

MADRONA WOODS RESTORATION MASTER ACTION PLAN

Prepared for Madrona Woods Community Volunteers
& Seattle Parks & Recreation Department

Sponsored by Starflower Foundation

GAYNOR, Inc.

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Table of Contents

Introduction

Guiding Principles

Methodology

Master Action Plan Concepts

Figures

Figure 1: Madrona Woods Restoration Master Action Plan

Appendices (not included)

Appendix A: Native Plant Community Species Lists

Appendix B: Experimental Restoration Plots: Preliminary Observations, Initial Installation and Follow-up Data Sheets

Appendix C: Public Meeting Minutes and Attendance Lists

Appendix D: Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation
CORE review “Approval with Comments”

Madrona Woods Restoration Master Action Plan

Introduction

Most planning efforts involve people setting goals, creating and discussing ideas that achieve those goals, and in the end producing a written and/or graphic document that describes the final vision agreed upon through the planning process. In other words, a lot of talk about activities to occur in the future. This plan is different.

Driven by a dedicated and interested group of local community members ¹, this plan is action-oriented and for the present as well as the future. Aptly called the Master Action Plan, its concepts were created and tested on site at Madrona Woods during the fall and winter of 1998/1999 by community members in concert with Peggy Gaynor of GAYNOR, Inc. Directed towards hands-on volunteer efforts, this plan is not about development or rapid change but focuses instead on consistent and steady nurturing of the natural ecosystems of Madrona Woods as a means of restoring the place.

Guiding Principles

The primary guiding principle of this plan is restoration of the natural ecosystems of Madrona Woods. The plan assumes and depends on long-term community commitment and volunteer involvement for its ongoing implementation and success. As such it is a plan by and for the people who have shown continuing interest in Madrona Woods.

Community members wanted a guiding vision to focus and direct an effective and ecologically-sound volunteer restoration effort in the Woods. Their questions revolved around creating a community consensus on how best to restore Madrona Woods to environmental health, not if they should restore the park. Restoration of Madrona Woods had been decided during a Community Outreach Project undertaken in 1996/1997. Other goals, agreed upon during this outreach and education process, include:

- developing and maintaining a good trail system
- restoring stream beds
- rehabilitating the Woods as a natural area using native plants
- creating opportunities in the Woods for local schools' environmental education programs

Thus this Master Action Plan builds off of previous planning by community members and addresses the community's eagerness to get started with the work of restoring the Woods.

Methodology

Creation of this plan was driven by community member participation in a truly hands-on process. Four public meetings/workshops, including on site layout of trails, were held over a nine month period during the fall and winter of 1998/1999. Interspersed with these workshops were three on site work parties during which eighteen (18) experimental restoration test plots were installed. In addition, school children from Saint Theresa Elementary School spent several class sessions

¹ The Steering Committee for this plan includes local residents Ann Bucher, Mary Holm, Judith Starbuck, and Joan Scott, otherwise known as "The Gang of Four."

Madrona Woods Restoration Master Action Plan

learning in the Woods, while doing clearing and revegetation projects with the guidance of teachers and community volunteers. A draft of the Master Action Plan was presented to Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation staff at a CORE review meeting on 18 May 1999. The following is a time line of major meetings and events. For public meeting notes and attendance lists, see Appendix C. For Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation CORE review "Approval with Comments," see Appendix D.

Time Line of Master Action Plan Meetings and Events

7/23/98	Kick-off meeting and site walk with Community Steering Committee (Gang of Four), Gaynor, and Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation staff
9/16/98	Public Meeting/Workshop #1: Focus - General park plan concept ideas and discussion
10/24/98	Experimental Restoration Test Plot Work Party #1 (plots 1 - 6)
11/21/98	Experimental Restoration Test Plot Work Party #2 (plots 7 - 12)
12/5/98	Public Meeting/Workshop #2: Focus - Trails
1/27/99	Meeting with Community Steering Committee (Gang of Four), Starflower Foundation, Gaynor, and Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation staff
1/30/99	Public Meeting/Workshop #3: Focus - On site Trail Layout
2/20/99	Experimental Restoration Test Plot Work Party #3 (plots 13 - 18)
1 - 6/99	Saint Theresa Elementary School classes and work sessions
5/1/99	Public Meeting/Workshop #4: Focus - Master Action Plan review and discussion; Implementation strategies
5/18/99	Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation CORE review meeting

Master Action Plan Concepts

Madrona Woods Restoration's Master Action Plan features six primary concepts or action items. Of these, restoring existing native plant communities is the foundation of the plan. In addition, trail accessibility to meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements and site furniture were discussed during public meeting/workshops with the following consensus decisions.

Trail accessibility is currently limited due to existing terrain and wood chip surfacing. However, a major goal of trail repair and relocation is to reduce trail grades, preferably to 5 percent or less, increasing safety and accessibility for all users. Trails will be improved with a minimum of structures. Two bridges, a length of boardwalk and trail steps are anticipated as necessary to cross streams and wetlands and traverse steep grades. A park plan indicating trail system conditions, slope and surfacing, will be posted in kiosks at major entrances to Madrona Woods. This

Madrona Woods Restoration Master Action Plan

information will give users the options and choices for access.

Information kiosks at the three major park entrances and a few natural log benches are the only site furniture desired by the community. Log benches will be located as desired in the field and by consensus of community users. Limiting structures to preserve the “wilderness experience” of the Woods is a cherished goal of the community.

The following are the key Master Action Plan concepts. For the graphic Master Action Plan, see Figure 1.

Concept 1: Use existing native plant communities as a primary design and organizational basis for planning and restoration efforts.

Site visits have revealed that Madrona Park contains a surprising diversity of remnant native plant communities and habitats. This diversity is the result of the park’s varied topography (ridges, ravines, steep slopes, depressions) and existing water sources (Madrona Park Creek and groundwater springs). The plant communities observed are listed below. These communities are site specific, somewhat whimsical and not necessarily botanically or ecologically pure.

- Oregon ash forested wetland community
- Western red cedar forest community
- Madrona - Douglas fir forest community
- Steep slope dryland shrub community
- Viburnum scrub-shrub wetland community
- Herbaceous-dominated marshland community
- Riparian corridors and associated wetlands
- Meadow (Western Washington prairie) community

Restoration and enhancement of these existing native plant communities becomes the primary underlying design and organizational concept defining Madrona Park’s Master Action Plan and resulting volunteer efforts. Native plant community species lists are suggested guides for planting appropriate plant species in the proper environment and adding habitat diversity to the Woods during revegetation work. See Appendix A for plant lists.

Concept 2: Conduct several experimental work parties to test site clearing and native plant restoration techniques.

Native wildlands in urban settings are under tremendous stress from myriad sources - pollution, dumping, invasive weeds, and all manner of human use and abuse. Conducting experimental work parties during the formulation of this master action plan tested and compared weed clearing, native plant restoration and other maintenance techniques that could have wide application to other people and places attempting to maintain or restore the health of their urban wildlands.

During the fall and winter of 1998/1999, three work parties were conducted that tested restoration techniques on six of the site’s native plant communities - meadow, steep slope, viburnum scrub-shrub wetland, Oregon ash forest, cedar forest, and madrona - douglas fir forest. Six 10-foot square test plots at each work party (for a total of 18 test plots) were staked out, cleared and restored in the following combination of treatments:

Madrona Woods Restoration Master Action Plan

- Manual clearing only
- Manual clearing and mulching
- Manual clearing, mulching and planting with natives
- Mechanical clearing only
- Mechanical clearing and mulching
- Mechanical clearing, mulching and planting with natives

Volunteers have been making weekly to bi-weekly observations of the experimental restoration test plots, recording mulch depths, weed regrowth, native plant growth/death, and the like. This follow-up data collection (including photographs) will continue until at least fall 1999 to document the effectiveness of the various restoration techniques. Results will be published and shared with others. Preliminary findings, along with initial installation and follow-up data sheets for all 18 experimental test plots, may be found in Appendix B.

Concept 3: Determine a program to repair, relocate or eliminate steep, eroded and dangerous trails, including main and secondary trails.

The same varied and steep topography that contributes to ecological diversity becomes a pedestrian-access challenge along several of the existing trails in Madrona Woods. A program to repair, relocate and consolidate pedestrian-access trails is a key element of the Master Action Plan. Trail recommendations shown on the plan were flagged, tested and agreed upon in the field during the winter of 1998/1999.

Trails will be hand-built with a minimum of structures. Several bridges, a length of floating boardwalk, and trail steps are anticipated as necessary to cross streams and marshes and to climb steep terrain. Main trails will be constructed and maintained at four to five (4 - 5) feet wide. Secondary trails will be built and maintained at two to three (2 - 3) feet wide. Overlook areas for gatherings, park tours, classes and the like are provided at key locations along the trails. Overlooks will be enlarged trail "rooms" that can accommodate 10 - 15 people. All trails and overlooks will be surfaced with "engineered" cedar wood chips. Construction of the main trail system and associated overlooks are first priority for trail work, followed by secondary trail improvements.

Concept 4: Remove dangerous big-leaf maples and alders, and selectively remove individual big-leaf maples that are out competing more desirable species, such as madrona.

Although native northwest trees, big-leaf maple and red alder are aggressive pioneer species that dominate disturbed sites, including urban wildlands. In Madrona Woods, mature big-leaf maples, whose tops are beginning to die and break apart, are hazards to trail users and are shading out other native trees such as madrona and Douglas fir.

Decisions regarding selective clearing of big-leaf maples and other trees for safety and ecological restoration have been made, and ongoing tree removal discussions are continuing between the park's volunteers and Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation staff. Several dangerous maples have been removed to date. Where possible, trunks of cut trees are left standing as snags for additional wildlife habitat. In addition, logs from removed trees may be recycled on site as benches at the request and direction of community members.

Madrona Woods Restoration Master Action Plan

Concept 5: Daylight and repair the natural waters (streams and seeps) of the park.

Madrona Park Creek currently flows in short reaches of open channel that go underground at storm drain inlets along the north edge of Madrona Woods. Seeps that form the southern marshland culminate in a “waterfall” at Lake Washington Boulevard. This water also is collected at a storm drain inlet along the boulevard.

A long-term goal of the master action plan is to daylight Madrona Park Creek through Madrona Woods and Madrona Beach Park to its natural and historical outlet into Lake Washington. The “waterfall” area is also recommended to be reconstructed as a boulder cascade and pool. The waterfall flow could continue to the storm drain inlet or be piped to the future Madrona Park Creek channel within Madrona Beach Park.

Concept 6: Incorporate interpretive devices into the master action plan that describe the park and its restoration, educate the public, and involve local schools.

Education and experimentation underlie several of the other plan concepts and provide a focus for planning and park restoration work. Sharing knowledge gained from experimental work parties, general information on native plant communities, park history, and the like links people together and nurtures connections with community and environment. As such, the incorporation of interpretive devices - overlooks, main entry kiosks, booklets and brochures, site tours, classes, student work projects, and the like - are essential to the long-term success of the park and its restoration and are a vital part of the Master Action Plan’s program.

During the plan’s creation (winter 1999), students from Saint Theresa Elementary School spent several classes clearing, planting and exploring in the Woods, with the guidance of teachers and community members. These sessions successfully demonstrated the value of hands-on environmental learning and stewardship available to people of all ages at Madrona Woods.