



Issaquah Alps TRAILS CLUB

— EST. 1979 —

Dedicated to engaging the public to preserve, protect, and promote the land, wildlife, and trails of the Issaquah Alps, for future and present generations.

Newsletter of the Issaquah Alps Trails Club

THE ALPINER

September 2023

News – Events – Hikes



Issaquah Alps Trail Running Club Celebrates 'Save Coal Creek' Campaign Success

Sijie Cheng - September 3, 2023

"I am a trail runner and I am looking for trail recommendations to train for a race in winter."

"I am a hiker and would like to go for after-work hikes on weekdays to train for my goal of summiting Mt Rainier this summer."

"I am a mountain biker and looking for flowy trails that I can take my beginner friends on."

"I am a botanist and would like to take pictures of the wildflowers in spring."

If you browse any Seattle-based outdoor forums/Facebook groups, be it trail running, hiking, mountain biking, or nature-based photography, and ask any of the above questions, one of the recommendations is almost guaranteed to be a trail from the Issaquah Alps. The "Issaquah Alps" is a nickname coined by Harvey Manning, the founder of Issaquah Alps Trails Club (IATC) to describe the foothills surrounding Issaquah. Much of the open space and trails in the Issaquah Alps are the fruits of labor from IATC's conservation and advocacy efforts over the last 4+ decades.



Salmon, across the street from its preserved land, with the campaign sign.

I have gotten to explore many trails of Issaquah Alps as a trail runner since joining the Issaquah Alps Trail Running Club (IATRC). While IATRC has no official affiliation with IATC, the run club is led by Kelly Jiang, IATC's board Vice President. The group meets every Tuesday evening at 6 p.m. and rotates through the three signature mountains of the Issy Alps - Cougar, Squak, and Tiger. We start each run with an icebreaker question, such as "who is your running role model?", "what are you most looking forward to this winter?". One of the ice breaker questions was "What is your favorite Issaquah Alps trail?". We went around in a group of 25+ runners and I only heard of a few trail repeats, which shows the vast coverage of the Issy Alps.



Running club all smiles with the salmon in front of coal creek falls, fed by Coal Creek

Kelly, as a board member of IATC, does a great job of informing and educating us about conservation efforts led by IATC. She first told us about the 'Save Coal Creek' campaign in February, when she gathered a group of runners to participate in a public rally at the Newcastle Beach Park in support of Save Coal Creek. The runners even ran in a salmon costume!



The goal of the Save Coal Creek campaign is to preserve a 12-acre parcel of land on Lakemont Boulevard directly across from Cougar Mountain Regional Wildland Park, initially planned for a development of 35 single-family homes. This is to protect a critical wildlife corridor between Cougar Mountain Regional Wildland Park and Bellevue's Coal Creek Natural Area, to maintain a rich history of mining in coal creek, and to improve parking and pedestrian access in the area. The Save Coal Creek campaign was started by a group of concerned citizens in 2020, who began collecting petition signatures to preserve this piece of land as a public park, rather than see it turned into a car-centric subdivision. IATC advocates have supported this campaign from the beginning by sharing their expertise and experience from past campaigns.



In October 2021, IATC established a dedicated fund to support costs related to Save Coal Creek, particularly research, attorney fees, and technical fees incurred to advocate for this campaign. Thanks to the campaign spearheaded by the Save Coal Creek committee, along with countless other volunteers and supporters from IATC, [in July](#), King County awarded a \$9.25 million grant to the City of Bellevue to purchase this parcel of land from the developer to add to the Coal Creek Natural Area. Although there is still work to be done before the purchase is finalized, this is a huge win for public lands, open space, and wildlife connectivity! When Kelly shared the great news on the grant, we decided to celebrate this win by combining a trail run with a post-run trailhead potluck, both Coal Creek themed!



Kelly talking about Save Coal Creek with the running club, featuring a reappearance from the salmon!

On celebration day, before the run, Kelly shared with us the history and success of the campaign. She also encouraged everyone to donate, as IATC still needs about \$37K to cover all of the costs associated with Save Coal Creek. Then we were off to our run, passing the 12-acre land that will be preserved and the Coal Creek Falls!

Here are pictures to highlight the run and post-run celebration. (credit: Kyle McCrohan)



Coal Creek themed cake!



Even some fish-themed treats!

The Save Coal Creek campaign has been years in the making, and we hope the [recent success](#) leads to conservation of this land for many generations. Please consider making a donation to Issaquah Alps Trails Club, which fiscally sponsors Save Coal Creek.

Here are three ways you can donate:

1. Make a direct donation through issaquahalps.org
2. Venmo @issyalps
3. If your employer matches donations, you can donate through your employer's matching portal



Maintaining Forest Health on Cougar Mountain

Svetoslav Semov - August 31, 2023

Written by Svetoslav Semov, attendee of our [Forest Stewardship hike](#) with Senior Forester Paul Fischer

Cougar Mountain's forests have changed significantly since the early 1800s when they primarily consisted of coniferous tree species like Douglas fir, hemlock, and western red cedar. The landscape transformed with Seattle's rise as a logging city and the [burgeoning](#) demand for coal driven by industrialization.

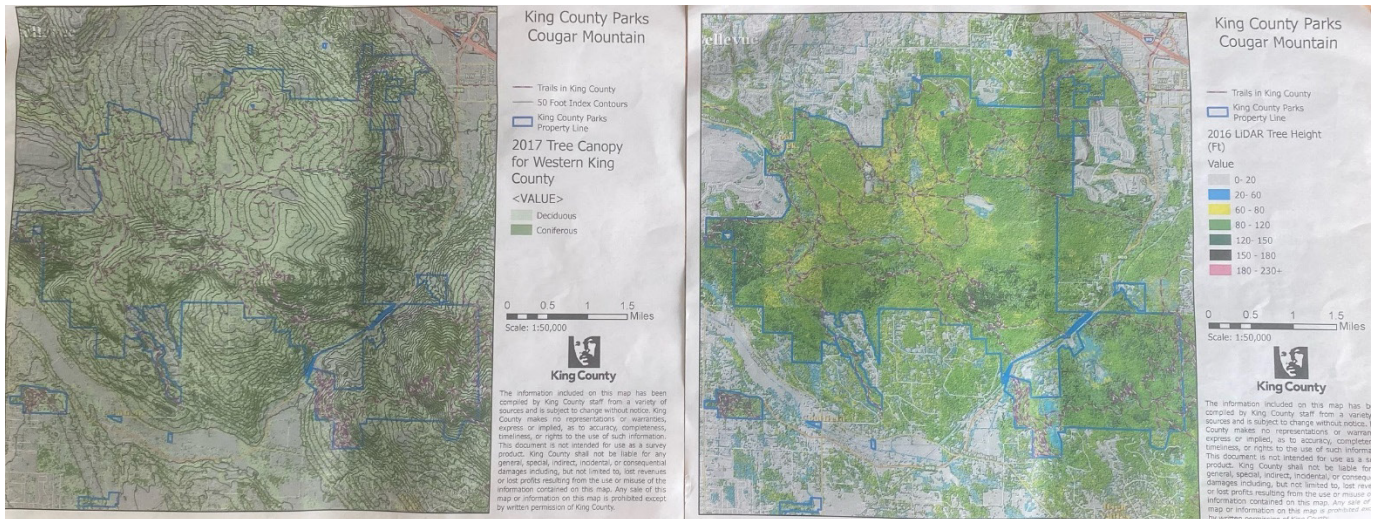
Today, areas around De Leo Wall and Wilderness Peak still feature a high density of conifers. However, red alder dominates large portions of Cougar Mountain, particularly in the northwest and middle regions, as it's the first species to spring up in disturbed areas.



Red Alder near Cave Hole/Quarry Trail, Fall 2022 (photo courtesy of Svet S.)

Diverse forests, both in composition and structure, are more resilient to climate change and crucial for maintaining biodiversity - both pressing concerns given current environmental trends.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of Cougar Mountain's forest health, [King County Park's Forest Stewardship Program](#) has employed lidar technology. Lidar creates 3D images of tree and vegetation structures, enabling [unprecedented scale](#) in forest health studies. Prior methods involved small-scale field studies whose results researchers would extrapolate to larger areas. Lidar now enables a new breed of studies designed to understand the impact of various forest [restoration treatments](#) by looking at [difference-in-differences](#) comparisons between treated and control areas.



King County Parks' Forest Stewardship Program aims to enhance forest health and resilience to climate change. They have conducted [gap treatments](#) on Cougar Mountain, a restoration treatment involving the removal of red alders and the planting of conifers. To date, the program has completed projects on seven sites, covering 11 acres.

Managing [29,000](#) acres of public forest lands-about [3.5%](#) of all forest land in King County-the Forest Stewardship Program is considering scaling up its treatments. Cougar Mountain Regional Wildland Park accounts for roughly [3,000 acres](#) or 10% of the program's area.



Senior forester Paul Fischer shows Board President Anne Newcomb a tree (photo courtesy of Kelly J.)

Cougar Mountain's story is part of a larger narrative of Pacific Northwest forest transformation over centuries. Once, old-growth conifer forests covered two-thirds of the Pacific Northwest; now, an [estimated](#) 72% has been lost. Yet there is hope for positive change.

The efforts of King County Parks' Forest Stewardship could help restore Cougar Mountain's original species composition over the coming centuries. This ambitious goal can benefit from community participation. IATC is exploring a partnership with King County to offer volunteer opportunities. Planting conifers successfully is a multi-year effort, complicated by Washington's wet climate, which intensifies competition from neighboring vegetation. These young conifers need our regular help to grow and thrive. Keep an eye out for ways to get involved.

The Amphibians of the Issaquah Alps

Sally Lawrence and Hilary Barnes - August 30, 2023

One of the many reasons to [SAVE COAL CREEK](#) is to protect and improve the existing wildlife corridor between Cougar Mountain Regional Wildland Park and Bellevue's Coal Creek Natural Area. Not just for the big guys like deer and bear, or the owls and hawks that search for prey in the Milt Swanson pasture, but also for the little guys - amphibians such as salamanders and frogs.

Amphibians are thin-skinned - they depend on wetlands and streams for the egg-laying part of their lives, and some species need wet habitats for much longer. They are the only vertebrate animals without fur, scales or feathers and are considered "indicator species." The health, diversity and numbers of amphibians breeding in and around our ponds and forests reflect the quality of the environment around them.



Northern Red-legged Frog

The Coal Creek watershed has streams and wetlands, starting high on Cougar Mountain at Klondike Marsh (1200 ft elevation) and likely some springs as well, so there is ample amphibian habitat.

Two Save Coal Creek volunteers, Hilary Barnes and Sally Lawrence, conducted amphibian surveys at Klondike Marsh in 2022 and 2023 as part of a [Woodland Park Zoo \(Seattle\) citizen science project](#) . The surveys are conducted with permission from King County Parks, which also generously supplied volunteers to help with the surveys when the team was short-handed. The surveys don't involve collecting animals; instead they rely on photographs of egg masses, tadpoles and adults. The photos

are submitted to the Zoo's project site on [iNaturalist](#), a global online platform for digital records of flora and fauna. The Zoo provides training for volunteers and assembles teams of 4 or 5 for each site. Besides Hilary and Sally, the 2023 Cougar Mountain team included Lynn Putnam, Dana Kendrick and Nikki Furner.

Hilary says, "We have learned that context matters deeply, and that patient and repeated visits to a place make the familiar unfamiliar as new questions arise and unsolved mysteries appear. We've seen many egg masses - but it's more difficult to document the juvenile stages. So we wonder, how many hatchlings survive and populate the woods?"



Pacific Tree Frog egg mass

During the two seasons, the volunteers recorded the presence of adults, tadpoles and/or egg masses of Northern Pacific Tree Frog; Northwestern Salamander; Red Legged Frog; and Long-toed Salamander at Klondike Marsh. Nearby, but outside the project site, they also observed a Rough-skinned Newt, a land-breeding Western Red-backed Salamander and a Coastal Giant Salamander.

Hilary noted that many amphibians have the capacity to regenerate tails or legs in response to attack by a predator, but they cannot recreate a healthy breeding environment. So all of us who live or recreate nearby have a stake in preserving these habitats. She says, "Please tread carefully and respectfully near streams and wetlands."

You can contribute to our understanding of the flora and fauna of the Issaquah Alps by creating a personal [iNaturalist](#) account. Whether you photograph a woodpecker in the forest or the skunk cabbage along the trail, additional records on iNaturalist will increase awareness and understanding of the amazing nature all around us.



Events

Partner Event: Post-Labor Day Clean up Event with FLSSP

Tuesday, Sep 5 from 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Join FLSSP and Lake Sammamish Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnership for this fun and meaningful community event at Lake Sammamish State Park to help pick up trash after the busy holiday weekend.



Partner Event: Issaquah Welcomes You

Friday, Sep 8 from 5:00 PM – 8:00 PM

Join the City of Issaquah and its partners in celebrating the cultural diversity of our community. Festivities include music, world dances, a fashion show, interactive art, resource booths and food trucks. Everyone is welcome!



Partner Event: Habitat Restoration at the Nursery with Pollinator Protectors

Saturday, Sep 9 from 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Join MTSGT for a habitat restoration event at Greenway Native Plant Nursery, home to nearly 30,000 native trees and shrubs, which will eventually make their final homes in urban forests, parks, and open spaces throughout the Greenway landscape.



Partner Event: Restoration Work Party at Emily Darst Park

Saturday, Sep 9 from 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Come join the City of Issaquah for a restoration work party at Emily Darst Park to remove blackberry and ivy that line the trail.



Restoration of High School Trail

Saturday, Sep 23 from 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Join IATC and Green Issaquah as we continue our restoration of the High School Trail, a well-loved section of Tiger Mountain.



Partner Event: Green Issaquah Bird Walk

Saturday, Sep 30 from 9:00 AM – 10:30 AM

Join the City of Issaquah for a morning walk at Confluence Park to look for birds as well as talk about what we can do to support them.



IATC Public Forum: Forest Carbon & Carbon Credits

Wednesday, Oct 25 from 6:00 PM – 9:00 PM

REGISTER NOW! Join IATC and our panel of experts from the City of Issaquah, King County, and City Forest Credits to learn more about forest carbon in the Issaquah Alps, and how carbon credits can be used to fund conservation.





Intermediate Hike – Explore Tiger Mountain with IATC's New ED

Sunday, Sep 24 from 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Join IATC's new Executive Director, Nicole Assumpcao, for a fun jaunt around the forests of Tiger Mountain while swapping stories about what the Issaquah Alps mean to you.



Native Plant Identification Hike at Klondike Swamp Trail

Sunday, Sep 24 from 9:00 AM – 11:30 AM

Join Rita Moore, a native plant steward with the Washington Native Plant Society, on a hike through Cougar Mountain to learn about the identification of native plants.



Critical Habitats for Climate Change

Saturday, Oct 7 from 10:00 AM – 12:30 PM

Join the IATC and the City of Issaquah on a guided hike along Pickering Reach to explore how riparian areas and wetlands are critical habitats for plant and wildlife diversity in the face of a rapidly changing climate.



The Apparatus

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