

Native Plants Delight Visitors at Columbia Gorge Plot

Editor's Note: Material for this article was provided by Berta Youtie – all except the parts that say what a whale of a job she did.

It all goes to show that information collected at a site where it “didn’t work out” can sometimes be put to excellent use at a different site.

Berta Youtie, The Nature Conservancy’s land steward for Oregon’s Governor Tom McCall Preserve,

located within the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, once worked for the National Park Service investigating techniques to restore the overgrazed ranches that comprise the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument in arid Eastern Oregon. Collecting seeds from the site, growing bunchgrass plugs in the greenhouse, and then transplanting them to the field was found to be very successful on a small scale, but wasn't considered feasible on the Monument's large scale.

That was back in 1981. Today is another site and another story – this one with a happier ending.

The site in question is two acres of what is called "disturbed habitat" – in this case, a somewhat euphe-

mistic term for part of a parking area that had become almost rock-hard by compaction. Today, because Berta Youtie saw the possibilities and remembered the techniques, the site is drawing the admiration of Gorge visitors who pause there to see the recently established display of wildflowers. The area now is a native plant garden, being used as an interpretive tool to heighten people's appreciation for the natural beauty of native species and to teach the art and science of restoration ecology.

The preserve is located on a plateau between Hood River and The Dalles and is home to more than 300 species of plants. They grow among the oak savanna, vernal pools, rocky basalt cliffs, biscuit scablands, and

Table 1. Native plant material used at the Rowena Crest Native Plant Garden in 1990.

Species	Habitat	Propagule	Survival*
Grasses			
<i>Agropyron spicatum</i>	mound	seed	+
<i>Festuca Idahoensis</i>	mound	seed	+
<i>Stipa lemmoni</i>	mound	seed	+
<i>Sitanion hystrix</i>	scab	seed	+
Shrubs			
<i>Rosa nutkana</i>	scab	cutting	+
<i>Holodiscus discolor</i>	scab	cutting	+
<i>Philadelphus lewisii</i>	scab	cutting	+
Forbs			
<i>Balsamorhiza careyana</i>	mound	plant	+
<i>Eriogonum compositum</i>	scab	cutting	+
<i>Eriogonum strictum</i>	scab	cutting	+
<i>Eriophyllum lanatum</i>	scab	plant & seed	+
<i>Lomatium columbiana</i>	mound	seed	-
<i>Lomatium dissectum</i>	mound	seed	-
<i>Lomatium grayi</i>	scab	seed	-
<i>Lomatium nudicaule</i>	scab	seed	-
<i>Lupinus latifolius</i>	mound	seed	+
<i>Penstemon richardsonii</i>	scab	plant	+
<i>Phacelia hastata</i>	scab	plant	+
*Survival = + majority of plants survived first year - majority of plants did not survive ? too early to judge			



Volunteers dig in to the job of introducing native transplants.

grassy slopes. The Nature Conservancy joined forces with Oregon State Parks and other local organizations to work their restoration miracle.

Permission for the project was obtained from the USFS, Columbia Gorge Commission, Citizen's Advisory Board for the Columbia River Gorge Scenic Highway (and of course Oregon State Parks). Last year, TNC won an award from the Oregon Native Plant Society in "the best use of native plants" category.

Landscape gardener Michelle Zimmerman initially designed the garden with some subsequent redesign from Kathy Schuttt, a landscape architect for Oregon State Parks. Before planting, it was necessary to recreate the natural mounded prairie topography of the previously leveled site. The Oregon Highway Department provided much of the construction means – heavy equipment, as well as volunteers with shovels and rakes for shaping and grading the mound surfaces.

Seeds of forbs and bunchgrass species (Table 1) were collected in the summer of 1989 from adjacent areas. Local Portland garden organizations experimented with scarification techniques for wildflower species and grew seedlings in their greenhouses. Balsamroot transplanting occurred from the wild. Small plants were removed from an area designated for development. More than 90 percent of the 200 transplants have survived the first two years. Bunchgrass seedlings were propagated in greenhouses. Shrub cuttings also were planted on the site.

Small signs now identify the scientific and common names of the plants and an interpretive sign is being created to promote understanding of restoration using native plants.

With survival having been overwhelmingly successful, the site was dedicated on June 16, 1991, to Robert Ellis, a conservationist and member of the Oregon Roadside Council.

A handy, well-illustrated visitor brochure describes the Tom McCall Preserve, its early history, geology, vegetation, wildlife, and management, and highlights "guidelines for use."

Although the National Park Service is not among those listed in the "credits," Berta Youtie's work, arranged through the NPS/CPSU at Oregon State Uni-



This lush growth of bunchgrass seems to be waving enthusiastic thanks to the volunteers who helped restore it.

versity, remains a solid underpinning for this recent attestation to the value of Cooperative Park Study

Units and to the far-flung successes that sometimes stem from seeming failures.



More signing is planned to interpret the area as well as sharing the credit.