



Winter is Coming!

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Spawning Salmon Time

Typically spawning salmon return to Douglas Creek around November 1. It seems they wait for a high tide and a good rain to raise the creek levels before entering the creek.

Chum salmon spawn in pools below Ash Road while the Coho salmon will swim further up stream above Ash Road, some even have been seen attempting to jump the weir, hopefully not making it because after that it's a storm pipe, not spawning beds.



Spawning chum

<https://pkols-mountdouglas.ca/web/Videos/ChumReturn.mp4>

The number of returning salmon everywhere, including Douglas Creek, has been declining. Although spawning salmon have been seen in Douglas Creek every year, there has been only a few in the last several years. Each and every fish needs to have the best spawning opportunities, but since they are very skittish, please stay clear of the creek banks.

Hérons

The Pacific Great Blue Herons returned again! They arrived in late spring, a little later this year, and were there until early summer. There are three nests near the tree tops along the Douglas Trail in the beach parking area. You will know you are in the right area when you see the white guano covered plants, look up at your own risk! Two of the three nests were occupied this year with two chicks in each nest (confirmed by seeing all four chicks test their wings at the same time).

For an excellent article on these beautiful birds, see this article on our web site: <https://pkols-mountdouglas.ca/wp/flora-and-fauna/birds/>

People, Pets and Parks

In June of this year, the People, Pets, and Parks (PPP) Consultant team completed their roughly 18 month study examining all aspects of pets (primarily dogs) in Saanich Parks. The consultant team consisted of three different companies, each a specialist area expertise. They reviewed what is done in other jurisdictions, examined the different Saanich Parks,

held a series of public consultations, and presented their recommendations to Council in June of this year.

Data was submitted on behalf of the conservancy to the consultants demonstrating the severe damage that was occurring, especially in the southern portion of the park around the Maddock, Glendenning and Mercer trails. This area, after many years of work, had been cleared of invasive plants by Saanich Pulling Together volunteers and fully restored with the planting of native plant species. Then came the onslaught of people and dogs during the COVID years. Too many people created and followed rogue trails, presumably hoping they would minimize contact with others. These rogue trails continue to be an issue, but at least they are confined and can be permanently closed and eventually restored, while a few might be recognized as official trails.

Off-leash, off-trail dogs were and continue to be a much larger issue. Dog walkers themselves continue to publish photos and videos showcasing their dogs, often in packs, running through the understory, damaging the brittle Oregon Grape and other native plants, tugging and pulling branches off of trees, and digging holes. Trails (especially the Mercer trail) widened from a 1 to 2 metre width, to easily ten times that with bare earth in multiple locations. The understory damage was clearly documented by a biologist working with a Park Pulling Together Lead Steward.

The PPP consultants recommendations relating to PKOLS-Mount Douglas were:

- A leash-optional, fully fenced 2.2 km circular trail in the southern section of the park consisting of Glendenning to Whittaker, Whittaker to Cedar Hill and Maddock back to Glendenning. This area was selected by the consultants on advice from Parks due to it being relatively flat and accessible to all abilities, compacted with good drainage for year-round use, multiple access points and wide enough to be fully fenced.
- On-leash everywhere else within the Park, with the exception of a second fully enclosed dog park in the former gravel pit.

It wasn't surprising that no one seemed happy with the recommendations. From the PKOLS-Mount Douglas Conservancy perspective, the recommendations were very lopsided, there was no dog free area considering the majority of residents and park visitors do not have a dog and there was nothing explicitly for the environment. It did offer one improvement over the existing conditions, namely, the southern section of the park included a proposed fully-fenced, leash-optional circular trail between the Maddock, Glendenning and Mercer Trails which has been and continues to be the playground for off

leash dogs and where the most severe damage is occurring. From the Conservancy's perspective, this fencing would be a terrible affront to the park, but it would keep people and pets out of the newly enclosed area, allowing for it to again be restored. For this specific reason, it was a difficult compromise on our position but it appeared best to support the PPP recommendations at the June Council meeting.

WSÁNEĆ Leadership Council Executive Assistant and Hereditary Chief Eric Pelkey stated in his letter to Saanich Council on June 16, 2023, that:

“The WSÁNEĆ Leadership Council is concerned about degradation of ecologically sensitive areas in PKOLS, caused by off leash dog walking and off leash trail use by dogs in these native ecosystems. We are aware that this is a significant concern.”



Garry Oak and Camas Worth Protecting

“We fully support the District of Saanich’s Pet Strategy that requires dogs to be on leash in natural parks that have ecologically sensitive areas.”

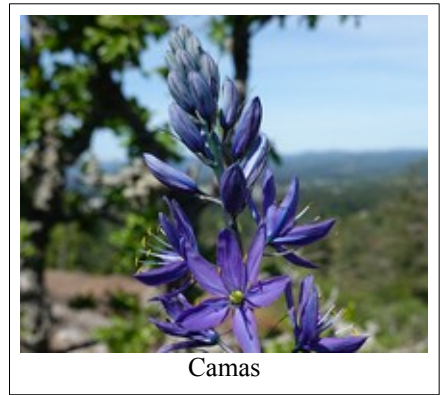
WSÁNEĆ Leadership Council Executive Assistant and Hereditary Chief Eric Pelkey made the following statement in his letter to Council: “PKOLS is an extremely important

location in the history of the WSÁNEĆ Nation.”

This letter appears to have been ignored by the council, despite expressing an interest in working in harmony with First Nations.

At that June meeting, Saanich Council unanimously endorsed the PPP consultants recommendations and directed staff to draft a corresponding bylaw and also to develop and implement a monitoring program in PKOLS-Mount Douglas in coordination with the WSÁNEĆ Leadership Council.

It is unfortunate that some (who want to continue with zero leash restrictions) responded by targeting and threatening supporters of the PPP. Both our Society President and Vice President were targeted on social media. Other supporters or presumed “instigators” of the PPP strategy process were also targeted, some at their homes. One person who spoke at the Council meeting supporting the PPP received a death threat.



In September, staff brought the draft bylaw to Council for approval. Most expected it to be unanimously approved, due to its alignment with the already unanimously approved strategy recommendations. However, vocal opposition during the public input in chambers led to Councillor Plant requesting a two week pause in the bylaw approval process. Two weeks later, on Sept. 25, the Mayor surprised everybody by adding last-minute amendments that essentially eliminated every environmentally beneficial aspect of the original proposal. The Mayor pushed his extremely ill founded ideas where all the data indicated these were an environmental disaster. Namely:

- Cancelling the fencing of the leash-optional trails, while leaving them fully leash optional.
- Extending the leash-optional trails at PKOLS to include the section of upper Glendenning Trail leading to the summit.
- Proposing a leash definition that included allowing 8 metre extendable leashes.

Cancelling the fencing and allowing an additional off-leash area means there will be zero protection for this entire section of the park, which contains some of the most sensitive

and at-risk ecosystems in all of PKOLS-Mount Douglas, and indeed all of British Columbia¹.

The upper Glendenning Trail traverses a fragile Garry Oak area, is a steep slope, in poor condition, subject to severe erosion and cannot handle high traffic volumes like the lower Glendenning Trail. Off-leash dogs without the installation of fencing in this fragile Garry Oak area is simply not appropriate. And yet the groups wanting no leash rules are still not happy with even these amendments, they want more off-leash access.

Our Society still reluctantly supports the original, evidence-based PPP Consultant recommendations as it moves in the right direction, pointing out that Council still needs to address protection of all the endangered areas. We continue to urge Council to vote down the Mayor's last-minute amendments that remove environmental protection from the most sensitive areas of PKOLS-Mount Douglas. That decision will be made at the October 30th Council meeting.

It must be noted that in PKOLS-Mount Douglas, there are three components:

- The environment, off-leash dogs, and full fencing with its associated costs.
- Of these three, the environment is paramount.
- Hence, off-leash and fencing must remain together if the environment is to be protected.
- However, Council could eliminate the leash-optional trail fencing by making PKOLS all on-leash, then use that money to make really good dog parks elsewhere. This would be the best solution!

Many of you have written letters to Council in support of the PPP, for this we thank you. There is still an opportunity to write another letter before the October 30th Council meeting, we will be writing yet again and hope you will also. Even after that meeting, it will not hurt to write, either to thank them or register your disappointment.

¹ All of PKOLS is mapped as Sensitive Ecosystems by the Federal/Provincial SEI initiative, as well, all of PKOLS is also mapped as Provincially listed Ecosystems at Risk by the BC Conservation Data Center (mostly red, some blue). Both maps are available on the Saanich Map GIS system. Most of the ecosystems in PKOLS are considered critically imperilled globally (G1) or imperilled globally (G2) according to the international NatureServe system, viewable on the BC Conservation Data Center website. This includes most of the forested ecosystems and Garry oak ecosystems. Also see “Endangered Ecosystems” menu item at <https://pkols-mountdouglas.ca>

Halloween Pumpkins

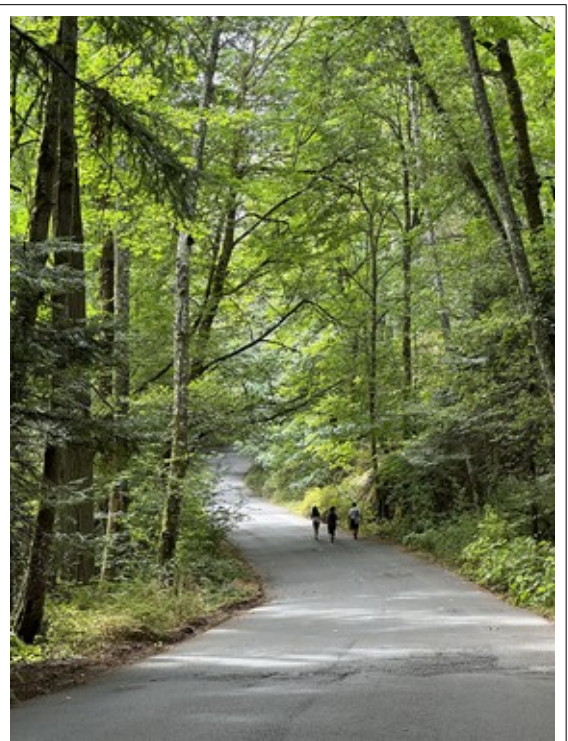
It's that time of year again. Hopefully everyone will carve a super friendly or even scary pumpkin. But after the fun is over, it belongs in the compost, not in a natural park! It might look nice for a day, but it doesn't take long before they get smashed or thrown in the understory, often still with the metal candle votive base, wax and pumpkin seeds. It takes traffic controllers, Saanich crews with a backhoe to pick up along the road, but then it's up to volunteers to pick up all the pieces thrown further into the park.



Pumpkins belong in the compost, not in the park!



Lonely Arbutus



Churchill Drive closed mornings for walkers

Beach Parties

Beach fires and trash left over from beach parties seems to be increasing. Other areas with good beaches have enacted stringent regulations either prohibiting beach fires entirely or have placed fire pits in safe locations where the fire cannot spread to nearby vegetation. For the PKOLS-Mount Douglas beach, there is no safe location between the high tide line and the bank vegetation. Further, over time, the accumulation of charred wood degrades the quality of the beach sand.

Then there is the garbage left behind. What happened to the pack out what you pack in? A slight improvement are those that at least take their garbage up the trail to the parking area garbage receptacle. Take a look on most Saturday, Sunday or Monday mornings after a nice weekend evening and see all the overflowing receptacles with the crows spreading it all around. Packing it out should mean take it home with you.



Remains of beach fire and party garbage

Engineering firm fined \$1M over B.C. spill linked to 85 trout deaths

A British Columbia court has ordered an international engineering firm to pay a \$1-million fine for releasing a harmful substance that flowed into a Metro Vancouver creek, after an investigation into the deaths of dozens of fish.

A statement from Environment and Climate Change Canada says Keller Foundations Ltd. was ordered to pay the penalty last month, after the company pleaded guilty in B.C. provincial court to one charge over violations of the federal Fisheries Act.

The department says the investigation into the deaths of about 85 cutthroat trout in April 2018 found Keller's construction activities led to a discharge of concrete leachate into groundwater that flowed into Larson Creek in West Vancouver.

It says much of the substance had elevated pH levels that are known to be harmful to fish, including cutthroat trout.

New Real Time Water Quality Measurements

A cutting-edge water quality measurement station has been recently deployed at the weir. This station is the product of 2S Water, a local company who are developing real-time water quality technology, traditionally employed in monitoring water discharge from mines to ensure compliance with environmental regulations. In collaboration with our Society and with the acquisition of a park permit, 2S Water's local research division has introduced this innovative device at the weir.

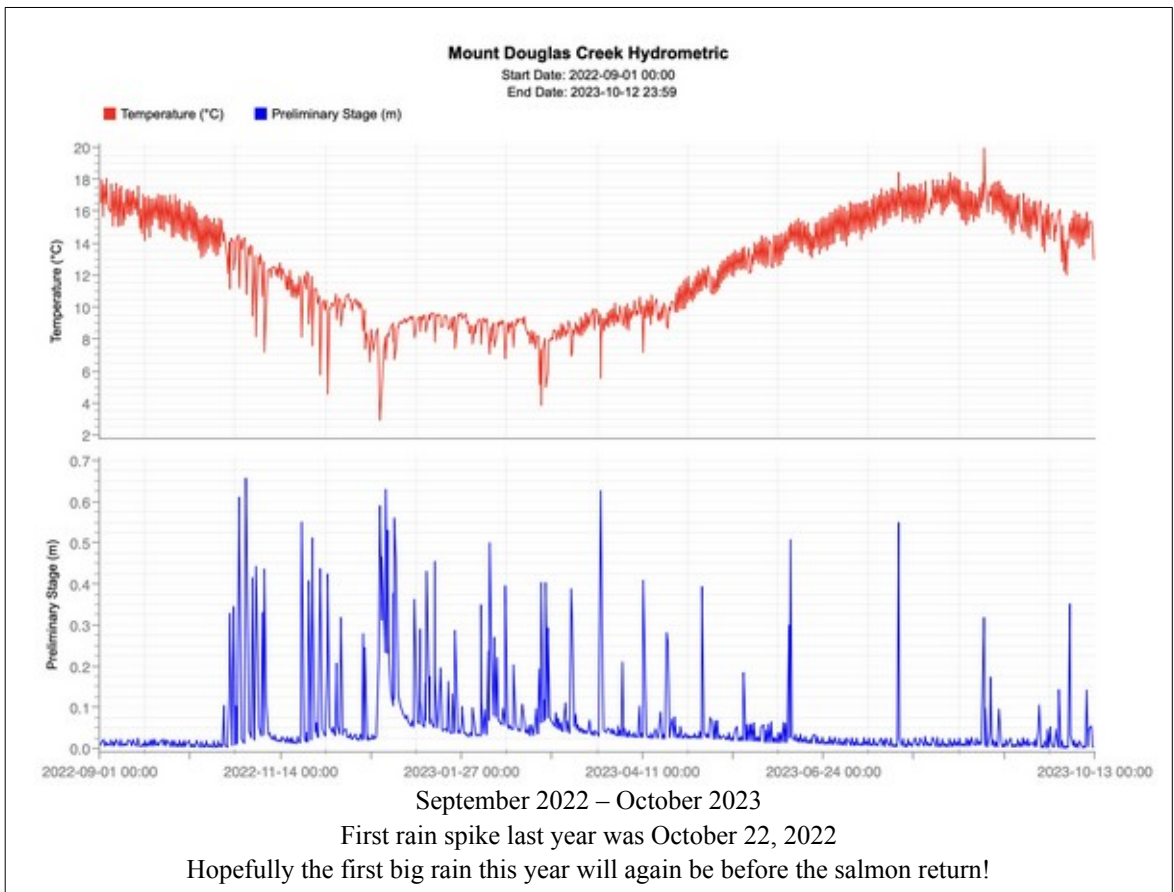
The device is designed to collect water samples approximately every half hour and then subject these samples to a high-voltage arc. This process essentially incinerates the water for a spectrum analysis, revealing the presence of various metals. The resulting data is uploaded to the internet in real-time, providing invaluable insights into water quality. The sensor itself is designed to replace the need for lab testing. Currently, to get this data, companies must send samples to the laboratory, and wait for long periods to get the data in return. 2S Water's new sensor is designed to increase the speed and efficacy of environmental compliance.

The objective of the deployment at the weir is to create the first robust data set of the water quality conditions. This data will help establish a baseline, detect changes caused by weather or human activity, and identify areas where the society can help improve water quality.

Douglas Creek Water Quality

There is a hydrometric station located at the weir that continuously measures water pH, water temperature and the water height of the weir pond. This data is uploaded to the internet every four hours. A sample graph showing water heights over a one year period can be seen on the interpretive sign in the “outdoor classroom” by the creek bridge.

The number of pollutants arriving from the watershed has fortunately decreased over the years. Heating oil spills used to be way too common, but since Saanich created the bylaw whereby if you spill, you pay for the entire cleanup, even if the cleanup isn't on your property had a dramatic affect. Now such heating oil spills are rare.



Douglas Creek 6-PPDQ Tire Toxin Water Sampling Research

The PKOLS-Mount Douglas Conservancy is pleased to be supporting a research initiative led by the BC Conservation Foundation (BCCF) in collaboration with Vancouver Island University's Applied Environmental Research Lab (VIUAER). Volunteers are collecting water samples during different rainfall events in order to determine whether a recently identified common tire preservative compound known as 6PPD-quinone is detectable in Douglas Creek. In 2020, 6-PPDQ was identified as the cause of 'urban run-off mortality syndrome' (URMS) in multiple salmonid species, with coho being the most vulnerable - even at extremely low concentrations. Sampling efforts are primarily focused on waterways that are utilized by coho salmon (particularly juveniles) as they are most vulnerable to URMS. The BCCF is interested in sampling waterways that stewardship groups are working to restore or introduce coho, which includes Douglas Creek.

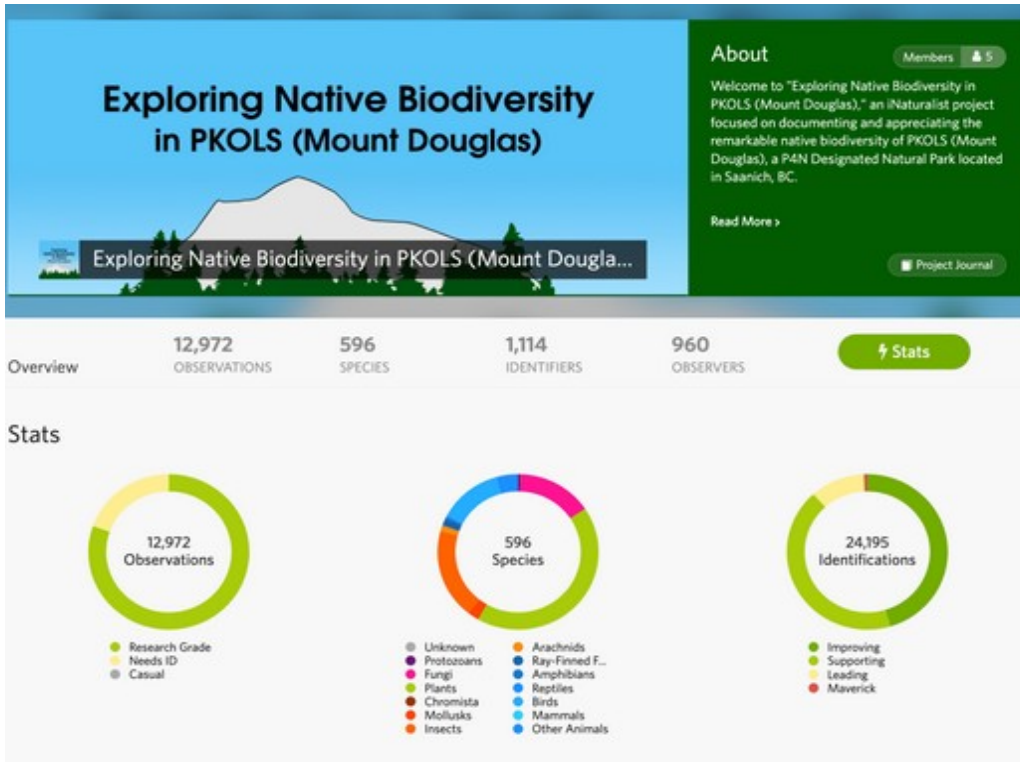


Douglas Creek with High Water



Fawn Lily – Trillium – Invasive Lunaria Annua

PKOLS-Mount Douglas iNaturalist Project



The **Native Biodiversity in PKOLS (Mount Douglas) Project** has 12,972 observations...and counting!

iNaturalist.org is a free app and platform that offers individuals of all ages and skill levels an opportunity to contribute to our shared understanding of the natural world. iNaturalist brings people together through learning — all you need is a camera phone and curiosity about the flora and fauna around you. Upload your observations from PKOLS-Mount Douglas in and they will automatically be added to the project database. You can participate in the project and learn more about observations at this link:

www.inaturalist.org/projects/exploring-native-biodiversity-in-pkols-mount-douglas



Ten Ways You Can Be A Nature Steward in PKOLS-Mount Douglas



1. **Stay on Designated Trails:** Always stick to established paths to avoid damaging vegetation or disturbing wildlife. There are many ground-nesting wildlife species and fragile plants that cannot withstand trampling.
2. **Pack Out What You Pack In:** Dispose of all trash, litter, and pet waste properly by carrying it out of the park with you. Remember: biodegradable doesn't always mean beneficial!
3. **Limit Noise Pollution:** Keep noise levels to a minimum in natural areas to avoid disturbing wildlife activity and disrupting the tranquil soundscape of the park.
4. **Respect Wildlife:** Always maintain a safe distance from wildlife and do not feed wild animals. Human food can harm their health and interfere with their natural behaviours.
5. **Stay Informed:** Make sure to research and follow the park bylaw and seasonal fire restrictions — they're in place to ensure the safety of both the wildlife residents and human visitors alike.
6. **Respect Plant Life:** Please don't pick flowers, dig up plants, or take cuttings. Avoid disturbing or removing natural features, as they provide habitat for even the tiniest of creatures.
7. **Report Wildlife Violations:** If you witness an incident involving humans harming wildlife, be sure to report it to the proper authorities (BC Conservation Officer hotline: 1 877-952-7277)
8. **Educate Yourself and Others:** Learn about the park's ecosystems, flora, and fauna, and encourage others to do the same. Research ways to reduce any potential impacts your presence in the park might have on its sensitive ecosystems.
9. **Remove Invasive Species:** Volunteer to remove invasive species (such as English ivy, Himalayan blackberry, and Scotch broom) with Saanich Park's *Pulling Together* Program
10. **Join Our Society:** Participate in park cleanups, habitat restoration efforts, and help advocate for PKOLS-Mount Douglas as a natural area to inspire generations to come.

Bottom Line: You just stepped off the trail on a small plant to let someone pass, you just took a clipping for your Christmas decorations, is that an issue? Given that the park enjoys many hundreds of thousands of visitors every year, think about what would result if only one or two thousand of those people following you did the same thing. There is no such thing as "It's just me".

Who Am I? (Flora)

In forests near, I proudly stand,
My roots embraced by ancient land
A coastal presence, tall and true,
From eagle's nests, a striking view.

A crown of cones, my branches wear
My seeds take flight through woodland air
I reach great heights to touch the sky
A king of trees, none can deny.

Named after one who studied with glee,
Botanical realms; his legacy.
So riddle me this, with wisdom and grace,
Which tree am I, in this natural place?

Who Am I? (Fauna)

In woodlands near is where I'm found
Along the damp and shaded ground.
O'er rotting logs and mossy trails,
Beneath the ferns, my pace prevails.

The clean-up crew of forest floors,
I dine on leaves and mushroom spores,
I play a role in spreading seeds
And see to healthy soil needs.

My hues might range from tan to gold
Speckled skin, a sight to behold
When Autumn nears look down and see,
Now guess, dear friend, who could I be?

Answers bottom of page 15



Victoria with Olympic Peninsula

Nature's Bounty: Garry Oak Acorn Mast Year and the Vital Role of Steller's Jays

If you've walked through any of the Garry oak-lined trails of PKOLS-Mount Douglas lately, you've likely noticed that 2023 is a "mast" year for these mighty trees. These intermittent mast years are significant ecological events in which Garry oak trees (*Quercus garryana*) produce a remarkable abundance of acorns, ensuring their own species' survival while offering a bountiful feast for wildlife, including squirrels, deer, and many species of birds.



Image Credit: VJAnderson CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons

Steller's jays (*Cyanocitta stelleri*) are a member of the Corvid family, related to crows and ravens. These striking native songbirds play a primary role in the dispersal and regeneration of Garry oak acorns in the region. (Fuchs, 1998). You may be seeing (and hearing!) Steller's jays more frequently in PKOLS-Mount Douglas these days, as they work hard to secure their winter food supply.

During a mast year, the excessive number of hoarded acorns surpasses what Steller's jays are able to consume over winter. By the following spring, many of the acorns that were stashed just below the surface of the soil will have germinated into young oak seedlings—destined to become the next generation of Garry oaks.

This unique relationship between Steller's jays and Garry oaks serves as a reminder of the interconnectivity between our native plant and animal species. Protecting the necessary habitat for Steller's jays so that they continue to thrive in our region is an essential part of ensuring the survival of Garry oaks and the fragile ecosystems they define.

Further learning: Fuchs, M. A. (1998). Seedling ecology of Garry oaks in British Columbia and dispersal of Garry oak acorns by Steller's jays (T). University of British Columbia.

Answer 1: Douglas fir tree
Answer 2: Pacific banana slug

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Membership Renewal - Gift Membership

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Providing information via this newsletter about the Park is an important Society function. We want to reach more Park users and Park neighbours. Why not **give someone you know a gift subscription and include it with your renewal**? A one-year membership isn't much more than the price of a good cup of coffee! You provide the gift and we'll send notification to the recipient of your generosity. We hope you will continue to support the work of the Society for another year.

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