

Article

Species Inventory Helps Uncover the Rare Plants of San Juan Island National Historical Park

[San Juan Island National Historical Park](#)

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July 2024

At San Juan Island National Historical Park, a recent species inventory is giving park managers the information they need to help safeguard rare plants within the park.



This shows a rare Douglas Fir woodland habitat sampled on Mitchell Hill, San Juan Island National Historical Park.

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Charting New Ground

San Juan Island NHP protects an incredible array of natural wonders, from lush forests teeming with diverse flora to rocky shores alive with marine life. In 2010, the park acquired Mitchell Hill, a new tract of upland forest that adjoins the English Camp unit. Since this expansion, park managers have been working to identify important features and species to protect within the new properties.

Twenty-seven rare plants can be found throughout San Juan Island County, but park managers didn't know if they were present in the recently acquired areas. Park staff sought to gain a better understanding of the whereabouts and abundance of rare and sensitive plants to make informed plans to protect them. Conservation of rare species helps maintain their genetic diversity as well as preserving the unique ecological and cultural functions they serve. In response, the park arranged for a species inventory of rare and sensitive plants in the Mitchell Hill area through the [Inventory & Monitoring Division](#).



True baby stars (left), Indian valley brodiaea (center), and shortspur white plectritis (right).

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Surprising Finds

While surveying Mitchell Hill in 2021 and 2022, researchers found three rare plant species: true baby stars (*Leptosiphon minimus*), Indian valley brodiaea (*Brodiaea rosea*), and shortspur white plectritis (*Plectritis brachystemon*). Indian valley brodiaea was an especially notable find, as this species had not been seen in Washington State in 113 years. Shortspur white plectritis had never been recorded on the San Juan Islands. These survey results indicate that the open Douglas fir woodland at Mitchell Hill provides vital habitat for numerous sensitive and rare plants. However, challenges such as understory encroachment by young trees and shrubs, deer overbrowsing, and the close proximity of rare plants to heavily trafficked paths remain concerns.



Claire (NPS) conducting conifer removal in Mitchell Hill to reduce tree and shrub encroachment in sensitive rare plant areas identified by this inventory.

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Informing Conservation Action

Park staff are eager to use this information to create management plans that will help protect the park's treasured rare plant species. They will use the data to pinpoint sensitive areas to protect from tree and shrub encroachment and invasive plants by removing select small-diameter trees and shrubs and conducting targeted herbicide treatments. Information from the

inventory is also being incorporated into a project with the Samish Indian Nation Department of Natural Resources to identify special areas with culturally significant plants.

Want to learn more?

See the [final products](#) from this project!

This article was summarized from the sources below:

Consortium of Pacific Northwest Herbaria Specimen Database (CPNWH). 2024. Data provided by: University of Washington Herbarium. Website: <https://www.pnwherbaria.org> (accessed February 15, 2024).

Martin, R. A., and S. Martin. 2023. Survey of rare and sensitive plants in recent acquisitions: San Juan Island National Historical Park (public version). Natural Resource Report NPS/NRSS/IMD/NRR—2023/2549. National Park Service, Fort Collins, Colorado. <https://doi.org/10.36967/2299855>