

RARE PLANT RESOURCES

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Spring growth: New seasonal staff, interns, monitoring events

Several new projects are underway this spring. Rare Care has hired two seasonal staff, Lizzie Zemke and Brittney Georgic, to assist with an intensive effort to monitor rare plant populations affected by wildfires, including populations on Hanford Reach National Monument and Bureau of Land Management lands in central Washington.

Two interns are also joining our team for this field season (see photos, page 2). Myesa Legendre-Fixx and Ceci Henderson will be conducting monitoring, seed collections and invasive species inventories as well as propagating rare plants. Myesa is a senior at UW studying biology with an ecology focus. She became interested in ecology while working on a climate change study at Mt. Rainier as an undergraduate researcher. Ceci is a senior in the School of Environmental and Forest Sciences pursuing a degree in Environmental Science and Resource Management. She has experience in horticulture and restoration through work with Earthcorps, the UW Chapter of the Society for Ecological Restoration, and with UW Botanic Gardens.

Rare Care's annual monitoring weekend will take place in Asotin County June 2-4. We will focus on rare plants found in Palouse bunchgrass communities and ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir forests of state wildlife areas and national forest lands. **From July 18-20, Rare Care will return to Camas Meadows** near Leavenworth to continue mapping populations of Wenatchee Mountains checker-mallow. If you're interested in participating in these events, please email rarecare@uw.edu.

AGENCY PARTNERS PROFILE: Thomas drawn to prairie-oak woodlands

Many times, it is the connection to a place that leads to one's life work. For Ted Thomas, Senior Ecologist with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), it is the prairie and oak woodlands of western Washington.

Ted was introduced to this unique ecosystem while helping graduate students characterize prairie plant communities and determine the age of oak trees. Much to his chagrin, Ted, a forest researcher at the time, managed to break two increment borers while coring large oak trees. "Oh boy, that was an expensive day of field work," Ted notes, "but I was hooked on the open, forb dominated landscape of an oak woodland and I pursued all opportunities to work in this landscape." Soon thereafter, Ted took a job with the US Forest Service Pacific Northwest Research Station in Olympia, where he continued to learn about this ecosystem by conducting research projects at Fort Lewis, now Joint Base Lewis-McChord. (continued on page 2)

Skinner's 6,000 seeds earn her high praise from Rare Care

Rare Care recognized Laurie Skinner this spring for significant volunteer contributions to Rare Care's monitoring and rare seed collecting projects. Since 2011, Laurie has devoted hundreds of hours to these ventures, coming from her home in Oregon to do so!

More than 6,000 seeds have been accessioned into the Miller Seed Vault from Laurie's collections of rosy owl-clover (*Orthocarpus bracteosus*), small-flowered trillium (*Trillium parviflorum*), common bluecup (*Githopsis specularioides*) and smooth desert-parsley (*Lomatium laevigatum*). She has documented new sites of rosy owl-clover. And her monitoring reports have included outstanding maps and images.



Laurie Skinner (top left, photo by Krista Thie) has added photographs of rosy owl-clover (left, photo by Laurie Skinner) and other rare species to Rare Care's image collection.



Thomas to retire by summer's end

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In 1994, an opportunity arrived to work for USFWS in the listing and recovery program. Right about this time, the Northwest Forest Plan became the standard for management of old-growth forests, and federal forestry operations sharply declined. "This was when I made the decision to refocus my energy and knowledge to what would be the next declining and threatened ecosystem by shifting the scope of my work from forests to prairies." Ted spent the next 23 years of his career with USFWS, and much of his work focused on the conservation of prairie ecosystems and the declining species they harbor.

Among the many projects Ted became involved in at USFWS are the listings and recovery projects of imperiled species. One of the first he worked on, in 1997, was the listing as a threatened species of golden paintbrush (*Castilleja levisecta*), an endemic plant of the prairies. Ted notes that one of the most satisfying aspects of his position is to fund proposals to support recovery actions. The Listing and Recovery Division at USFWS has funded over \$1 million annually for the past ten years. As a result several threatened or endangered species, including the golden paintbrush, are nearing recovery, and it is hoped they will be delisted within the next five years.

Ted also wrote the proposed and final rules for two Wenatchee Mountain endemic plants, showy stickseed (*Hackelia venusta*) and the Wenatchee Mountains checker-mallow (*Sidalcea oregana* var. *calva*). A fun fact: the Wenatchee Mountains checker-mallow was one of five varieties known as the Oregon checker-mallow, but the name was changed during the listing process to reflect this variety's narrow geographic distribution.

The best part of Ted's job, though, has been the people. "Our partners in conservation are collaborative, ingenious and forward thinking in their approach to conservation and allow us to plan and implement the best management practices to enable us to succeed with species recovery and long-term conservation." This includes working with local landowners on Habitat Conservation Plans through the Section 10 process to permit incidental take and a group of diverse stakeholders invested in the prairie-oak woodlands.

This collaborative approach brought Ted to serve on Rare Care's Science Advisory Board. Ted was an original member of the board and has been a proponent of the program ever since. He notes, "Rare Care has been nothing short of a blessing to all of us who work in plant conservation in the Pacific Northwest. Rare Care provides a precise, comprehensive, documented service statewide to work with agency personnel on locating and confirming the location of critically imperiled and rare plant species. This job would be impossible without the support of Rare Care."

We are equally grateful for all that Ted has done for Rare Care and plant conservation. Ted will retire by the end of this summer, at which time he will have more free time to explore many new ecosystems and meet new plants and butterflies. He plans to travel to exotic places such as Italy, Scotland, Belize, Ecuador and Argentina and to enjoy more visits and explorations of Japan, where his oldest son lives. And he will have more time to visit, recreate and cook up a storm with his youngest son, who lives in Olympia. Ted will stay active with volunteering, work in his vegetable garden and with his fruit trees, and maybe even learn to play piano. Whatever Ted decides to do, he can be confident that his contributions to species conservation will pay dividends for years to come.

Top: Ted Thomas, Senior Ecologist, US Fish & Wildlife Service.
Middle: Myesa Legendre-Fixx, intern.
Bottom: Ceci Henderson, intern.
(Photos courtesy of those pictured.)

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