



# Make a Difference

By Carman Lore  
Intern, Whidbey Island Conservation District

## OUR OWN LITTLE PIECE OF ECOLOGY

Greetings from Whidbey Island Conservation District (WICD) intern, Carman Lore! To introduce myself, and how I came to intern for WICD, I grew up on south Whidbey and graduated from South Whidbey High School (SWHS) in 1997. Spending time away at school and experiencing the outside world, I was mostly off island until 2005 when I returned. It wasn't until 2009, however, that I started to work in the natural world as a gardener. In 2015, this became a new program of study as a student in the Edmonds Community College (EdCC) horticulture program. As part of finishing up my degree, I've sought an internship with WICD and have been granted some quality internship experiences. Moving forward after my horticulture degree, you might see me doing some fine gardening work for south-enders, but I'm also interested in developing as a writer – with any combination of professional, technical, and fictional content. As such, WICD has been gracious enough to have me write this article for the paper.

WICD is all about conserving natural resources, so I thought I'd add to its general message by talking about ecology and native plants. My degree from EdCC will specifically be in Landscape and Restoration Horticulture. Don't let the "Landscape" label fool you though – it's more like Ornamental Horticulture (fine gardening), as I don't aspire to be a "landscaper." However, I do embrace the restoration part of my education. Restoration is all about ecology. In fact, it's sometimes referred to as "Restoration Ecology," and the practice of it is known as "Ecological Restoration." Unlike my little sister, who is a professor of Ecology, I'm not an expert on ecology but I do know some of the basics. Perhaps you might be curious to know about ecology too, and how it relates to conserving resources on your land.

Ecology is the study of organisms and how they relate to their surroundings and each other. For the purpose of this article, ecology means how plants and animals interact and maintain their continued survival. The need for restoration both on our own landscapes and the greater Whidbey Island region is based on native plants and animals losing their trajectory of continued species survival. Restoration seeks to restore the interactions of the ecosystem so existing native plant and animal species continue to survive. Some people attempt to restore ecosystems to a point in history – for example, the flora and fauna of 100 years ago. Others focus mostly on restoring the ecosystem processes to a sustainable plant and animal community, while accepting the fact it might be somewhat changed from 100 years ago. One quality which helps ecologists evaluate the health of an ecosystem is the biodiversity found within it – this is a count of the number of separate species living within the ecosystem (the number of different plants and animals found within a certain boundary). Factors that influence the stability of an ecosystem include:

- Water availability (amount of rain, level of water table, etc.)
- Presence of topsoil (this can wash away with erosion or be removed in development activities)
- Presence of pollution
- Space to establish
- Exposure to sunlight, shade, or shelter for animals
- Disturbance from unusual activity (this might include soil compaction from unusual human or livestock traffic)

All of these factors might even be considered when planning your home residential garden beds! It doesn't have to just be about wild spaces when we think of these things.

To give you an idea of how ecology is viewed on a national level, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has delineated significantly different environmental conditions (defined as "ecoregions") at multiple different levels. At the finest level, "level IV," there are 967 different ecore-

gions within the conterminous United States! Up one level, to "level III," there are 105 bigger regions encompassing all those smaller regions. At that third level, Whidbey Island is part of the Puget Lowland. The Puget Lowland includes land central to Puget Sound, including the following regions:

- Fraser Lowland
- Eastern Puget Riverine Lowlands
- San Juan Islands
- Eastern Puget Uplands
- Central Puget Lowland
- Southern Puget Prairies
- Cowlitz/ Chehalis Foothills
- Cowlitz/Newaukum Prairie Floodplains

The "Puget Lowlands" is defined by the EPA as being 'characterized by a mild maritime climate. It occupies a continental glacial trough and is composed of many islands, peninsulas, and bays in the Puget Sound area. Coniferous forests originally grew on the ecoregion's ground moraines, outwash plains, floodplains, and terraces. The distribution of forest species is affected by the rain-shadow from the Olympic Mountains. Douglas-fir, western hemlock, western red cedar, grand fir, red alder, and bigleaf maple are common forest components. A few small areas of oak woodlands occur in drier locations.' If interested, check out the EPA's website at [www.epa.gov/eco-research/](http://www.epa.gov/eco-research/) ecoregions for links to look at the actual maps showing these regions. Whidbey Island's fourth level classification puts it in the "Olympic Rain-shadow" region, along with additional land to the west of the island.

Nestled within the big picture of EPA ecoregions lies the peace and serenity many of us find at our homes, or locally, on Whidbey Island. I currently live in my childhood home on the south end in Clinton, on four acres. Some of the property is composed of native remnant forest with beautiful mature Western red cedars (*Thuja plicata*). The second most common trees in our forest are Douglas fir trees (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*). We also have some red alder trees (*Alnus rubra*), and even a Western hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*) and red elderberry (*Sambucus racemosa*) or two. Common understory plants for us are red huckleberry (*Vaccinium parvifolium*), evergreen huckleberry (*Vaccinium ovatum*), Western sword fern (*Polystichum munitum*), ocean spray (*Holodiscus discolor* - I love the mature arching forms of this plant), dull or short Oregon grape (*Mahonia nervosa*), salal (*Gaultheria shallon*), and a bunch of bracken ferns (*Pteridium aquilinum*). One of my favorite scenes is a sort of natural Amphitheatre of sword ferns. We don't have the topography of that at home, but I love it whenever I see it - often on the side of the road next to a stream.

When witnessing the natural beauty that's everywhere, even on the side of the road, contributing to plant and animal continued existence (ecoregion stability) might be of interest to everyone, and associated resource conservation. WICD most likely has some material on any resource conservation topic of interest to you, and native plant publications along with rain garden instructions are but a few of the offerings. There's also a native plant sale run by the WICD beginning in November – [www.whidbeycd.org/native-plant-sale](http://www.whidbeycd.org/native-plant-sale). At EdCC, I have taken a class entitled 'Native Plants.' It's offered summer quarter through the horticulture department, meets once a week, and was part of my degree. I'll share one of the key morsels of guidance learned in the Native Plants class: take a copy of Pojar and Mackinnon's *Plants of the Pacific Northwest Coast* with you on hiking adventures, walks in the woods, or even just into your backyard. WICD has a copy of this book in their resource library located at the office, if you'd like to check it out, and it's widely accepted as a great field guide. In addition to consulting the WICD regarding your native plant needs, consider looking at this book for ideas about native plants and how to incorporate them into your landscape and contribute to Whidbey restoration.

## An Informational Meeting regarding the Wrights Crossing Master Plan UGA Application

### September 6 6-7pm

Best Western Plus  
Conference Center  
33175 State Route 20  
Oak Harbor

Carl Halsan  
Planner and MC

Panelists:  
Scott Thompson  
Managing Member and  
Utilities Advisor

Joel Servatius  
City Councilman and  
Housing Task Force Chair

David Markley  
Traffic Engineer



# WRIGHTS CROSSING

Master Planned Community



Thank you for reading! Please recycle the Whidbey Weekly when you are finished with it.

