoration best practices.

- Buildings and infrastructure in Hidden Valley – Hidden Valley remains closed to access without written permission from the Mountaineers Foundation. Driveway and trail access are marked with No Trespassing zones. We will clean up remaining hazards with the long-term goal of integrating Hidden Valley into the Preserve. We will conduct a professional restoration assessment to identify options for the valley. We will demolish the Paschall house and will assess the garage/carport, 2-room cabin, and other small outbuildings in the valley to determine if there are future uses for those buildings. If no viable future use is identified, the buildings will be removed to eliminate hazards and to naturalize the valley.

- Lea Addition buildings and utilities – We will maintain low-level heat through propane for the garage to avoid mold and electrical service for security lights. We will evaluate options for the disconnected drinking water well and the onsite sewage system as part of the long-term use of the garage.

- New buildings or other infrastructure at the Preserve – We have no immediate plans for new buildings at the Preserve. Any infrastructure investments would be vetted through Preserve Committee and approved by the Mountaineers Foundation board. Hidden Valley, the Lea Addition, and the meadow north of Seabeck Highway will be included in the 2014-15 professional site assessment related to the proposed learning center.

- Bridges and trails – We will continue to maintain the Big Tree trail and two existing bridges across Wildcat Creek. We will assess options for protecting Big Tree from erosion around its roots due to human foot traffic. We will evaluate options for a trail from the Forest Theater to Hidden Valley and will consider expanding the trail network if it serves the needs of future generations in a way that protects and maintains the conservation values of the Preserve.

- Boundaries – We will continue to maintain unfenced boundaries to promote wildlife travel but will monitor for signs of intrusion from humans. We will increase signage at the boundaries, emphasizing typical entry points in the Preserve.

- Monitoring – We will monitor the condition of infrastructure throughout the Preserve.

- Signage – We will install signage on Seabeck Highway to identify the Preserve. We will install a structure at the Big Tree trailhead appropriate to the surroundings and with permission from the Mountaineers to provide navigation and educational materials to visitors. This could include a visitors log for wildlife observations.
4.0 EDUCATION, OUTREACH, AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The current community of Preserve visitors is introduced to the Preserve through second-hand sources. This community includes people who have attended plays at Forest Theater, children and families who have participated in Salmon Safaris, educators and children who have connected with the Mountaineers or Mountaineers Foundation in need of field trip locations and topics, Mountaineers members from Kitsap and beyond who learn about it from conservation activities, former volunteers at the Preserve, and neighbors who stumble on the Preserve. Many describe the Preserve as a well-kept secret.

We must establish the Mountaineers Foundation as an identifiable community partner and the Preserve as a valuable destination for environmental education and natural experiences in an urbanizing world. Potential partners include the Suquamish Tribe, Ueland Tree Farm, Mountaineers, Great Peninsula Conservancy, K-12 educators, college educators, scouting groups, native plant societies, Master Gardeners, historical interests, and neighbors in the Kitsap community.

Education and outreach should have both physical, in-person representation coupled with a strong web and social media presence. Onsite activities will include both passive means, such as signage, and active components, such as interactive programs. These tools and practices should enable people to find the Preserve and understand its resources quickly and efficiently. The Preserve and the Mountaineers Foundation do not have an office or on-site staff at the Preserve. To maximize values and resources, we must offer online tools that respond to the highest needs of the community.

The Mountaineers Foundation will partner with educators in the region to understand curriculum needs and to maximize the value of the Preserve to educators. Off-trail travel and instream activities will be prohibited except as specifically approved by the Foundation. The Foundation will identify practices that approved educational activities must follow, such as boot decontamination and leave no trace off-trail travel. The Foundation also will identify restoration opportunities appropriate for educational groups to implement and monitor.

Desired Future Condition for education, outreach, community engagement and recommended actions:

- Establish a recognizable and valuable front door to the Preserve through signage and facilities that support the needs of the community while maintaining conservation values. Signage should be informational, such as maps to navigate the Preserve trails, and educational, such as native species identification. This information should be available through unmanned boards and updated at regular intervals. Seabeck Highway and Big Tree trailhead installations will be needed.

- Create a virtual front door through creative web presence and social media campaigns. We currently maintain two web sites, a Facebook page, two blogs, Flickr page, Google+ and a YouTube channel. We need to increase the rate at which information is refreshed, which will require engaging more volunteers in providing content.
• Develop priority educational materials installed on signs or transportable as brochures or electronic media. These could include plant identification, edible and medicinal plants, points of interest, history of the Preserve, nature trail map, outreach and publicity flyer, scientific information, Google Earth tour, and QR codes as links for the reader or visitor. These will be available at the Big Tree trailhead.

• Collaborate with schools and community groups to conduct the 2015 and 2020 Bioblitz programs. Compile Bioblitz results for use in educational programs.

• Partner with other organizations to develop and promote age-appropriate activities unique to the Preserve. These should include in-person and online activities.

• Cultivate an education-based community, focusing on local K-12 educators.

• Provide contact information for the Preserve committee members who can respond to questions and be a resource for special requests.

• Identify the information needs of the Salmon Safari and Adventure Camp programs offered by The Mountaineers and other similar programs and evaluate how best to meet those needs.

• Assess the needs for an online library of Preserve-related materials to share resources and to provide a clearinghouse of information developed by the Foundation and by community partners.

• Evaluate means of engaging communities, both local and regional, through education and outreach to inspire advocates for the Preserve.

5.0 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY AND LONG-TERM MANAGEMENT SUSTAINABILITY

The Mountaineers Foundation operates the Rhododendron Preserve Second Century Fund to support the maintenance and expansion of the Preserve. A now-closed fund supported maintenance activities only, but this will be eliminated once the balance has been depleted. The Preserve Education Fund supports educational activities at the Preserve. Another fund is dedicated for purchasing properties along Seabeck Highway as they become available. The Mountaineers Foundation also has a general fund and other designated funds such as the Wiseman bequest that could support activities at the Preserve that align with the goals of those funds. The 2012 land purchases relied heavily on a grant from the Suquamish Tribe to accomplish our shared goals.

The only active Mountaineers Foundation fundraising at present is the annual appeal at the end of the calendar year. Passive fundraising includes the web site donation options. The Preserve needs dedicated fundraising efforts for long-term financial sustainability in addition to general fundraising for the
Mountaineers Foundation. We need to review and update web-based information on the Preserve funds.

Each year the Rhododendron Preserve committee recommends activities and requests a budget for the calendar year. These requests are reviewed and approved through the Board of Directors. Recent budget requests include the payment of taxes and utilities, invasive species eradication and control, assessment and removal of hazardous materials, and demolition of hazardous buildings.

The Preserve relies on numerous volunteers to support ongoing education, conservation, and planning efforts. Besides Mountaineers Foundation Rhododendron Preserve committee members, volunteers have no means to connect with the Preserve or with each other. To maximize the connection of existing volunteers and grow a larger base of volunteers who will care for the Preserve through 2020 and beyond, we need to provide physical and virtual resources that create regular volunteer opportunities and reward volunteers for their time. We recommend developing distribution lists that volunteers can opt into or out of as they wish. These lists could be reached through blogs, newsletters, email, or Facebook.

We need to expand the Preserve volunteer base. Currently, Preserve Committee members identify volunteers from previous volunteer programs at the Preserve. We also recruit volunteers from the Tacoma Mountaineers climbing programs but also need to expand to the Kitsap Mountaineers climbing programs.

We recommend the creation of a Preserve Community Advisory Council consisting of potential community partners with shared, action-oriented goals. The purpose of this council would be to advise the Mountaineers Foundation and the Preserve Committee on the short-term and long-term needs and opportunities for the Preserve. The Council could provide a community sounding board for ideas and plans for future management of the Preserve. Members would reflect a variety of backgrounds, including K-12 education, higher education, natural resources science and management, history, and business.
Figure 1. Parcels owned or managed as the Rhododendron Preserve.
Region | Use | Allowed Activities | Prohibited Activities
---|---|---|---
Dry Creek | Ed-3 | Request written authorization from Foundation for all access | Unauthorized access
Meadow north of Seabeck Highway | Ed-1 | Activities that potentially disrupt the plants, leashed pets | Overnight use; unleashed pets; fires
Wildcat Creek Valley | Closed | None | Closed to all access to protect wildlife and habitat
Hidden Valley | Ed-3 | Request written authorization from Foundation for all access | Unauthorized access
Lost Creek Valley to Big Tree | Ed-2 | Daytime foot traffic only; must stay on trail; request written authorization from Foundation for other activities | Unauthorized access; pets; in-creek access October through May
Chico Creek valley | Ed-3 | Request written authorization from Foundation for all access | Unauthorized access
Central Plateau near Hidden Valley | Ed-3 | Request written authorization from Foundation for all access | Unauthorized access
Lea Addition (blue garage) | Ed-1 | Activities that potentially disrupt the plants, leashed pets | Overnight use; unleashed pets; fires
Central Plateau (rest) | Ed-3 | Request written authorization from Foundation for all access | Unauthorized access
South Plateau | Closed | None | Closed to all access to protect wildlife and habitat

NOTE: Fires are prohibited throughout the Preserve and across all usage zones.

Figure 2. Rhododendron Preserve usage zones. (WPO = with permission only).
Figure 3. Preserve infrastructure (November 2014).
Figure 4. Lea Addition parcel infrastructure. The house marked with an X has been demolished.

Figure 5. Hidden Valley infrastructure. X indicates buildings shown in the image that have since been removed and the sites naturalized.