



## ***South Sound Program Highlights July – September 2013***

*The Center for Natural Lands Management is committed to conservation within the South Sound region, the Willamette Valley/Puget Trough/Georgia Basin ecoregion and throughout the Northwest. The Center performs outstanding stewardship, protects key conservation parcels and promotes a conservation community of cooperative partners.*

### **From the San Juan Islands to the Willamette Valley, Grant Recipients Begin Work**

A year into the [State Wildlife Grant](#) awarded by U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, CNLM and partners have made great progress towards reducing invasive weeds and conifer encroachment, and increasing connectivity to improve prairie oak habitat for the rare species that call it home. The bi-state project is carrying out restoration on over 20 sites and 1,000 acres to improve the population statuses of 21 SGCN (Species of Greatest Conservation Need). For instance, conifer and shrub removal aim to connect and improve habitat patches for Taylor's checkerspot on forest balds of the Olympic Peninsula, Bald Hills of Thurston County, WA and in meadows of Benton County, OR. Here in the South Sound lowlands, the grant is supporting seed production, education, and habitat restoration at sites managed by CNLM, Wolf Haven, WDNR and WDFW.



*Dense reed canarygrass in a pre-treatment photo of a site being restored by Oregon's Greenbelt Land Trust. Removal of the grass is one of many restoration actions at this site.*

### **New Seed Farm at Violet Prairie-Scatter Creek Preserve**

Native seeds are crucial to prairie restoration efforts. As CNLM's seed production program succeeds, expectations and partnerships have increased. Recently CNLM expanded seed production to help Joint Base Lewis-McChord and will now be producing large quantities of seed for on-base restorations. This expansion includes a new farm site, at CNLM's Violet Prairie-Scatter Creek Preserve. The southernmost five acres of preserve were chosen due to the rich Spanaway-Nisqually soils and proximity to the seed processing facility at Shotwell's Landing. Initial tilling and bed shaping have been completed. The first round of planting and seeding at the farm will begin in late October.

### **2013 Seed Harvest a Great Success for Taylor's Checkerspot**

This year CNLM had an excellent harvest of native seed. Over 400 pounds of native prairie seed were grown, more than doubling last year's harvest. Particular gains were made with the species that are grown for Taylor's checkerspot butterfly reintroductions. Sea blush (*Plectritis congesta*) is a larval host plant and an important nectar plant for adults. Harvests of this species increased from less than one pound last year to over 56 pounds this year. Similar increases were obtained with two species of Blue-eyed Mary (*Collinsia parviflora* and *C. grandiflora*), valuable nectar and larval host plants for the checkerspot. Seed production was also doubled for the two plant species most critical to the success of reintroduction efforts, those that the checkerspot will lay its eggs on: Harsh paintbrush (*Castilleja hispida*) and English plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*). With significantly more critical seed available hopefully next spring the prairies will look even more appealing to Taylor's checkerspot butterflies.

## Successes and Challenges of the Prescribed Fire Season

Over the summer CNLM provided a greater than typical amount of support for ecological burning. The challenges presented by sequestration created a significant reduction in the amount of support that JBLM could provide, and CNLM was able to ramp-up capacity to meet the need. Burning focused on prairie habitats this year, particularly for the benefit of three rare species - one proposed and two recently listed under the ESA. Ecological burning is part of an integrated approach to restoration. For example, in the Rainier Training Area (RTA), ongoing fire provides the primary long-term control of Scotch broom and is coupled with follow-up treatments of broom that survived the fire. Fire reduces moss and thatch, which help managers detect and treat other noxious weeds. Moss and thatch reductions also facilitate successful follow-up seeding and planting success of native species in the autumn. All of these actions maintain and improve habitat for Mazama pocket gophers, a species that is currently abundant in the RTA.



*A prescribed fire burns on JBLM's Johnson Prairie. CNLM will be plugging and seeding the site this fall.*

## Restoration Success Reduces Annual Workload and Costs

A few years ago, it took a crew of ten individuals one day to spot-spray Scotch broom at Wolf Haven's 30-acre prairie. The same crew spent two days spot-spraying 90 acres at Tenalquot, and three days spraying 200 acres at Glacial Heritage. This year, continuing improvements to the quality of prairie at these sites reduced efforts of spot spraying by 80% from 2011 and 2012 levels. Instead, broom was controlled through hand-pulling. Volunteers and staff pulled over 150 acres of broom this year! As restoration efforts continue to improve on South Sound prairies, the cost of continuing management is decreasing dramatically.

In addition, these preserves are now showing the benefits of the restoration efforts. At Wolf Haven, the reduction in Scotch broom is helping the growing Mazama pocket gopher population. Tenalquot will be ready for a Taylor's checkerspot reintroduction in 2015. At Glacial Heritage, after the second year of reintroductions, the Taylor's checkerspot population is taking off.

In the spring, volunteers will continue to remove Scotch broom. With a dedicated, coordinated effort, it is possible to reduce broom invasion to a manageable level, reducing costs and improving prairies and their rare species.

## Looking Forward: Groups to Set Recovery Priorities

The annual meetings for CPOP's rare species working groups are upon us. The groups provide coordinated conservation efforts for the Mazama pocket gopher, Taylor's checkerspot butterfly, and streaked horned lark. With the recent listing of the latter two species, the prioritized action plans that each group puts together annually are more important than ever, providing agencies with a unified voice on what the active conservation community feels are the best next actions. To learn more about the listings and the work that CNLM is doing for recovery, read our post, ["Rare Species Granted Federal Protection"](#), on the South Sound Prairies [blog](#).



*Bill Kronland, formerly a CNLM preserve manager in California, is the new Restoration Project Manager at JBLM.*