

Strawberry Fields Forever

Volunteers turn out for Weed Warrior Wednesday

By KATHERINE LACAZE
For Seaside Signal

For Cheryl Conway, of Astoria, volunteering with the North Coast Land Conservancy for their various Hands-on Stewardship events and Weed Warrior Wednesdays is about embracing not only the opportunity to play in the dirt but also a chance “to help balance out the things I help screw up in the environment.”

From using plastic bags at the grocery store to driving a car, she said, “I try to make up for it in the little ways I can.”

Conway was one of about a dozen volunteers who took to the Surf Pines Prairie Habitat Reserve near Gearhart on Nov. 6 to help plant beach strawberry and seacoast angelica strawberry, two plants that are native to the coastal prairie. The planting, which was the conservancy’s Hands-on Stewardship event for the month of November, is part of the group’s continued coastal prairie restoration efforts at the site.

Experimenting on the prairie

According to Land Steward Eric Owen, strawberries already exist at the Surf Pines site, along with other coastal prairie habitats, as they are inclined to grow near the shorelines and in the dunes. They can thrive in sandy soil with low nutrients.

“It’s their preferred habitat,” Owen said.

It can be challenging, however, to get new ones established. Owen expects there will be some mortality among the strawberries planted during the stewardship day, simply because of the harsh conditions and grazing by wildlife. Native plants and seeds that the conservancy put out on the prairie several years ago are just now starting to take hold. Meanwhile, the conservancy tests different measures, such as topsoil removal, to try and bolster the survival rate of the plants.

“A lot of it is experimenting and just learning as you go,” Owen said.

The conservancy’s efforts are aided by grant funding from the U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife, which was designated to help restore the Oregon silverspot butterfly, a federally threatened species that has declined because of habitat loss and degradation. While the conservancy doesn’t tend to narrow its focus to one species, efforts to restore the Oregon silverspot are mutually beneficial for other species and the habitat as a whole.

“There is so little coastal prairie remaining,” Owen said.



Photos by Katherine Lacaze

Volunteer Holly Owen and her 3-year-old daughter, Ruby, help plant strawberries with the North Coast Land Conservancy at the Surf Pines Prairie Habitat Reserve near Gearhart.



ABOVE Linda Fisher, a regular volunteer with the North Coast Land Conservancy, plants strawberries to help replenish the coastal prairie habitat near Surf Pines.

RIGHT Volunteers took to the North Coast Land Conservancy’s Surf Pines Prairie Habitat Reserve to plant strawberries Nov. 6.



A sense of purpose

While the work profits the prairie, it also enhances the lives of the volunteers.

Conway, who moved from Ohio to Astoria about a year ago, enjoys being outdoors in nature. Now that she lives in an apartment, “I don’t have my own dirt to play with,” she said. Volunteering for projects such as the strawberry

planting or pulling weeds gets her outside and also makes her exercise “without realizing it,” she added.

She also appreciates gathering with like-minded people, or even those from different walks of lives and professional backgrounds. It was especially helpful when she first moved to Astoria.

“For those of us who don’t have any

friends, it gives us a base,” she said.

Penny Abegglen, who moved to the area in 2013 and is now one of the site managers of the Blind Slough near Knappa, agreed. She started volunteering with the conservancy because, as a retired nurse, she was “looking for something that gave me that sense of purpose again.”

“This has,” she added.

Train to be a Master Gardener

Seaside Signal

Registration for the OSU Clatsop County Extension Service Master Gardener training program are underway.

Applications are available at the Clatsop County Extension office, 2001 Marine Drive, Room 210, Astoria, 503-325-8573, or request an application by email from Amanda Noyes at amanda.noyes@oregonstate.edu. Classes are held at Clatsop Community College Astoria Campus on Wednesdays from 6 to 9 p.m. and Saturdays from 9 a.m. to noon, beginning Jan. 8 and ending March 21.

Students will receive over 60 hours of intensive gardening education in the classroom and an addi-

tional 55 hours of volunteer service as hands-on training. The cost is \$250 and includes the course text: “Sustainable Gardening: The Oregon — Washington Master Gardener Handbook.”

The curriculum provides information and references on subjects such as botany, soil management, pruning techniques, integrated pest management and more. The classes are taught by OSU Extension faculty, certified Master Gardeners and experts in their respective fields. Students of all ages and abilities, beginners and experienced gardeners alike, are welcomed in the program.

Return completed applications with payment to the OSU Extension Office by Friday, Nov. 22.

Healthy Oregon project to expand after Clatsop County introduction

By R.J. MARX
For Seaside Signal

The Healthy Oregon Project’s “HOP Spot” has moved from the Sunset Pool lobby after three months of dispensing DNA collection kits to determine inherited cancer risk of those who choose to participate.

The program, which launched statewide at the start of the year and in Clatsop County in July, is now heading to Bend, Portland and statewide. The goal of the Healthy Oregon Project is to learn how a person’s genetics, environment and behavior can affect their risk for long-term diseases and conditions, including cancer.

Voluntary participants create a secure account, receive a kit and donate a

saliva sample. Swish with mouthwash for 60 seconds, spit into a tube, and return the specimen to a diagnostic lab — locally at the main lobby at Providence Seaside Hospital or Columbia Memorial Hospital for recording and analysis.

Results take about four months. Negative results will be posted in the “results” tab within the Healthy Oregon Project mobile application. If you have a positive result, you will be contacted by an OHSU genetic counselor by phone or email.

Healthy Oregon’s Rachel Crist, volunteer coordinator for the project, came to Seaside Nov. 6 with an update. “Our driving project is inherited cancer,” she told members of the Seaside Chamber of Commerce at the

Bob Chisholm Center. “We really want to see what we can learn through a large-scale project throughout the state.”

More than 95% of participants are negative for inherited cancers, she said. When inherited cancers are detected in a sample, par-

ticipants are contacted by a genetic counselor. Individuals at increased risk can take action to prevent cancer at its earliest stages, when it is most curable.

So far, the program has had almost 3,500 participants, with a goal of 100,000 statewide.

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