

Friends of North Creek Forest... a brief history

By Jim Freese, Founding FNCF Board member

2000 - 2010

In 2000 a developer proposed to log the forest and build new houses. A neighborhood group sprang up and fought mightily to oppose this development. They paid for scientific studies which showed the forest to be of high ecological value. But, after ten years of opposition and city council meetings, the developer won all of the permits necessary to log and build. Then the housing market crashed and a window of opportunity opened. The original group wished to maintain their strategy and direction. Others (most of us) decided we needed a more comprehensive approach or we risked complete loss of the forest. Thus was born Friends of North Creek Forest.

2011

Our mission was to engage all aspects of the forest through education, stewardship and conservation. Every decision we made served one or more of those goals. And everything we did was done in a way that everyone was respected, receiving something positive for their support: landowners, the original group, elected leaders, city administration... everyone got something.

In 2010 the forest was still referred to as the "Boy-Scout Assemblage", the developer's name for the dominant landowner. So we took the liberty of renaming the forest to identify it with its place in things: the largest remaining upland conifer forest in the lower North Creek Watershed. We became Friends of North Creek Forest. Then everything happened at once.

January

We formed a Board of Directors and placed an old union organizer in as a volunteer Executive Director. Our first action was to build a website, email system, develop promo material and gather endorsements from a broad spectrum of citizens and organization. We did all of this in about a month. Endorsements and letters of support came in from the Chancellor of UW Bothell, the Northshore School Board, the Tulalip Tribes, elected leaders, artists, authors, and students. By the time we had our first meeting with the city council we had about 700 endorsements, including most of the city council members. "Why not?" was probably going through the heads of the pro-development side of the council, a majority.

April

The city said it had no time to write grants. We said we will. The city said they did not have a budget to take care of the forest. We said we would. We were probably not given much consideration at that point. But a month later a grant became available and we asked to apply on behalf of the city*. The result... the city received \$200,000 followed by another \$200,000 that came in 6 days later from the work of Rep Derek Stanford in the Legislature. Since we made it our habit to make friends with all the landowners, we were not surprised when the Boy Scouts put their 35 acres of forest up for sale that same month. So, by Christmas 2011 Bothell owned over half of the forest. If there was any doubt we were serious, our President also bought 6 acres in the middle of the forest to make sure it stayed safe, thus cutting the remaining developable land in half. Word spread we were a serious group.

September - Stewardship:

Parallel to land acquisition efforts, we formed a relationship with the UW Restoration Ecology Network. This is a Capstone project involving teams of 6 students who remove 1/4 to 1/3 acre of invasive plants and replace them with a variety of native species suited for the site. We

supplied tools, hamburger and volunteers. They directed the operation. Since our President now owned a piece of the forest we didn't need to ask permission from the city for anything. We just began doing what we said we would... stewardship of the forest. And that got us more grants. We were attracting hundreds of volunteers and it was exciting to be able to purchase 60 loppers, 100 pairs of gloves, etc. Oh, hamburgers too. Nothing like a hamburger under a BBQ smoke-filled awning on a drizzly day to get volunteers to return. The theory seemed to work.

September - Education:

While the UW-REN work provided stewardship we also engaged interns in the forest to do botanical studies and later to do a year-long amphibian survey. We supported about 20 interns over our first 3 years.

Community involvement:

A lot of our volunteers began to come from the surrounding community. This really took off after we received broad radio, television and newspaper coverage.

We finished our first year strong!

From 2012 through 2014 we won many more grants for the city and several operations grants too. Sources included: King County, Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office, Tulalip Tribes, Rose Foundation, Peach Foundation and others. Some of the grants provided us with some drama. We placed first on a critical grant application, scoring higher than 16 other park administrations across the state. The city won an award for this. The Governor took notice.

The FNCF office resided in our executive director's basement the first four years and it was busy. At any given time, day or night, you could walk into the basement and find the Education, Research or Stewardship Committees meeting, or students having a brainstorm session or doing data entry on some project. The place was busy because everyone knew where the key was hidden, all needed a convenient meeting place, it was the only available bathroom on the edge of the forest and it served coffee and occasionally pizza.

There were many twists and turns on the road to saving this forest. We all lost sleep, we all got soaked doing stewardship and education with students, generations were bridged, lasting friendships were made and the forest got saved. Governor Jay Inslee cut the ribbon to North Creek Forest in 2017.

FNCF is now well into its second phase. With conservation complete, education programs have grown quickly, with over 1000 students being exposed to this ecosystem each year. As of this writing we are in the middle of our 8th year of partnership with UW-REN. Our relationship with the city keeps growing stronger and our Board of Directors has evolved to fit our current priorities.

A book is pending!

Notes:

*We learned about this grant on a Monday, got permission from the city council on Tuesday, wrote and submitted the application by the Thursday deadline and did an in-person presentation to the Snohomish Parks Board on that Friday... and won.

Timeline of events:

<p>2000? Development proposed Help Our Woods (HOW) formed</p>	<p>In about 2000 Camwest Development secured purchase options to develop the forest, designating it “The Boy Scout Assemblage”, named after the owner of the largest parcel, the Boy Scouts of America. A community group, Help Our Woods, formed in opposition to development. Their initial challenge was the proposed development of a road within the forest. HOW organized 300 people to attend a City Council meeting but zoning was not changed.</p>
<p>2004 HOW challenges rezoning</p>	<p>In 2004 Camwest sought additional zoning changes within the Boy Scout Assemblage. HOW gathered signatures of about 600 citizens wishing to save the forest.</p>
<p>2006 HOW funds research</p>	<p>2006 - 2008 HOW gathered donations and hired professionals in the fields of wetlands, wildlife habitat and environmental law. This research was valuable foundation work establishing the ecological significance of the “Boy Scout Property”. At the end of 2008 a judge ruled the development plan had “inconsistencies” and declined to affirm development.</p>
<p>2008 Rezoning fails</p>	<p>2009 HOW funded a forest assessment establishing the “Boy Scout Property” as “high value habitat”. HOW researched ways to purchase forest lands and in 2010 the City Council authorized staff to proceed with a King County Conservation Futures (KCCF) Grant. The research HOW had available was key to the successful grant award of \$200,000. A required match for these funds proved difficult as the City Council stated HOW needed to raise that amount from the community.</p>
<p>2009 HOW funds forest assessment: “high value habitat”</p>	<p>2009 HOW funded a forest assessment establishing the “Boy Scout Property” as “high value habitat”. HOW researched ways to purchase forest lands and in 2010 the City Council authorized staff to proceed with a King County Conservation Futures (KCCF) Grant. The research HOW had available was key to the successful grant award of \$200,000. A required match for these funds proved difficult as the City Council stated HOW needed to raise that amount from the community.</p>
<p>2010 Permits in place for development</p>	<p>By late 2010 Camwest had the permits necessary to begin site development but the housing market grew unstable then crashed with the effect of suspending development.</p>
<p>6-acre parcel purchased by family to save it for development</p>	<p>At the same time a landowner within the forest offered his 6-acre parcel for sale. With no match for the KCCF grant other members of the community grew uneasy. The result was: Jeannie and Tom Robinson, living adjacent to the forest, purchased the 6-acre parcel to ensure its protection from development.</p>
<p>2011 Two critical problems identified</p>	<p>At the beginning of 2011 two things became clear to many: 1) it would probably be impossible to raise all matching funds from community members alone and 2) the relationship between conservation interests and the landowners was extremely adversarial. A strategy was needed to address both of these problems if there was any chance to save the “Boy Scout Property”. The early efforts of HOW impeded development and they continued to raise money for the forest, \$57,000 by 2016.</p>
<p>Friends of North Creek Forest (FNCF) founded</p>	<p>Those seeing a need to address the 2 problems of relationships and money more broadly founded a new group calling itself Friends of North Creek Forest (FNCF) and began referring to the forest as NORTH CREEK FOREST.</p>

FNCF Mission	The mission of FNCF is: “To maintain and improve the biological function of <i>North Creek Forest</i> through education, stewardship and conservation in perpetuity.
FNCF Principle	The method of FNCF is: all stakeholders must win: wildlife interests, landowners, students, education institutions, City and County(s) (the forest spans King and Snohomish Counties).
FNCF comprehensive campaign	FNCF established what they internally referred to as a “Comprehensive Campaign”. They simultaneously pursued endorsements across a broad spectrum of potential allies; sought an accord with landowners; established their 501c3 designation; gathered the unanimous support the city council and elected leaders; developed a website with an active blog and began calling “The Boy Scout Property” North Creek Forest.
FNCF Commitments	FNCF made a commitment to educational institutions to provide education programs that would bring classrooms to the forest for direct observation and experience. FNCF made a commitment to the City of Bothell to actively undertake stewardship of any forest land saved by their efforts.
April Snohomish County grant State grant	In April FNCF discovered a Snohomish Conservation Futures grant was available. With City Council approval, they wrote and presented the application on behalf of the city and simultaneously, and provided info to 1 st Legislative District Representative Derek Stanford, who applied for matching funds from a Washington State Economic Development grant. Both allocations for \$200,000 each were successful. With improved relations with the Boy Scouts we learned they were simultaneously putting their property up for sale.
	Special note: A part of the original KCCF grant, initiated by HOW, was used to purchase ½ of the 4-acre Boy Scout Property that extended into King County. The City came up with the match. Without those KCCF funds the whole deal would have collapsed.
September FNCF partnership with UW	Meanwhile in September FNCF teamed up with the University of Washington Restoration Ecology Network (UWREN) to remove invasive species and plant 1000 native trees, plants and shrubs in ¼-acre of NCF. This would be the first of six (so far) restoration partnerships with UWREN bringing hundreds of students and community members into stewardship and providing 10,000 hours of labor the city.
FNCF Education Program	Also in September FNCF began education programs. The deal was: if you help restore the forest you received a forest oriented education module and a hot hamburger.
Land and Water Grant	Also in September, FNCF supported the city with an application for a grant funded by the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). This heavyweight application took hundreds of hours to refine and won second place in the state.

<p>Cascadia College interns</p>	<p>Also in September, FNCF provided academic support for interns from Cascadia College to undertake a detailed level 9-month botanical survey within 6-acres of the forest and interns from UW Bothell, using advanced GPS equipment and their botanical knowledge mapped plant communities across the whole forest.</p>
<p>December 2011 35 acres purchased by Bothell; Expansive media coverage</p>	<p>At the end of 2011 the city purchased the first 35 acres and formally designated the property: North Creek Forest. This made every newspaper from Wenatchee to Kitsap County. The front page of the Everett Herald led with: "Bothell Gets a Forest for Christmas". 3-minute TV Special NY Eve.</p>
<p>2012 HOW leads on 2nd King County grant</p>	<p>March 2012 HOW leads on a second successful KCCF grant with FNCF adding some supporting points discovered while researching other grants.</p> <p>April 2012 FNCF begins an application with the city for a second LWCF grant. This too was successful.</p>
<p>April 2012 FNCF 2nd Land and Water grant; more internships</p>	<p>April 2012 FNCF takes on an intern from UW to produce conceptual architectural landscape designs to later be used in the Master Planning process.</p>
<p>May 2012 WWRC and elected leaders and staff plant trees</p>	<p>May 2012 staff and board members of the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition and the staff for Senator Patty Murray, State Rep Louis Moscoso and City Council members spend a day with FNCF and UWREN on stewardship.</p>
<p>June 2012 FNCF gets operation funding</p>	<p>June 2012 FNCF begins receiving a series of \$5,000 and \$10,000 grants for their education and stewardship programs from the Rose Foundation and the Tulalip Tribes. FNCF education programs begin to reach into K-12 classrooms.</p>
<p>FNCF internships</p>	<p>October 2012: 6 addition interns join FNCF to geo map amphibians by species across the whole forest and build databases.</p>
<p>FNCF internships</p>	<p>November 2012 FNCF takes on its first Executive Director intern to work with our ED. After 6 months of amazing work she graduated to become the Executive Assistant for a large financial consulting firm. Also FNCF hired a part time Volunteer Coordinator.</p>
<p>FNCF funding</p>	<p>November 2012 Area High Schools get involved with FNCF Forest stewardship. Also in November individuals donated \$26,800 to fund FNCF operations.</p>
<p>2013</p>	<p>January 2013 FNCF begins running two restoration projects at once, one is UWREN the other a special English holly eradication program.</p>
<p>February 2013 Landowner makes contribution</p>	<p>February 2013 Forest landowner Marty Fries, offers his house and water supply to volunteers for every event forward, sometimes two events per week. This proves to be critical to providing water to upwards of 3000 plants in the summer and shaking off the chill of winter work in the rain.</p>

Volunteer wins National Conservation Achievement Award	February FNCF Volunteer Jessica Howe, president of Bothell High School Earth Club, wins the 2013 National Conservation Achievement Award in the youth category.
WWRC/Senator Murray	April 2013 Saint Brendan's students attend an FNCF education program and participate in a video made by Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition (WWRC) expressing gratitude to Senator Murray for her support for the Land and Water Conservation Futures Fund...
May 2013 Soundview International Baccalaureate School Scouts YMCA	May 2013 FNCF is joined in stewardship and education programs by Soundview International Baccalaureate School, the Cub Scouts and YMCA summer youth program. YMCA continues to participate every summer. Soundview continues participate with students arriving by bus from Lynnwood 8 times per year.
August 2013 The art fundraiser	August 2013 Artist A. Gaul Culley organizes a FNCF operations art sale fundraiser at Top Foods in Woodinville.
Whale Scout	October 2013 Whale Scout, a nonprofit organization with members dispersed around Puget Sound to spot and log Killer Whale movement begins attending our restoration events and continues with events three times per year.
Media	October 2013 Seattle Times article about the Land and Water Conservation fund features North Creek Forest as an example of the importance of continued funding by Congress.
6-acre purchase	December 2013 The Bothell City Council approves the purchase of six more acres of forest. Funding was from the Land and Water Conservation Fund, King County Futures and a donation by the landowner, the Robinson Family.
2014	January 2014 Woodinville Montessori School begins stewardship and education program with FNCF.
Tulalip students	February 2014 Marysville High School students bus from Tulalip to plant 200 willow tree stakes in the forest.
Land developer helps	February 2014 A land developer, Mike Hughes, donates his time and money to cut up old cars discovered in the forest. UWREN students find a new friend.
King County funding	March 2014 King County awards \$500,000 for land purchase and diverts another \$484,000 from incomplete projects in an all-out effort to match projected awards from other sources.
	April 2014 Canyon Creek Elementary joins education and stewardship event.
	June 2014 Fishbowl Productions creates first virtual tour of NCF.
FNCF successful applications	August 2014 FNCF completed two applications and presentations: Land and Water Conservation Fund \$500,000 Washington Wildlife and Parks: \$1,000,000

	Both were successful.
Peach Foundation	September 2014: Peach Foundation begins annually funding FNCF at \$20,000 per year.
2015 Eagle Scouts	January 2015 Eagle Scout Projects (2) begin
FNCF hires first full-time employee	February 2015 FNCF Hires its first paid Executive Director, Emily Sprong. Jim Freese served in this capacity since January 2011.
Murray/DelBene	August 2015 Senator Murray and Congresswoman DelBene visit North Creek Forest to demonstrate the impact of the Land and Water Conservation Fund. November 2015 FNCF hosts first Forest Research Expo- featuring year 4 and 5 restoration sites. January 2016 Engineering students design gravity fed irrigation system for restoration sites.
Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office: Bravo Award	February 2016 Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office recognizes the City of Bothell and FNCF with Bravo Award for: Raising \$2.8 M to save the forest Taking first place in the state on its latest Land and Water grant FNCFs expenditure of \$221,600 for forest stewardship Bringing 1200 volunteers and 10,900 hours of stewardship Special note: If HOW had not worked so hard in the first 6 years and initiated the first scientific studies FNCF success in grant work would have been far more difficult.
2017 January FINAL ACQUISITION COMPLETE!	January 2017 -FINAL LAND ACQUISITION COMPLETE! BOTHELL HAS A NEW 64 ACRE PARKLAND. February 2017 FNCF expands use of paid internship program March 2017 FNCF finalizes its next five-year plan April 2017 Northwest Horticultural Society partners with FNCF for stewardship
May – Ribbon Cutting	Governor Inslee cuts the ribbon. September 2017 FNCF offices relocated from Freese residence to UW Bothell Campus.

It is critical to note the relationship between citizens' groups, land owners, elected leaders, dedicated city, county and state staff, education and conservation interests and amazing students. If any one of these had given up the entire venture may very well have failed. If one work exemplified everyone's participation it was Trust. Maybe the second word would be excitement.