

Fall 2026

LANDmark



TLC
The Land Conservancy
of British Columbia

TLC team poses after an invasive grasses training day
on Trial Islands Ecological Reserve, near Victoria.

Photo: Max Bailey



Left to right: Emily Francis (Communications Manager), Frankie Iwachow (Lands Manager), Lisa Morry (Donor Relations Manager), Beth Reimer (Conservation and Restoration Technician), Michelle Thompson (Deputy Executive Director), Max Bailey (Communications Officer), and Torrey Archer-Anderson (Biologist & Lands Manager).

What does it mean to care for a place? For TLC's community of volunteers, partners, staff, and supporters, the answer takes many forms. It can mean restoring habitat, sharing knowledge, protecting ecologically significant lands, or simply returning to the same place year after year with a commitment to its well-being. Whatever the approach, stewardship begins with the understanding that the land's future is a shared responsibility.

That spirit of stewardship is woven throughout this edition of the *LANDmark*. Within these pages you'll meet people who embody that commitment in inspiring ways. We celebrate the 80th anniversary of Abkhazi Garden and the opening of a new interpretive exhibit that shares the remarkable story of the garden and the community that continues to care for it. On Cortes Island, a visit to Linnaea Farm explores how decades of thoughtful land stewardship continues to nurture both ecosystems and people.

We also look toward the future through restoration and conservation initiatives. From invasive species management at the Alston-Stewart Estate and Ayum Creek Regional Park Reserve to emerging conversations

about restoring the ecological role of fire at the Fort Shepherd Conservancy Area, these stories remind us that healthy landscapes depend on patience, learning, and long-term commitment.

Underlying each story is the dedication of a community who continues to show up for the lands we all cherish. At a time when environmental challenges can sometimes feel overwhelming, their efforts remind us that meaningful change often begins locally, through relationships, knowledge, and collective action.

Thank you for being a part of TLC's conservation community. Your support ensures that these landscapes, and the stories they hold, will continue to inspire future generations. ■

Warmly,



Dianna Stenberg

Dianna Stenberg
Executive Director

40 volunteers gather to restore TLC's Alston-Stewart Estate in Saanich.

Photo: GV Green Team



Stewardship in Action at Alston-Stewart Estate

Story by Michelle Thompson, Deputy Executive Director



In July, a restoration event at TLC's Alston-Stewart Estate in Saanich's Blenkinsop Valley demonstrated the impact of community stewardship.

Working alongside the Greater Victoria Green Team, 40 volunteers contributed more than 120 hours to remove approximately 9.5 cubic metres of invasive plants and restore 223 square metres of habitat.

One of the primary targets was Italian arum (*Arum italicum*), an emerging invasive species of concern on southern Vancouver Island. Recognizable by its glossy, arrow-shaped leaves and bright, orange-red berries, Italian arum spreads rapidly through gardens and forests, forming dense patches that displace native vegetation. It is particularly challenging to control as small root fragments left in the soil can regenerate. Volunteers carefully removed entire root systems to help prevent this species from becoming established within the protected area.

Beyond restoration work, the day created opportunities for learning, connection, and community building. Volunteers

shared stories, learned new skills, and enjoyed the surrounding forest. Some even sampled ripe Himalayan blackberries growing along the property boundary. Although blackberries are themselves an invasive species, they offered a reminder of the complex relationships between people and the landscapes we steward. By the end of the day, participants had improved habitat for native species while strengthening their connection to the land and one another.

The event also coincided with an important conservation milestone. This year, TLC completed a five-year Invasive Species Stewardship and Management Plan for the Alston-Stewart Estate. Developed through site assessments and invasive plant mapping, the plan identifies priority species, sets management objectives, and guides future restoration efforts. By combining strategic long-term planning with hands-on community action, TLC is helping ensure the ecological health and resilience of the property for generations to come. ■

Photo Credits:

Figure 1. Italiaanse aronskelk (*Arum italicum*). Locatie, Tuinreservaat Jonkervallei 01, by Dominicus Johannes Bergsma, via Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Italiaanse_aronskelk_%28Arum_italicum%29_-_Locatie,_Tuinreservaat_Jonkervallei_01.JPG), licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0.



TLC's Beth Reimer (left) and volunteer meticulously remove Italian arum bulbs.
Photo: GV Green Team



Figure 1. Italian arum's berry stalks turn bright orange-red in the late summer to early fall.

Beth exemplifies the resilience, optimism, and care at the heart of stewardship.

Photo: Frankie Iwachow



Fighting for What Matters: Beth and the Next Generation of Stewards

Story by Max Bailey, Communications Officer



My peers, and friends working in stewardship are a constant source of inspiration. Mounting

economic hardships, climate grief, and the many inherent challenges of the profession can make the work difficult. Yet the people at the heart of every stewardship success story, like TLC's Conservation Covenant and Restoration Technician, Beth Reimer, fight through.

"One of the main challenges that I've found has been that a lot of this work feels like a fight. It can be easy to get bogged down by that but I don't know if at this point we can afford to stop fighting," Beth explains.

Beth celebrated one year at TLC this past summer. As a young professional in conservation and stewardship, she brings valuable perspective and energy to the organization. Beth and I spoke about what life is like working at TLC, in stewardship, and beyond.

In her time so far, Beth has embraced learning new stewardship skills while helping manage TLC's over 250 covenants across the province. She highlights a flashy, technical one: flying

a drone to remotely survey hard-to-reach covenanted properties.

While modern professionals are rapidly adapting to new technologies, enduring, Beth muses on the value of interpersonal skills:

"Communicating with landholders and the public has been a good reminder of how dependent we are on people."

Alongside her skill set, Beth's definition of stewardship has expanded. Stewardship for her has always come from a place of humility and respect, but she says that "we can be bolder and more creative in how we practice it."

Future stewardship includes diverse perspectives, isn't afraid of failure, and learns from every decision. Reflecting on her peers in conservation, she notes:

"We've grown up in this world of uncertainty and conflict so we've gotten really good at balancing the ability to advocate for change while also balancing caring for yourself."

Despite uncertainty, Beth concludes that she's "really fortunate to have been able to turn my hobby and my general lifestyle into a job because there's nothing else I'd rather be doing." ■



Don't miss out on these

FALL EVENTS

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 17

Ayum Creek - Plant the Peninsula

Help restore Ayum Creek Regional Park in Sooke. Tools and snacks provided! All abilities welcome.

Registration required.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 7

John Dean Park - Fungi ID Walk

Discover the Saanich peninsula's colourful mushrooms with the Friends of LAU, WELNEW/John Dean Park Society, local fungi experts and TLC biologist, Torrey!

Registration required.

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 15

Mists & Mycelium - Fungi ID Walk

Hip-hip foray! Join us for a second fungi ID walk with local mycologists and TLC biologist, Torrey! **Registration required.**

SATURDAY & SUNDAY

DECEMBER 12-13 & 19-20

Abkhazi Garden - Festive Market

Support Abkhazi Garden by giving the gift of green this holiday season! Shop locally-made swags, table centres, wreaths and more.

Scan this QR code to register for events or visit our website.



When Fire Disappears



Without periodic fire, native shrubs like ceanothus, chokecherry, and Saskatoon berry become woody, and inedible for deer, elk and moose.



Less food availability reduces resident ungulate population. Decreased browsing pressure allows shrub overgrowth to continue.

Photo: Raven Bluffs Consulting



With a crowded understory habitat quality declines, impacting local biodiversity. Meanwhile, fuel load and high-intensity wildfire risk increase.

..... Restoring the Balance

With support from local partners, Fort Shepherd's overcrowded understory is being managed with techniques that mimic a restorative fire regime.



Fort Shepherd: A Case for Good Fire

Story and photos by Frankie Iwachow, Lands Manager



It was a warm, sunny spring day on the Columbia River near Trail, B.C. Karen Trebitz, Consulting biologist

and Fort Shepherd Conservancy Area volunteer steward, walks ahead of me on a grassy bench above the river. She points to a thicket of young ponderosa and white pines and explains that the brushland, a type of grassland, is filling in with trees, changing the habitat and making it difficult for resident ungulates to rest and raise their young. I'm reminded of local hunters who have shared concerns about declining populations in recent years.

We brush against ceanothus, its sweet fragrance filling the air. I comment on the smell, and Karen points out that these shrubs are important forage for ungulates and are fire-adapted. Without fire, they become stagnant, woody and inedible. A picture begins to form: this ecosystem is missing an important component.

What we consider natural today has been shaped by Indigenous stewardship practices for millennia. This includes fire as a stewardship tool, informed by generations of lessons from the land and practiced through ceremony. I reflect on this as we walk.

We continue toward the old Hudson's Bay Company fort site, built in 1856 over an Indigenous village. Only a cairn marking its presence remains. I look at dense patches of chokecherries and Saskatoon berry bushes and wonder what this place was like before we decided that fire was bad and suppressed its presence for more than a century.

The old fort site looks different from the thickets upstream. A few years ago, a project led by the Okanagan Nation Alliance returned Syilx land management practices to the site to promote ecosystem resilience. Their crew worked by hand to reduce over abundant shrubs and ladder fuels, clearing dead branches and small trees to restore the open forest structure - a laborious mechanical treatment instead of fire.

We admire the work. Ponderosa pines stand with branches high off the ground, their crowns shaped like shortened skirts. The grasses below reach only to their ankles. I think: when fire passes through, the flames won't be able to climb into the precious canopy.

An interpretive sign describes the work here. Fire is an ecological process, as essential as sun and rain. Many ecosystems have evolved with fire as a beneficial disturbance. Around here, the brushland was historically maintained by frequent, low-intensity fires, supporting open understories that made good living for deer and people alike.

ONA's work expanded on a similar enhancement project undertaken about a decade earlier using mechanical techniques. Decades before that, the local rod and gun club recognized the relationship between ceanothus and deer, conducting small patch burns to help restore balance.

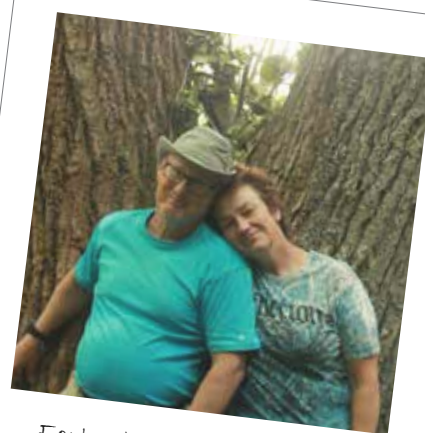
Fire is not a problem to solve, but a process to understand.

We sit on the pine needles for lunch, and between bites, Karen shares how the local community relates to Fort Shepherd. Everyone,

she says, sees this place as an opportunity to get ahead of catastrophic wildfire; to manage fire intentionally, before fire manages us.

With enhancement work already underway, we have an opportunity to restore balance through careful study, collaboration and knowledge: reducing hazardous fuels, supporting biodiversity and reconnecting culture to land. We agree to spend the coming years learning from the landscape and from each other, building the knowledge and relationships needed to prepare for the return of fire to this fire-starved landscape.

This thinking is shaping the new management plan for Fort Shepherd. Ecological restoration, guided by Indigenous stewardship and cultural practices, will be central to the work ahead, including exploring prescribed fire as a tool to restore ecological resilience, reduce wildfire risk and support the safety of communities living alongside this landscape. ■



Fort Shepherd volunteer stewards, Al Malette (left) and Karen Trebitz (right).

Tending Tomorrow at Linnaea Farm

Story by Emily Francis, Communications Manager

Photos by Tamara McPhail, Linnaea Farm Land Steward

Grazing cattle play a significant role
in land stewardship at Linnaea Farm.



Cradled by the slopes of Easter Bluff on Cortes Island lies a fertile valley known as Linnaea Farm. Here, winds ripple through waist-high agrarian grasses, carry the fragrance of century-old orchards, and mingle with the happy “moos” of grazing cattle. Named after the twinflower, *Linnaea borealis*, Linnaea Farm is a living testament to the enduring relationship between people and place, shaped by generations of stewardship.

I had the privilege of speaking with Tamara McPhail, Linnaea Farm’s resident land steward. In 1998, Tamara became connected to the farm through her partner, Adam, then a Garden Program intern. While embracing young motherhood, she developed a passion for livestock husbandry, shearing sheep and milking cattle, under the mentorship of farm steward Liz Richardson. Nearly three decades later, she reflects on the gifts, challenges and responsibilities of caring for land.

Life at Linnaea pushed Tamara into roles she never imagined for herself from farmer and historian, to filling Executive Director and Board Chair positions with the Linnaea Farm Society.

“My stewardship plan can be thrown in a wheelbarrow now,” she says playfully. “I can scale it up or down depending on

what the land needs.”

That knowledge, she remarks, comes from years of careful observation, repetition, and countless mistakes. Yet, she is quick to note that her tenure is but one chapter of Linnaea Farm’s greater story:

“You inherit something from the people who came before you, you do your best to care for it while you’re here, and eventually you have to think about what you’re leaving for the people who come next.”

For Tamara, succession and land stewardship are inseparable. In an era of growing uncertainty and unprecedented change, she emphasizes the need to cultivate mentorship and foster agency in the next generation of stewards:

“There is so much conversation now about climate change, food systems, ecological collapse, sustainability, resilience, and yet we can’t find people who want to farm. Protecting the land is one part of the work but figuring out how we support the people who care for the land is just as important.”

Through Linnaea’s education programs, Tamara has seen many young people arrive carrying climate grief and a sense of helplessness. Rather than offering easy optimism, she encourages a different response:

“You can feel overwhelmed by the scale of the problems and still decide that this particular piece of land, this

garden, these animals, this community, are worth your attention.

Maybe that is what resilience has come to mean to me: staying in relationship with something even when you don’t know what the outcome will be.

For me, there is something hopeful in the decision to keep showing up.”

Tamara’s message is simple and profound: the future takes root in the places we choose to tend, the knowledge we choose to share, and the people we trust to carry the work forward. The important thing is to plant the seed. ■

With the Quadra Island Conservancy, TLC co-holds a 127ha conservation covenant at Linnaea Farm on Cortes Island. Read more: www.conservancy.bc.ca/linnaea-farm



Land steward Tamara McPhail has nearly three decades of experience tending Linnaea Farm on Cortes Island.

Celebrating 80 Years:

Abkhazi Garden's New Interpretive Centre

Story and photo by Cherie Miltimore,
Abkhazi Garden Site Manager and Volunteer Coordinator.



In 2026, TLC celebrates the 80th anniversary of Abkhazi Garden. To mark the occasion, volunteer docent Karen Link proposed transforming the Summerhouse into an interpretive centre that would tell the garden's remarkable story. With additional support from volunteers Ronnie Eastwood, Jim Sharp, and Mark MacIntyre, the vision became reality.

Today, visitors entering the Summerhouse can explore twelve interpretive panels and artifacts that trace the lives of Peggy and Nicolas Abkhazi, their wartime experiences, their marriage, the creation of their home and garden, and the community effort that ultimately saved Abkhazi Garden from development. Artifacts on display include Peggy's garden coat and one of Nicolas' irrigation tractors.

The new interpretive centre officially opened during the 80th Anniversary Volunteer BBQ in July, when long-time volunteer docents Margaret Smart and Diana Knufman, each with 26 years of service, cut the ceremonial ribbon.

This exhibit enriches the visitor experience by sharing the inspiring story of Prince and Princess Abkhazi and the community effort that preserved their legacy for future generations. ■

This fall, enjoy the garden and the new Summerhouse Interpretive Centre from Wednesday to Sunday, 11 a.m. 5 p.m. (last entry is at 4 p.m.).



Volunteer docent Karen Link, the spark behind Abkhazi Garden's new Summerhouse Interpretive Centre.



Comic by Frankie Iwachow, Lands Manager

Volunteers lift mulch and each other's spirits at the Ayum Creek Restoration Day in June.

"Mulch" to Celebrate at Ayum Creek

Story and photos by Max Bailey, Communications Officer



New technique: biodegradable paper rolls replace cardboard as a base layer, making sheet mulching a breeze!



I can only imagine how difficult it is to plan a restoration project: the labour demands, the coordination of complex schedules, the unpredictability of day-of conditions, and, in my experience, the fear of the "fool's errand". Fortunately, organizers across B.C., including here at TLC, are experts at transforming this sense of trepidation into progress.

I believe that every time a treatment patch begins, or is revisited on its restoration journey, there is a celebration being held. A celebration that our community made it through the hard part of planning, advocating, fundraising, and spearheading a cause for our native ecosystems.

This summer, I had the pleasure of a celebration at Ayum Creek Regional Park

Reserve in Sooke. As part of a 9-year-long invasive species management initiative, largely funded by TD Friends of the Environment Foundation, we treated over approximately 130 m² of land infested with lesser periwinkle (*Vinca minor*).

We practiced a technique called sheet mulching, where thick layers of various organic materials suffocate the carpet of periwinkle. This method takes time and is ripe with opportunities to learn and adapt. Torrey Archer-Anderson, the beating heart of this initiative, is always keen to try new things for the sake of growth, acknowledging the importance of a site-specific management plan. For example, to overcome challenges with access to cardboard for sheet mulching, she opted to secure non-laminated paper rolls instead: a neater, cleaner, and less laborious option. As Ayum Creek's management enters a new chapter at the turn of a 5-year invasive species management plan, we can look back on our lessons learned and how best to protect its biodiversity.

We hope to continue celebrating the effort, learning something new about nature, and learning from the invaluable members of our community who devote their time and energy to projects such as this one.

This shared knowledge is what scares off the fear of the fool's errand. It's the belief in the fact that growth, trying new things, learning from each other, and continuing to come back year after year makes the meaning of our errand. It's the belief in the fact that we and the people around us care so deeply about protecting our native spaces, contributing to a cause, and learning something new every time that we come back. ■

Max's passion for birding, flair for whimsical prose, and photographic talent enriched TLC's office this summer during his time as a Communications Officer.

TLC is honoured to be the recipient of donations in memory of:

Theresa van der Goes, Carolyn Kroeber, Jean Screech, Marjorie Urquhart and Katherine Dianne Young

To remember your loved one with a special gift call 1-877-485-2422

TLC Board of Directors: John Allen ■ Hassan Arif ■ Paleah Black Moher
■ Tom Cimolai ■ Penny Crawford ■ Kelly Fretwell ■ Casey Macaulay
■ Andrew Morgan ■ Jeff Sheldrake ■ Fran Sloan Sainas