Park Steward Policies
Bellingham Parks Volunteer Program

The Park Steward program provides opportunities for citizens and groups to care for Bellingham trails, parks, and open spaces. Volunteers complete critical stewardship work to help restore our natural areas to healthy forested parklands as well as maintain trails, stock dog waste stations, cleanup litter, and more. The program seeks to empower our community to have the tools, knowledge, and skills to care for, restore, and protect Bellingham’s parks, trails, and open spaces while instilling a sense of ownership in our park system.

**Steward Criteria:** Any individual or group may sign on for stewardship of a trail section, park, or natural area with a commitment of at least 6 months. Individuals under age 18 and youth groups are welcome to adopt parks and trails with coordination and support from an adult leader or teacher.

**Duties:** Park Stewards are given appropriate projects that match their skills and interests. Duties can be as simple as routine litter pickup or as complex as planning and leading others in the restoration of a natural area or constructing a trail. In general, stewards are not allowed to use power tools.

**Agreement:** Stewards are issued permission to work via a Park Steward Agreement, signed by both the volunteer and the Park Operations Manager. The agreement lists the site, all permitted duties, allowable equipment or techniques, any work limitations, and a liability waiver. Agreements are renewable each year in January unless another date is designated.

**Reporting:** Park Stewards are required to report their volunteer hours online at: https://cob.org/parks-volunteer-hours-reporting. Hours need to be reported at least twice per year though monthly is recommended.

**Newsletters:** All Park Stewards are automatically signed up for the Parks Volunteer Program newsletter (sent quarterly; includes information on upcoming volunteer work parties, appreciations, naturalist corner, and more), Habitat News (sent quarterly; includes information on habitat restoration projects and events in Bellingham); and Park Stewards check-ins (sent occasionally throughout the year. All newsletters are digital. You can unsubscribe from newsletters if you do not wish to receive them.

**Safety:** Safety is our top priority. All stewards must adhere to our Safety Protocols for Volunteers, Sharps Protocols for Volunteers, and Safety Guidelines during COVID-19 documents.

**Homeless Encampments:** Stewards are not allowed to clean up active homeless camps. Report all homeless encampments to www.cob.org/camps.
Graffiti: Please report any graffiti found here: https://cob.org/graffiti

Project Standards: If agreed-upon standards for the project are not being met, the Parks Volunteer Coordinator will discuss the site with the steward. If assistance is needed, the Volunteer Program will provide advice and support and possibly supplementary volunteer work parties, as capacity allows. If the steward wishes exclusive responsibility for the site but fails after discussion to maintain it to the agreed-upon standards, the coordinator will terminate the agreement in writing.

Tools: For routine work, stewards are asked to provide their own tools. For special projects or large groups, the Parks Volunteer Program can loan tools and gloves on a case-by-case basis.

Support: Support will be provided in the form of advice and guidance, trash bags and bag pickup, site preparation work (if heavy equipment is required), mulch and gravel deliveries, and native trees and shrubs from the Park Operations Nursery. Whenever possible, stewards are asked to transport weeds or garbage to Park Operations (please provide advance notice of each drop-off so that Volunteer Program staff can coordinate with you). If assistance is needed, staff will arrange pickup.

Recognition: Park Stewards are generous people and deserve more recognition than they get. The Parks Volunteer Program is developing more ways to fully appreciate our stewards including spotlighting volunteers in our quarterly electronic newsletters and celebrating our volunteers at annual Park Steward Appreciation Gatherings. Stay tuned for more information!