



Mark Vukobrat
Wolfbrotherphoto

Great Horned Owls

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New Society Name

We have a new name. We are no longer “Friends of Mount Douglas Park Society”, but we are still the same society, just a name change to PKOLS-Mount Douglas Conservancy.

When Saanich Council changed the name of the park from Mount Douglas Park to PKOLS (Mount Douglas Park) we followed that lead. We also wanted a new name that better represented our efforts for protecting and preserving the park and felt “conservancy” better represented that view than “Friends of”.

We also wanted consistency between our Society name and web site name. Saanich's name for the park includes parenthesis which unfortunately are not valid web site characters.

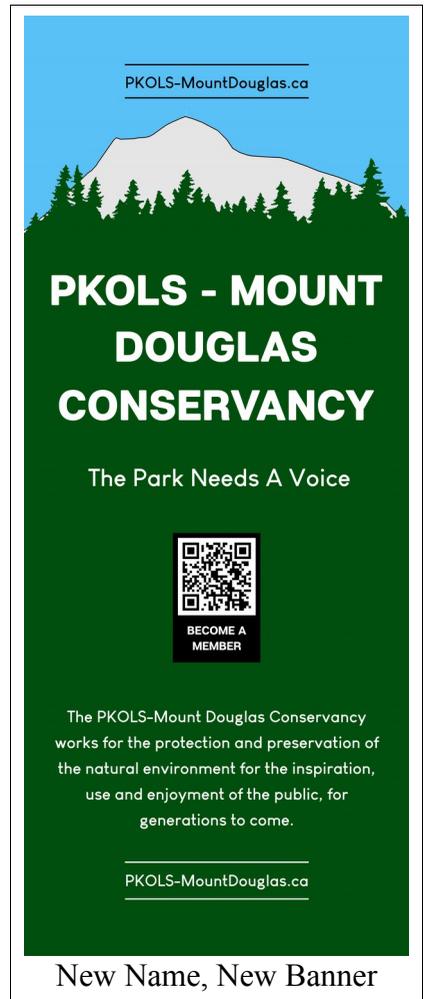
Hence the new society name PKOLS-Mount Douglas Conservancy and the new web site name <https://PKOLS-MountDouglas.ca>. Take a look at our new website, it has been completely redesigned, we hope you'll like it!

New Beach Stairs

The powerful large rain storm water surges in Douglas Creek completely undermined the old concrete beach stairs, making them unusable. In fact, they never did provide a reliable way to the beach because high tides kept changing and blocking the last step onto the beach with logs. Even before the bottom section washed out, the creek bank supporting upper sections of the stairs was eroding, causing the stairs to noticeably tilt.

Last fall, Saanich Parks carpenters completed the construction of a new stairway that leads to a sand beach well above the high tide line. These new stairs are on an old access road that was used several decades ago when rocks were brought down to the beach to bolster the cliff bottoms from tidal erosion.

It's going to be a big job, but the old concrete stairs will be removed this summer and the area which is within the riparian zone will receive restoration planting.





Old stairs undermined by creek high flows



Access to old stairs now blocked by log jam



Completed new stairs to the beach



Carpenter Joshua and Bear installing railing for completed stairs

Garbage Pickup

A very special thanks to the many volunteers that regularly pick up garbage.



Packed in but not packed out seen on Mondays after good weekend weather



Furniture dumping in the park is unfortunately no different than elsewhere in Saanich. This is a job for Parks crews.



UVic students with Surfrider did a beach cleanup



Two shy society members took advantage of the recent closure of Cordova Bay Rd to pickup 3 bags of bottles and fast-food garbage.

Great Horned Owls

A mamma and papa Great Horned Owls couple found the perfect wildlife tree for their nest. And in March there were three little owlets watching us watch them.



The largest owlet with mama sleeping



Three Owlets

Often owlets will attempt to fly before their flight feathers are fully developed resulting in a somewhat graceful soft landing on the ground. With all the off-leash and off-trail dogs in the area, Saanich Parks staff erected a protective fence around the area.

Don't worry if you see one on the ground, mama will continue to care for the young one who might simply climb back up it's nesting tree.

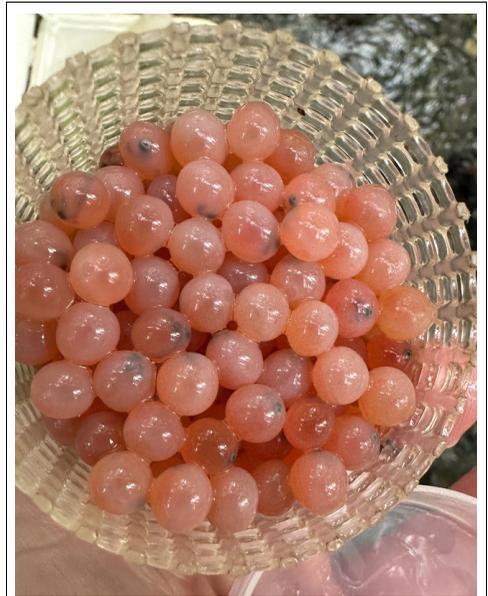


Owl watchers watched by owls

20,000 Chum Eggs – An Artificial Redd

This winter the Howard English Hatchery at Goldstream brought us 20,000 chum eyed eggs to place in Douglas Creek. Six volunteers (the two Saanich chaps got “volunteered” to do the heavy lifting!) placed a cubic yard of spawning gravel in the creek. This was to provide a hiding place for the alevin to hide until their egg sac is absorbed and they emerge as fry. By the time you read this, the fry will have emerged and most likely departed on their long journey up the coast and past the Aleutian Islands before returning.

Many don't realize that for many years now, Douglas Creek is officially a Federally recognized fish bearing stream. This is a result of the spawning salmon that have been returning to the creek each year. This designation provides enforceable guidelines about not disturbing the spawning salmon, the redds, alevin or fry.



Eyed chum salmon eggs



Pouring 2000 eggs from ten transfer tubes into the artificial redd



Spawning Salmon in Douglas Creek



Mena, Darrell, Joscilyn, Kyle, Brad & Reece installed spawning gravel and artificial redd

PKOLS-Mount Douglas, an Exceptional Saanich Asset

PKOLS-Mount Douglas is a special spectacular natural park in many ways.



Soaring Turkey Vulture



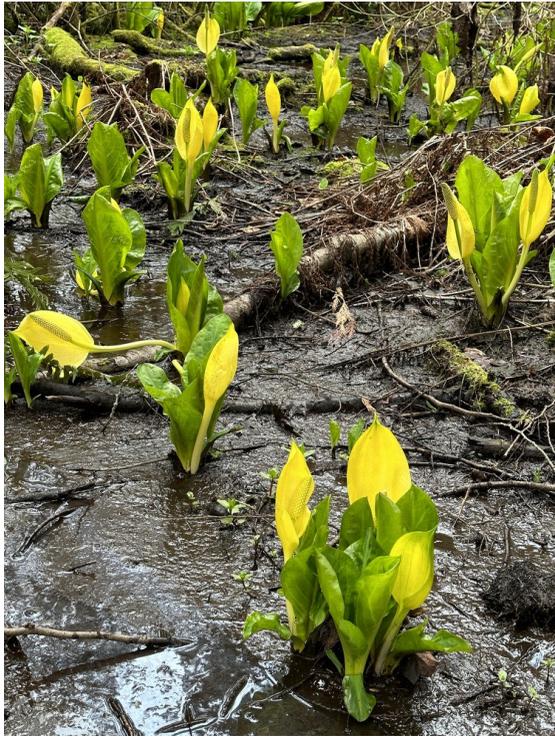
Two Lovebirds



Getting to Know You
Invasive Rabbit

First and foremost, the park is an outstanding nature reserve situated in an urban setting encompassing endangered ecosystems such as Coastal Douglas Fir, Garry Oak Meadows and potentially 45 provincial plant communities that are classified as endangered. It should be noted that all ecosystems within the park are either at risk or classified as sensitive ecosystems.

There is a wide variety of birds, notably large soaring Turkey Vultures, Bald Eagles, Great Blue Herons, Horned Owls, Barred Owls and enumerable smaller but not less important smaller birds, many that are ground nesting.



Skunk Cabbage

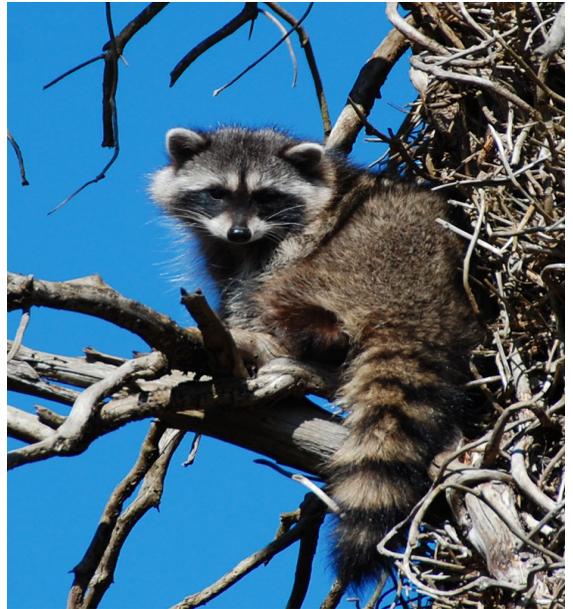


Mink screenshot from video <https://pkols-mountdouglas.ca/web/PhotoAlbums/Mink/>

Along with the frequently seen deer and raccoons are otters, mink, weasels and yes, even the occasional cougar. But no bears.



Barred Owl



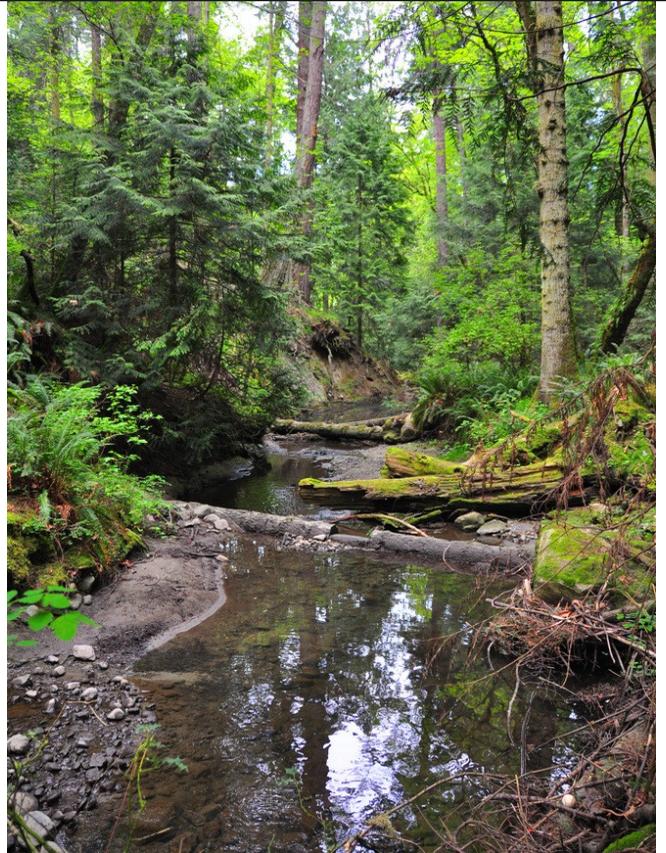
“Friendly” Raccoon

The salmon bearing stream, Douglas Creek, is home to chum salmon, Coho salmon, and cutthroat trout as well as crayfish and numerable small but important invertebrates. It also offers a peaceful reclus with the restful sounds of gurgling, flowing water.

Perhaps a not so well known important feature, is the soundscape featuring large areas where one can hear nature with no urban sounds. In these quiet areas, it's like going from a bright room into a dark room. It takes yours eyes time to adjust before you can again see. The same with the soundscape quiet areas. You have to stop, wait and listen for your hearing to adjust before you begin to hear nature. There are very few other areas in the urban city, if any, where you can hear quiet. It's a very positive feature that you cannot see and this might be the most difficult park feature to protect.



Crayfish in Douglas Creek



Douglas Creek

Douglas Creek Outdoor Classroom

Student Stream Survey

The Douglas Creek Outdoor Classroom is being put to good use. It is providing a safe access to the creek for the several schools that rear salmon fry as part of the classroom incubation program. Every year around late April or early May, the school classes come down to the creek to release their fry.

The Outdoor Classroom has also been serving as a school laboratory for performing stream surveys as part of stream keeper education. St Margaret's School has been carefully measuring water flows, water quality and stream physical aspects as part of their course laboratory exercises for the past few years.



Students recording stream physical aspects

Odds & Ends

The Conservancy sets up an “information table” sharing information about the Park, creek and beach. A feature is the Spinning Wheel where you can spin for a park “Quick Fact”

A special thanks to all who pick up garbage along the trails and in the parking lots. It's part of the “Broken window syndrome”, a clean area stays clean.

And a very special thanks to two of the many Saanich Park staff that keep the park beautiful and in good shape. There's Joel that drives the garbage truck emptying the containers. He's super friendly; say “hello” to him if you see him driving up Churchill on a Saturday or Sunday.

And there's Chris who single-handedly deals with any and all graffiti in Saanich parks. It's a job that shouldn't be needed, but it is!



Spin the wheel, learn a quick park fact
If you see the booth, please stop and say “hello”



Why?



Thanks Chris!

2023 Major Parks Projects

Current planned major projects for the 2023 budget year:

- Douglas Creek during summer fisheries window:
 - Repair bank washout 100 m from outlet
 - Bolster bank projection 100 m below weir
 - Weir pond: Remove invasives, plant shade trees.
- Remove old concrete stairs to beach
- Install boardwalks
 - Douglas Trail near pond
 - Norn Trail south of Churchill Drive
 - Norn Trail 200 m north of Irvine intersection
- Completed split rail fence along beach trail
- Repair trail east approach to bridge
- Upper parking enhancements & new kiosk
- Repair asphalt pathway between upper parking lot and summit
- Repaint the letters on the Charter Rock

Churchill Challenge

With Churchill Drive closed daily until noon and also all day on long weekends, the Churchill Challenge has become a popular exercise. There are many regulars, mostly walkers, but several cyclists. It's a 1500 metre distance with an elevation gain of 160 metres.

How many times have you done the Churchill Challenge?

March 31, 2023, Jim Fidler, 72, completed the 160 m Churchill Challenge climb 5,500 times since he began tracking his rides eight years ago. He often does 8-10 climbs in one morning. That's the equivalent of 99 times the height of Mt Everest! By the time you read this, his ascents will surely be more than 100 times the height of Mt Everest.



Jim Fidler has cycled
Churchill Challenge 5,500 times

People, Pets & Parks Strategy

Saanich Council has contracted consultants for a People, Pets & Parks (PPP) study to provide recommendations for a district-wide strategy. First, we want to acknowledge the importance of investing in parks, trails and areas where dogs are allowed, on leash or off. It is our sincere hope that the PPP Strategy recommendations will adequately address these requirements.

A series of videos have recently been forwarded to our Society that appear to show commercial dog-walkers with large numbers of dogs running off leash, off trail and through fragile ecosystems. This is of great concern, as it seems that some of these dog walkers may not be fully aware of the impact they are having on these natural areas. Saanich Parks has confirmed that CRD commercial dog walker permits are not valid in Saanich parks and Saanich has not issued any permits to commercial dog walkers. We hope the PPP Strategy will address this issue for the safety and well-being of all park users.

At a recent Saanich Council meeting on March 6th, a delegation of Pulling Together Lead Stewards made a presentation to Council. The delegation spoke to Council about the harm inflicted on natural ecosystems and wildlife disturbance caused by people and off-leash dogs venturing off of designated trails.

(<https://pkols-mountdouglas.ca/ParksPresentationBackgrounder23.3.6.pdf>)

The group mapped the southern park area and identified severe damage to the ecosystems. Entire sections of the trails, particularly on the Mercer Trail, have been worn down to bare earth and are now three to five times wider than their original width. The population of ground nesting birds has significantly declined in these areas. (Speaking of birds, Hakai Magazine recently published an excellent article on dogs and the impact on shorebirds: <https://hakaimagazine.com/features/gone-to-the-dogs/>)

Regrettably, The Pulling Together Lead Steward has now stopped work within in PKOLS-Mount Douglas. Once the invasive species are removed, the new natural growth is quickly and repeatedly being trampled – in particular by off-leash, off-trail dogs – rendering efforts to restore the ecosystem futile and hindering the progress of ecological conservation within the park.

Witnessing the current ecosystems damage, the predator effect of dogs on wildlife, and the threat to ground nesting birds, we stand by our [Park Plan](#) position on dogs and cats. We look forward to a PPP Strategy that will protect and preserve the beautiful yet endangered ecosystems in PKOLS-Mount Douglas, while addressing the needs of dogs and their owners in Saanich.



Skunk Cabbage

