

RARE PLANT PRESS

From Washington Rare Plant Care & Conservation

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CHANGES ARE TAKING ROOT

You may have heard by now about exciting changes happening with Rare Care and UW Botanic Gardens. UW Botanic Gardens and the Arboretum Foundation have joined together under a 501(c)3 organization called Seattle Botanic Gardens. Seattle Botanic Gardens will remain closely affiliated with the University of Washington and continue UW Botanic Gardens' role of managing the Center for Urban Horticulture and Washington Park Arboretum plant collections, facilities, and programs.

What does that mean for Rare Care? In the near term, Rare Care will be a partnership between the Seattle Botanic Gardens and the University of Washington, allowing us to continue our plant conservation activities to their fullest potential uninterrupted. Seattle Botanic Gardens will provide operational and development support, while our staff and federal grants will continue to be at the University. Over the next several years, we will transition our operations to Seattle Botanic Gardens, but we will remain closely affiliated with the University and continue our collaborations with faculty and students.

In the meantime, communications from us will come from emails of both organizations, rarecare@uw.edu or rarecare@seattlebotanicgardens.org, and you can reach us at either email or by phone at (206) 616-0780. **This will be our last print newsletter.** If you'd like to continue receiving biannual news you love about Rare Care, please sign-up for our email newsletter online. See the back page of this newsletter for directions. We are asking donors to the Rare Care Plant Conservation Program to now give through Seattle Botanic Gardens; more details are in the accompanying letter and response device. As always, you can find us in person at the Center for Urban Horticulture in Seattle.

COLLECTING TAKES A COLLECTIVE by My-Lan Le

Seed collecting truly highlights the collective (pun not intended) nature of our botanical community. This spring and summer, we completed 43 rare plant seed collections that were made possible through years of collaboration with the Washington Natural Heritage Program, state and federal partners, and Rare Care volunteers. Other people outside of these partnerships survey, collect herbarium specimens, and make observations without knowing what plant conservation they may enable.

Take the least bladdery milkvetch (*Astragalus microcystis*), a rare and lovely lavender-flowered, silvery-haired pea. As part of a grant with the Center for Plant Conservation, Rare Care was tasked with making two seed collections of this state sensitive plant from populations on Department of Interior (DOI) land, narrowing the possible populations to collect from to four. Unfortunately, three of these populations were not found in our scouting efforts. Two were historical records from the 1940s with low geographic precision, and we could not locate these populations, possibly due to flooding caused by the construction of the



Least bladdery milkvetch (*Astragalus microcystis*) growing on a steep river bank with seed collectors canoeing in the background.
Photo by: My-Lan Le

Grand Coulee Dam. The third population originally had only 6 individuals, and it may now be extirpated. After combing iNaturalist for recent sightings of the species,...

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COLLECTING TAKES A COLLECTIVE (CONT).

I contacted Kettle Falls-based botanist Kyle Chamberlain about his iNaturalist observations at Lake Roosevelt National Recreation Area (NRA). We realized the National Park Service (NPS) had no records of the population he documented there, and this July, I was able to meet up with NPS biologist Cam Prophet to collect seeds and occurrence data, which NPS can now use to manage the population. Without Kyle's observations and initial identification, a seed collection at Lake Roosevelt NRA would not have happened.

As some may have noticed, many Rare Care volunteers and iNaturalist users have received messages from me this season. I used volunteer monitoring reports and people's observations to check phenology (timing of plants' reproductive condition) and enable site access. Sarah Krock and I divided the task of monitoring a large population of rosy owl's-clover (*Orthocarpus bracteosus*) together, so that I knew when and where I could collect seeds. Barbara Varnum-Finney and I collected Thompson's clover (*Trifolium thompsonii*) at different populations, and I was able to collect seeds at an ideal time thanks to her. Carol Mack and John Stuart, who had monitored least bladderly milkvetch by canoe in 2023, helped me make a collection at the same population. Many other Rare Care volunteers also helped me this season.

Continued and successful collaboration was one of the most rewarding aspects of my field technician position for me. Even when I worked independently in the field, I knew my work was the result of many people's long commitment to documenting and protecting our rare flora.

EXPERIMENTS TOWARDS RECOVERY BY ANABELLE MANRIQUE

Whether it's making rare seed collections or monitoring plant reintroductions, my summer as a field technician for Rare Care has been spent jumping from one project to the next. Despite the ever-changing nature of field work, one thing remained constant: every two weeks, Allie Howell and I would drive three hours to water an outplanted population of the low-growing, yellow-flowered Umtanum desert buckwheat (*Eriogonum codium*).

Growing along the top of a single basalt ridge, the entire native population consists of approximately 3,000 individual plants. With the increased threat of wildfire and this species' low recruitment rates, efforts have never been more critical to protect this federally threatened, endemic species.

Over the past decade, experimental outplantings at four different locations have had limited success. One challenge has been establishing the tiny seedlings in this plant's dry, harsh environment. The project I assisted on is addressing this issue by testing how varying the amount of water delivered to outplants every two weeks affect their survival at the Hanford Reach National Monument. Rare Care has planted plugs at this site annually since 2023. As of the end of July 2026, 37% of the seedlings planted in 2025 were still alive, and 79% of the seedlings that survived through the winter survived into mid-summer. This is the highest survival rate Rare Care has seen yet with this species at this site. Our experiment comparing the effect of different watering volumes is still ongoing, with updated data and results still to come.

As my field season wound down, I also participated in a burgeoning experimental trial to understand the germination requirements of Umtanum desert buckwheat to inform outplanting efforts. The goals of this project are



Seasonal technician Anabelle Manrique and research scientist Allie Howell watering Umtanum desert buckwheat (*Eriogonum codium*) outplantings. Photo by Emma Latendresse

to improve germination rates, decrease the time needed for seeds to germinate, and reduce nursery mortality rates of germinants. Over the next several months, Rare Care will be testing treatments including the efficacy of applying gibberellic acid, varying temperature and light regimes, and excising embryos to promote seed germination. As an avid seed lover, my favorite part of this project was excising the embryos out of the tiny, teardrop-shaped seeds. Using a pair of cushioned tweezers, a #10 blade, and a good microscope, I spent an afternoon excising 100 embryos to test if the seed coat may act as a physical inhibitor to germination.

While there is still much to learn about this little woody buckwheat, conservation of the species could not be attained if not for coordinated efforts of state, federal, and tribal partners.

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Rare Care monitors traveled here, there, and everywhere this field season. All in the pursuit of surveying rare plants.

Teamwork, determination, and luck went in to finding annuals this year. Joanna Long, Sarah Stolar, and Tiffani Manteuffel-Ross created a rotating schedule to try to relocate a population of white fairy-poppy (*Meconella oregana*) in Island County that had not been found in the last two years. The incremental visits proved successful, as Joanna found one small subpopulation on the second search. Two weeks later, though, when Sarah went to find the other subpopulation, the first one had already senesced. Ephemeral little fairies, indeed.

New volunteer Jeff Wills went looking for dwarf suncup (*Eremothera pygmaea*) up a steep and loose scree slope in Grant County. On his first attempt, he didn't find any plants. Determined to locate the population though, Jeff returned a month later, again scaled the precarious slope, and to his delight found 28 little plants flowering.

Erika Schreder tasked herself with finding a needle in a haystack: a common bluecup (*Githopsis specularioides*) population that was last recorded in 2003 with only five plants. The land manager gave her a tip on how best to hike up to the steep slope where the population was last found. As luck would have it, approaching from this direction, she stumbled upon the plants as soon as she walked onto the bald and counted 27 individuals hiding amongst perennial grasses.

Our surveyors had a challenging year to get to some sites as the December 2025 floods damaged many

roads on public lands. That didn't deter Zoe Loutos. On the way to her roadside site, she encountered a heavily rutted road. Instead of turning around, Zoe drove as far as she could, then walked the remaining mile of damaged road to reach a healthy population of marsh corydalis (*Corydalis aquae-gelidae*) that had not been surveyed for 36 years.

Barbara Varnum-Finney coordinated with several private landowners in Douglas County to survey and collect seeds of Thompson's clover (*Trifolium thompsonii*), a Wenatchee Mountains endemic. She assembled a group of experienced volunteers, including Julie Bresnan, Jeff Thorson, and Marilee Henry, to assist her. Their seed collection is one of 33 from this year that is part of a grant with the Center for Plant Conservation.

We spent this year's monitoring weekend with 18 volunteers at Tiffany Mountain in the Colville and Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forests. Our targets for the weekend were pink agoseris (*Agoseris aurantiaca* var. *carnea*) and tall agoseris (*Agoseris elata*), among others. We were greeted with a confusing array of morphological traits in *Agoseris* plants. We surmised more work needs to be done to understand tall agoseris variation in the area. In total, we surveyed 15 rare plant populations and found four potentially new ones.

Over a hundred pairs of feet have driven, biked, hiked, and climbed to reach rare plant populations across the state this year. Our volunteers often don't know what they're going to find when they set out to survey, but the information they collect is crucial in moving us further along the path of plant conservation.



Scott Batiuk searching for snow cinquefoil (*Potentilla nivea*) near Tiffany Mountain. Photo by: Naomi Reibold



Marsh corydalis (*Corydalis aquae-gelidae*) in Skamania County. Photo by: Zoe Loutos



Marilee Henry holding Thompson's clover (*Trifolium thompsonii*) in Douglas County. Photo by: Barbara Varnum-Finney

July 1, 2025 - June 30, 2026

THANK YOU

Volunteer hours: 2,508

\$10,000 and Above

Anonymous

\$1,000 to \$9,999

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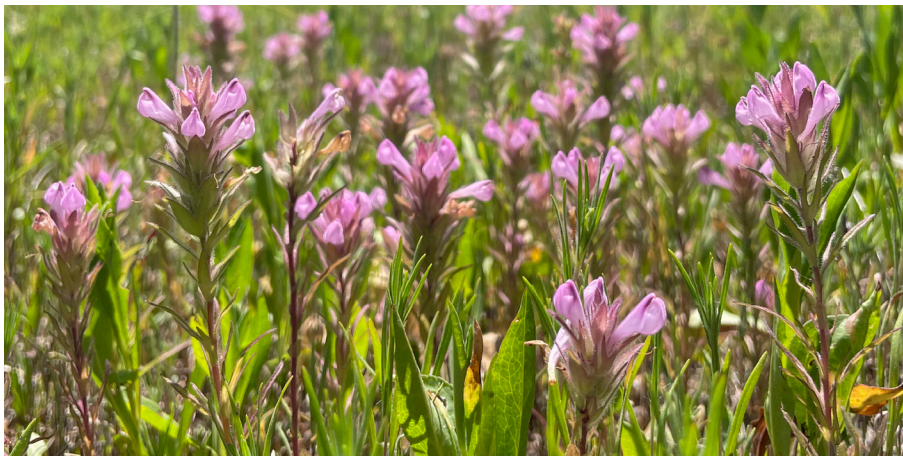
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A clump of rosy owl's-clover (*Orthocarpus bracteosus*) growing in Klickitat County.
Photo by: Sarah Krock

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