



PKOLS-Mount Douglas Conservancy

Fall/Winter 2024 Newsletter

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Territory Acknowledgement

PKOLS - Mount Douglas lies within the traditional territories of the W̱SÁNEĆ peoples, represented by the W̱JOŁŁP, BOKÉCEN, STÁUTW, W̱SIKEM and MÁLEXEŁ Nations; as well as the the lək'wəŋən peoples, represented by the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations. The W̱SÁNEĆ and lək'wəŋən peoples have been here since time immemorial, and their relationship with the land and water is long and rich.

lək'wəŋi?nəŋ and SENĆOTEN Names for 'Mount Douglas'

On June 3, 1955, Songhees Band member James (Jimmy) Fraser (c.1871-1857) provided a name for Mount Douglas to a reporter from Victoria's Times newspaper:

- **"Chu-utchin"**. Meaning : "heavenly mountain".

Saanich [W̱SÁNEĆ] elders provided a different name for Mt. Douglas which is similar to the name given by Songhees advisors to Mt. Tolmie (*Pkaals*):

- **"PKOLS"** - "white head". David (Dave) Elliott 1990:27 (revised edition from 1983 edition)
- **"PKOLS"** - "means white head". (David Elliot 1983:64)
- **"Pepkey'as"** - "white berries"; refers to white berries that grow on the slopes."

Saanich elder Ernie Olsen provided this name for Mt. Douglas to Douglas Hudson in 1969. Hudson #87. This name is that of the snowberry. It is also spelled as *Pepkiyos* . Elsie Claxton (Tsawout) and Chris Paul (Tsartlip) note that this plant is poisonous but also used as a medicine (Turner and Hebda 2012).

- **"pq'als"** - Saanich Classified Word List # 1870. Montler, Timothy (1991:88)

We thank to Grant Keddie for providing this summary of Indigenous place names

Mount Douglas Park Charter

"The lands known as Mount Douglas Park are hereby reserved in perpetuity to the protection and preservation of the natural environment for the inspiration, use and enjoyment of the public.

This land has been transferred by the Province of British Columbia to the Corporation of the District of Saanich on the condition that it be maintained and preserved as a public park.

With this charter, the spirit and intent of the original crown grant of 1889 is maintained while its scope is expanded to include within Mount Douglas Park all adjacent municipal parkland present and future, so that the whole will continue as a wilderness preserve for generations to come.

Proclaimed this 22nd. day of November 1992 by the council of the Corporation of the District of Saanich on behalf of the citizens of Saanich."

A Remarkable Return of Chum Salmon in Douglas Creek



November 7th, 2024: Chum spawning activity



The following day: A Chum carcass in Douglas Creek

In late October we received reports that salmon were observed jumping in the waters of Cordova Bay, near the tidal mouth of Douglas Creek. This is right on time with our historical observations of Chum returning to Douglas Creek during the later portion of October or the early half of November. From what we have seen, they choose to enter the creek with a high tide on a rainy day. They need the rain to raise the creek water levels so that they can move between pools to where they will spawn. Experience has shown that the Chum invariably spawn below Ash Road, unlike Coho that migrate to above Ash Road (and have even been observed attempting to jump the weir).

We regularly monitor the creek and carefully look for any salmon and also look for any redds. This is a critical time for the fish since any human activity near the creek banks scares them. Also, any redds are not deep in the gravel and footsteps, even from a dog can destroy the redd. Saanich has put up fencing

along trail edges to help keep people away from the creek, never-the-less there are too many rogue trails leading down to the creek and along it in some critical areas.

Following steady rainfall and a high tide on the morning of November 4th, three Chum Salmon were spotted in the lower reach of the creek. Four more counted by the afternoon, and as the sun began to set on the day a family of river otters had gathered on the beach... right at the mouth of the creek. Imagine spending four years navigating the vast reaches of the North Pacific, returning against all odds to the entrance of your natal creek...only to be caught by a river otter on your way upstream! Life certainly isn't easy for salmon—but resilience is in their DNA.

By the next day, there were at least three Chum observed in every spawning pool below Ash Road! These numbers remained steady over the next few days, and by the following week, Chum carcasses were seen in the lower

stretch of Douglas Creek. This sight (and smell!) may be familiar to those who participate in the annual Carcass Transplant, a restoration activity designed to simulate this very ecological process. In 2023, Chum returns were so disastrously low that the extra carcasses typically provided for this event by the Goldstream Hatchery had to be supplemented with Coho.

A 99% decrease in Chum eggs from previous years had devastating impacts on many local restoration projects. This year, Chum returns up and down the coast surpassed even the Fisheries forecast.

Our challenge continues to be getting the message out to the public that Douglas Creek is a highly sensitive, federally-designated fish-bearing stream. Sadly, there is frequent disregard for the posted “Please respect the spawning salmon” signage. Some park users express doubt there are salmon in the creek at all — and therefore see their actions as completely justifiable. In same time span that Chum were present in Douglas Creek this season, we also observed:

- Household garbage, food wrappers, and bagged dog waste floating in the creek and/or caught up in vegetation along the creek banks (safely and carefully collected by volunteers).
- Park users moving woody debris and stones within the stream zone to create “dry” pedestrian crossings. This alters salmon habitat and restricts salmon

movement, which is particularly problematic for Chum, which are poor jumpers.

- Individuals tending to a creekside campfire in an area that had been carefully designed and restored as part of a salmon habitat enhancement project.
- An off-leash dog entering the creek to lunge at a trio of salmon that had been engaging in courtship behaviour, stirring up a cloud of sediment and scaring away the fish.



November 2024: An off-leash dog enters Douglas Creek in pursuit of several spawning salmon.

It's clear there is still much work to be done, but what we do know is this: ongoing work to improve Douglas Creek is making a difference. This year's remarkable return of Chum salmon is a notable achievement for a creek that was once described by naturalist Freeman King in 1974 as “*polluted, stinking, and battered*” and destined to become “*nothing more than a series of eroded gullies.*”



▶ Watch the Remarkable Return of Chum Salmon to Douglas Creek! | 2024

QOL,EW is the SENĆOŦEN word, and **kʷáɫəxʷ** is the ləkʷəŋiʔnəŋ word for *Chum Salmon*.

▶ WSANEC protecting wild salmon for generations

Adam Olsen (STHENEP) speaks about the sacred relationship between the WSÁNEĆ and salmon

Park Project Updates:

- **The stairs at the top of Glendenning Trail**, leading to the summit, have been rebuilt and are now safer to use.
- **Fencing around to protect a highly-sensitive vernal pond ecosystem** has been installed on Blenkinsop Trail (shown at right). This pond is habitat for a very rare invertebrate species (*Eubbranchipus oregonus*).
- **Animal Bylaw Signage and Fencing** is scheduled to be installed sometime this fall/winter. We have reviewed the site-specific signage proposed for PKOLS (Mount Douglas) and provided feedback and suggestions. At a meeting with Parks Staff in September, we learned that there is still uncertainty regarding the construction specifications and timeline, as well as budget concerns.
- **Split-rail fencing around Norn Pond** will be installed in December to protect this rare wetland habitat. After advocating for this fencing for some time, we are grateful to Parks for their hard work (truly the heavy lifting!) and collaboration in ensuring this measure is taken to address and restore the degradation from trampling and unauthorized access by people/dogs.
- **A preliminary drilling survey for the tower replacement project** took place in November. The results are being analyzed, and this will determine the final design. Construction is anticipated to begin in early 2025. Updates regarding the project will be posted to [this Saanich webpage](#).
- **Creek bank stabilization:** Approximately 100 meters upstream from the creek outlet, a section of the steep bank is eroding with each heavy rain event and subsequent stormwater flow. Saanich will install Geobags to stabilize the banks. Geobags help prevent soil erosion by acting as a physical barrier that absorbs and dissipates the energy from water flow. Over time, they can promote vegetation growth, further reinforcing the bank and improving its stability. This restoration work was delayed this year and will likely take place next summer.
- **Enhancement of the Douglas Creek Weir Pond** by removing invasive species and follow-up planting of native trees and shrubs to provide shade and habitat.



Proposed New Pedestrian Bridge

The rogue trails leading down to Douglas Creek suggest many Park visitors do enjoy being closer to the creek. This was similar to the issue prior to the existing Creek bridge. There was no official creek crossing, so folks made their own, honeycombing the area with rogue trail creek crossings. Installing that first bridge created a good creek crossing and provided a controlled, safe way to be near the creek. And the rogue trails disappeared!

The current area, perhaps a hundred metres above the creek outlet, is similar; rogue trails leading to the creek on the north side, a rogue trail leading from the Durling Loop down to the bluff above the creek but no proper connection, all in areas where Chum are known to spawn and build their redds. So, what can be done?

We are proposing, with Saanich, to install a pedestrian footbridge, providing a new safe trail connecting the Beach Trail with the Durling Loop Trail. If prior experience holds, this will provide good, safe access to the area,

protect the salmon, eliminate the rogue trails, plus provide a beautiful accessible loop walk from the Beach Parking area, down the Beach Trail, across the bridge and back along the Durling/Churchill Loop.

What are the obstacles? There seems to be two primary issues for Saanich. The first is money. Our Society has offered sufficient funds that should easily cover the cost of the bridge itself plus the installation. We don't have an estimate on trail construction costs yet but we expect we can help with that also. The other issue is crew capacity in 2025 for the work, including trail construction. This work can legally only be done during the brief summer Fisheries window when water levels are low and salmonids are not present in the creek.

We want to make this a priority for 2025 but we need Saanich. When completed, this new bridge will be a true Park asset, allowing Park users to get up close with the creek while ensuring salmon habitat remains undisturbed.



A conceptual map showing the approximate location of the proposed new bridge and trail connectors.



An image rendering of the proposed bridge site,

Cordova Bay Road Stabilization Geotechnical Report

In the Spring of 2023, Cordova Bay Road in PKOLS (Mount Douglas Park) was closed for several days while a geotechnical assessment took place in the northern boundary of the Park, along the Cordova Bay shoreline. This fall, we met with representatives from the Engineering department who presented us with an overview of the geotechnical report findings and short-term remediation recommendations. The District of Saanich has since released a [statement](#) outlining these findings, and the [full report](#) can be viewed online.

Key Takeaways:

- Despite several studies and stabilization projects completed since the 1980s, erosion along the shoreline has continued.
- The report identifies two areas in particular that will require short-term remediation.
- Short-term recommendations for these sites include wattle fencing and live planting of native vegetation cuttings.
- This remediation work will offer "immediate near-surface support," and provide longer-term protection as the root systems develop, further stabilizing the slopes.
- The cost estimate for these bioremediation efforts is between \$712,343 and \$1,282,216.
- This is a short-term option — eventually the roadway through the Park *will* be closed — but the idea is that this remediation plan will buy the District some time (~5 years) while they continue to assess and cost-out long-term remediation plans.
- A detailed design for the wattle fencing is underway, with construction expected to begin in the Fall of 2025. Monitoring of the shoreline erosion will continue in the meantime.



"Exposed mid-slope sand bluff scarp from Station 11+60 to 12+40 (taken 27 March 2023)"[WSP Canada Inc.]



"Failure of the rip-rap revetment has allowed continued erosion of the shoreline."[WSP Canada Inc.]

What is Wattle Fencing?

by Polster Environmental Services Ltd.

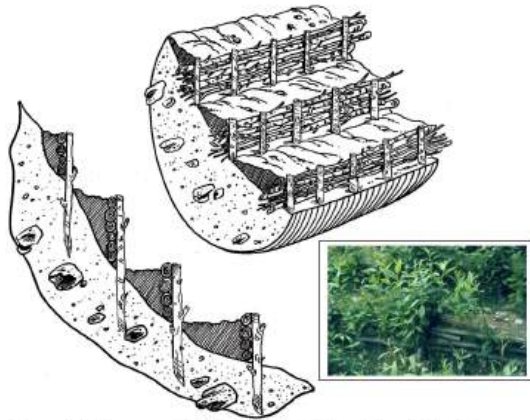


Figure 1. Wattle fences are short retaining walls built of living cuttings. Both the stakes and the horizontal pieces will sprout and grow (inset) providing a dense growth of pioneering species on the slope.

“Wattle fences (Figure 1) are short retaining walls built of living cuttings of willow (*Salix spp.*), cottonwood (*Populus balsamifera L.*) and red-osier dogwood (*Cornus stolonifera Michx.*). The cuttings will sprout and grow, changing the conditions on the slope so that other plants can establish. In addition to the growth of the cuttings used in the wattle fences, and by reducing the effective slope angle, the wattle fences create stable platforms on which vegetation can establish. The species used in construction of wattle fences and other bioengineering structures are pioneering species. These create conditions that encourage establishment of other later successional species such as Douglas-fir and possibly Western Redcedar. By initiating the natural successional processes, the wattle fences start a process that will ensure the treated site remains vegetated forever.”

Up Close With Fungi and Flora in PKOLS (Mount Douglas)

It’s easy to overlook the smallest residents of an ecosystem, but sometimes they play the biggest roles..



Purple-edge Bonnet (*Mycena purpureofusca*)

The tiny purple-toned fruiting bodies of this fungus grow from the decaying wood and fallen debris of conifer trees, particularly Douglas fir.



Dendroalsia Moss (*Dendroalsia abietina*)

This distinctive, feathery moss is a vulnerable species associated with Garry Oak woodlands, where it grows on tree trunks in dense mats.

Migratory Bird Sanctuary Petition e-5182

A petition calling for a new *Salish Sea Migratory Bird Sanctuary* located between the Victoria Harbour MBS and the Shoal Harbour MBS is open for signature until December 28th. The petition is sponsored by MP Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands), and will be presented to the House of Commons upon reaching 500 verified signatures.

Chief Eric Pelkey (WEC’KINEM) and others at the WSÁNEĆ Leadership Council (WLC) have confirmed their support of this petition, which recognizes: *“This entire shoreline falls within the traditional territories of the WSÁNEĆ and Lekwungen Nations, who seek to strengthen their Indigenous marine stewardship rights and responsibilities through guardian programs.”*

The proposed MBS includes the shoreline of PKOLS-Mount Douglas Beach, a critical feeding and resting area where over 120 bird species (migratory and non-migratory) have been observed and recorded. Pacific Great Blue Herons are often found foraging in the shallow waters along the beach, and in the summer

months can be observed flying to and from the heron rookery located within Park. Several at-risk migratory species are regularly observed include: Marbled murrelets, Horned grebes, Western grebes, and Barn swallows.

Additional protection in this region is urgently needed for migratory birds, which face increasing pressures and significant, widespread population declines due to climate change, pollution, habitat loss, and human disturbance. A federal report published in October (preceding the launch of this petition) reveals several concerning trends: Since 1970, long-distance migratory bird species have declined by 29%, and shorebird species have declined by an alarming 42%.

We are in full support of this initiative and encourage Society members to [read and sign the petition](#). Anyone who is a Canadian citizen is able to sign. Your signature will not be made public, but you will need to confirm your email address to verify your signature.

 <p>HOUSE OF COMMONS CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES CANADA</p> <p>e-5182 (Environment)</p> <p>Keywords Habitat conservation Migratory birds Salish Sea</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Petition</p> <p>Initiated by Briony Pezm from Salt Spring Island, British Columbia Original language of petition: English</p>		<p>Gone to the Dogs: Protecting Migratory Birds From Ourselves.</p>  <p>ANIMOCRACY</p> <p>Now available on:</p>   
<p>Sign: Petition e-5182</p>	<p>Read: Saanich News Article</p>	<p>Listen: Animocracy Podcast</p>

Photos: Signs of Autumn on Douglas Trail



The vernal spring on Douglas Trail is one of several wetland habitats within the Park.



A Bigleaf Maple (*Acer macrophyllum*) leaf rests on the evergreen foliage of Salal (*Gaultheria shallon*).



The web of an introduced Cross Orbweaver Spider (*Araneus diadematus*) catches the morning light.

“A Place of Habitual Resort”

How 160+ Years of Recreation Has Shaped and Strained PKOLS (Mount Douglas Park)

For thousands of years, PKOLS (Mount Douglas Park) has been a place of profound cultural, spiritual, and ecological significance. Marking the border between W̱SÁNEĆ and ləkʷəŋən territories, PKOLS was an important gathering place where families met to share news and celebrations. Its meadows, forests, and shorelines were carefully-stewarded Garry oak and associated ecosystems that have evolved and adapted alongside millennia of traditional land management practices.

When the land surrounding ‘The Hill of Cedars’ was first set aside in 1858 by James Douglas as a government reserve (later to be named Mount Douglas Park), public perspectives of land use were largely influenced by societal values of the time that prioritized exploitation (resource extraction, agriculture, and leisure) over stewardship. In 1862, the Colonial Secretary representing the Colony of Vancouver Island turned down a local farmer’s request to lease several of its acres, on account of the park being “*a place of habitual resort to the citizens of [Fort] Victoria.*” This recreationally-focused perspective has guided public interaction and park management practices for more than 160 years — degrading its ecosystems, extirpating its species, eroding its slopes, and now threatening its future.

Historical records shed light on the evolution of social perspectives surrounding activities that, while initially embraced and normalized by the public, ultimately proved incompatible with the

Park’s natural landscape. During the 1920s, cars were permitted on Glendenning and Whittaker trails to Cedar Hill Road, before this access was shut down. The following decade saw the construction and completion of Churchill Drive to the summit viewpoint, allowing more visitors to access what the Daily Colonist described in 1932 as “*one of the most beautiful playgrounds on the southern end of the Island.*” Around the same time, gravel excavation, tree-cutting, goat grazing, and garbage dumping in the park drew public complaints, prompting a formal commission to “*inquire into the management, regulation, protection and control of Mount Douglas Park.*”

After a noticeable decline in the number of wildflowers returning each year, concerned citizens began to rally for more environmental protection. The longstanding tradition of picking Easter lilies and other spring wildflowers was taking its toll on the ecosystem, and in the Spring of 1939 the Society for the Preservation of Native Plants petitioned the City of Victoria, who requested police protection for the Park’s wildflowers during the Easter holidays. Municipal bylaws were later introduced, prohibiting the removal of native vegetation from any park land.

In 1919, the first motorcycle hill climb race tore up the southern slopes of PKOLS (Mount Douglas). This popular annual event continued through 1978, and slopes that were once lush with native vegetation were left as barren,

eroded sand gullies that have continued to erode, complicating restoration efforts. Now overgrown with a thick understory of Scotch broom (an invasive species that thrives in disturbed soil conditions), the area has been fenced off due to imminent safety concerns.

The end of the motorcycle hill climbs saw an increased popularity in mountain biking. By the 1990s, decades of mountain bike trails had carved up the slopes at the summit, visible in aerial imagery of the time as deep scars across the fragile Garry Oak ecosystems. This activity was also prohibited due to the significant environmental impact. The creation of rogue trails and the widening of existing ones continues today—no longer caused by wheels, but rather the cumulative impact of footprints and pawprints straying off designated trails that trample plants and compact the soil, hindering the regrowth of native vegetation.

The rocky outcrops at the summit were once covered with a lush, diverse layer of mosses and lichens—slow-growing species that can take centuries to establish. Repeated trampling destroys this moss layer, which acts as a natural sponge. Moss absorbs and retains rainwater, allowing it to slowly trickle down to the slopes below, but repeated trampling and unrestricted access to off-trail areas have destroyed vast colonies of this moss layer. Without it, water pours off the now bare rocks in torrents — washing out trails, accelerating slope erosion, and altering hydrological patterns that influence entire ecological communities.

The increase in park users and subsequent habitat degradation has taken a toll on ecological communities. By the 1950s, five species associated with Garry Oak ecosystems were extirpated from the Park: Tall woolly-heads (*Psilocarphus elatior*), Yellow montane violet (*Viola praemorsa*), Howell's violet (*Viola howellii*), White Meconella, (Meconella oregana), and the endemic Island Tiger Moth (*Apantesis complicata*). An sixth extirpated species, the Moss' Elfin (*Callophrys mossii* ssp. *mossii*) has not been seen since 2004. The fate of an additional plant is in question, with only one individual remaining after the others were trampled to local extinction.¹

As the number of park users have continued to increase, so too has the documented damage to the landscape resulting from recreational use and unrestricted access. These cumulative impacts illustrate how increasing public demand is pushing the Park's ecosystems beyond their capacity to recover. We now know that not all recreational activities are compatible with natural areas, especially those which are composed entirely of rare and endangered ecosystems. A review of the park's modern history reveals a clear pattern — with nearly each passing decade, stricter regulations have been introduced to address escalating and imminent threats to its fragile environment.

¹ We thank Rick Hatch and the Parks Natural Areas team for responding to our requests this summer, and taking swift action to install fencing to protect this plant. We will be working with Parks to restore suitable habitat for this Species at Risk, while stabilizing and enhancing the extant population.

The PKOLS (Mount Douglas Park) we know and love is being loved to death. The park's biodiversity is suffering, with habitat loss and fragmentation increasingly evident. There is now an urgent need to reconsider what constitutes responsible use of and access to this natural area. It is time to shift public perceptions of PKOLS (Mount Douglas), moving beyond its identity as a recreational 'resort' and 'playground' towards one that

prioritizes its ecological, cultural, and historical significance. This is not merely an environmental task, but a cultural one, and it is work our Society has been committed to since 1988. Government, First Nations, stakeholders, and communities must come together to examine what it will take to protect PKOLS (Mount Douglas Park) and choose a future for this land that fosters restoration, respect, resilience, and reconciliation. The time to act is now.



Motorcycle Hill Climb, 1971 (via [City of Victoria Archives](#)).



The lasting impacts from decades of recreational use, 2024.



Recreation is destroying rare ecosystems. Where have all the Camas gone? Trail widening and habitat loss continues to worsen in this globally-ranked "Critically Imperilled" Garry Oak ecosystem. Where a sea of wildflowers once thrived, only bare earth remains.



[\[Click to Expand Photo\]](#) People and their dogs stray off trails to clamber over slopes — trampling plants and eroding soil — until only bare rock remains. Only a few clumps of Satin Flower (*Olsynium douglasii*), visible at the top right, remain on this rocky outcrop in Garry Oak habitat.


Introduction to Using iNaturalist: Become a Citizen Scientist in PKOLS

Citizen science involves members of the public working to collect and share data in collaboration with professional scientists or institutions, to contribute to scientific research. This approach is particularly valuable in natural areas like PKOLS (Mount Douglas Park), which supports both a high level of biodiversity and high volume of daily park users. You can download the iNaturalist app (available on [iOS](#) and [Android](#)) and create a free account using your email address. A mobile device with a camera and an internet connection is required to use the app. The web version of iNaturalist ([iNaturalist.org](https://www.inaturalist.org)) offers additional features, like advanced filters, data exports, & project tools.

HOW TO USE

iNaturalist

to contribute to citizen science and restoration efforts
in PKOLS (Mount Douglas Park)



Always respect posted signage, fencing, and trail markers!


1

Download & Sign Up

Download the iNaturalist app (available on iOS and Android) and create an account using your email address.

An internet connection is required to use the app.

The web version of iNaturalist ([iNaturalist.org](https://www.inaturalist.org)) offers additional features, like advanced filters, data exports, & project tools.




2

Get Outside and Explore!

Find a plant, animal, or other living organism you want to identify. Open the app, select "Observe" and snap (or upload) a clear photo. You can also use [iNaturalist.ca](https://www.inaturalist.ca) to upload photos taken with a digital camera.

Tips for Accurate Species IDs


Capture multiple angles, including close-ups & different features (eg. leaves, flowers, wings). It's helpful to include a wider photo of the organism within its habitat, too.



3

Add Details & Submit

iNaturalist will suggest possible identifications based on your photo. If you're not certain of the exact species, choose a broader taxon (eg. "plants" or "birds") that you feel confident about. Add any notes about your sighting, and click "Share" to upload it!



4 Engage with the Community

Once shared, other users will confirm or help refine your identification.

Check back to see updates and learn from the iNaturalist community!

Join local projects on iNaturalist.ca!

5 Contribute to Science

Observations that reach "Research Grade" status are shared with scientific databases, like the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (Learn more at: www.gbif.org)

The observations you share from your next walk in the Park could contribute valuable data to global (and local) biodiversity research and conservation efforts.

This is citizen science in action!

6 Help Restoration Efforts

Invasive species observations help restoration practitioners identify priority areas for controlling invasive species, while tracking new occurrences.

Invasives of Concern in PKOLS Project Map

7 Explore iNat Projects in PKOLS

Native Biodiversity of PKOLS

An iNaturalist project documenting and appreciating the native biodiversity of PKOLS (Mount Douglas Park), a P4N-designated natural park located in Saanich, BC.

- Migratory Birds in PKOLS
- Pollinators in PKOLS
- Invasives of Concern in PKOLS
- Mosses of PKOLS

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Get Started with iNaturalist Projects in PKOLS (Mount Douglas Park)

[Native Biodiversity of PKOLS](#)

[Introduced and Invasive Species in PKOLS \(Mount Douglas\)](#)

[Invasives of Concern in PKOLS \(Mount Douglas\)](#)

[Migratory Birds in PKOLS](#)

[Pollinators of PKOLS \(Mount Douglas Park\)](#)

[Mosses of PKOLS \(Mount Douglas\)](#)

Ecosystem Feature: Red Alder/Slough Sedge [Black Cottonwood]

<p><i>Red Alder</i> <i>Alnus rubra</i></p>	<p><i>Slough Sedge</i> <i>Carex obnupta</i></p>	<p><i>Black Cottonwood</i> <i>Populus trichocarpa</i></p>
 <p>A preferred wood for smoking fish. Edible inner bark is known as “SXAMET” in SENĆOŦEN</p>	 <p>Also known as “Basket Grass” – harvested, dried, and used to create woven baskets.</p>	 <p>The late winter/early spring leaf buds have long been harvested for their medicinal properties.</p>

The northeast corner of PKOLS (Mount Douglas Park) is home to a remnant patch of a critically imperiled wetland ecosystem — the *Red Alder/Slough Sedge [Black Cottonwood]* ecological community. This rare habitat is one of the most at-risk ecosystems in Canada, found in low-lying areas with fluctuating water tables that remain saturated in winter and moist throughout summer.

With only 15.3 km² mapped across its Canadian range (all on the south-eastern coast of Vancouver Island) this ecosystem’s footprint has declined by over 70%, primarily due to agricultural land use and urban development. Of the 21 mapped occurrences, most are in poor/fair condition and located on privately-owned land. Only five protected areas remain: PKOLS (Mount Douglas Park); SMONEĆTEN/McDonald Park and ŁÁU,WELŦEW/John Dean Provincial Park in North Saanich; Cowichan River Provincial Park in Lake Cowichan; and Woodley Range Ecological Reserve in Ladysmith. Imminent threats include habitat fragmentation and degradation, climate change impacts, and invasive species encroachment.

Black Cottonwood trees are a particularly significant component of this ecosystem — this rapidly growing species is capable of growing up to two meters each year, rarely living beyond 200 years. Their deep root systems stabilize the banks of Douglas Creek, while tree snags provide critical nesting habitats for native birds such as woodpeckers. These ecosystems also provide several essential ecosystem services. Wetland ecosystems capture and store carbon, while reducing flood risks to adjacent properties. Deeply-rooted vegetation stabilizes the earth preventing erosion and protecting the salmon habitat of Douglas Creek.

Photos: On The Forest Floor



Orange jelly spot fungus (*Dacrymyces chrysospermus*) can be found on dead coniferous wood.



A Pacific Banana Slug (*Ariolimax columbianus*) munches on a tasty snack of leaf litter

From the Archives: “Battle Weary Warriors May Have Rested Here”

By S.J. Robson —*The Islander (Daily Colonist Magazine)* — Sunday, July 14, 1957

We are sharing a historical article that offers perspectives and insights into the past land use and ecological composition of PKOLS (Mount Douglas Park). However, this account is told from a colonial perspective and may not reflect an accurate portrayal of historical Indigenous land use. We also recognize that the language used in the original piece reflects the biases of its time and is culturally insensitive by today’s standards; this does *not* align with our current understanding or respect for Indigenous cultures and histories whose sacred relationship with this land continues to this day.

“Just west of the south entrance to Mount Douglas Park stands this five centuries old Douglas fir, its massive branches spreading shade today as they did for the Indian tribes feasting there centuries before the white man came to British Columbia.

In the summer sunshine I paused, the other day, to admire the grand, old Douglas fir. I have known it for many years. How many people must have seen it and admired it! But I wonder how many would have realized it has stood on its hillside for about 500 years, a guardian of the valley.

The trunk is 25 feet in circumference at the butt and the giant has an immense branch spread. This is one of the few remaining first growth giants within a wide radius about Victoria.

In bygone days it would have afforded shelter for Indians camping at the nearby spring, where mounds of clam shells still can be found. In later years it sheltered the ewes and the lambs², and children played under its branches, and watched the squirrels eating the

cone seed, wishing they could catch one. Southward lies an old battleground, where Indian bones, arrowheads, and ancient weapons have been ploughed to the surface.

An old timer in the district told me that the maples come first, then the oaks, and lastly the firs. He could remember, he said, when Mount Douglas park was an oak glade, with only a few old firs. Now the oaks are almost gone and the maples make a brave showing.

One hopes this grand old tree will see many more cycles come and go. But, meanwhile, the new fir forest flourishes, progeny no doubt of the grey guardsman.”

◇



² Many of the Park’s trails owe their course to the tracks made by sheep belonging to James Tod (early Gordon Head pioneer and farmer) over 160 years ago.

Board of Directors

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Membership Renewal - Gift Membership

Join online: pkols-mountdouglas.ca

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.

Name: _____

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Membership: **4 Years (\$20)** 3 Years (\$15) 2 Years (\$10) 1 Year (\$5)

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