



Project Overview
Fairhaven Park Outdoor Classroom

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Section 1: Background

In 2014, **Recreation Northwest** became stewards of the **City of Bellingham's Fairhaven Park**. As park stewards, Recreation Northwest led volunteer work parties to maintain and improve trails in the adjacent community forest, home to sections of its' signature event at the time- **Bellingham Traverse**.

The effort to build a new trail, providing public access from both Fairhaven Park and 18th Street entrances, also met the ecological need to relocate the heavy use of social trails that was increasingly damaging vulnerable wetlands.

Recreation Northwest adopted the project after learning that the City's budget lacked the necessary funding to tackle this public access problem. The non-profit organization took on the responsibility of project management with managing a team of contractors, submitting permits, recruiting and organizing volunteers, and creating fundraising campaign efforts for the **Fairhaven Park Trail and Wetland Boardwalk** project.

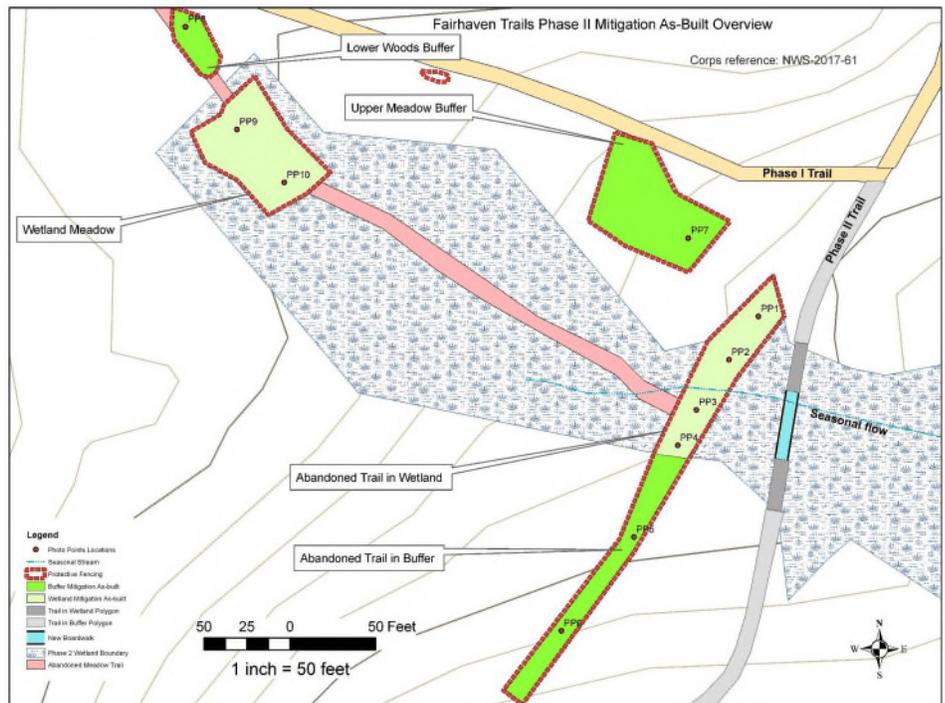
In November 2015, **Phase 1** of the project was completed: relocating the two access trails out of the wetlands and into the buffers. The new trail connected Fairhaven Park and the neighborhood at the end of 18th Street.

March 2016, **Phase 2** began with the advanced Wetland Mitigation measures of installing Native Plants in one of the five areas in the project's impact zone. This was to prepare to offset our impacts to the wetland and satisfy our permits with the Army Corps of Engineers and City of Bellingham. The first areas planted were in the **Wetland Meadow** and **Lower Woods Buffer** near the Fairhaven Park trailhead.

In March 2017, volunteers cleared a space of invasive blackberry and thistle to make room for our **Upper Meadow Buffer** area to be planted as mitigation measures.

This is our Mitigation Monitoring Overview Plan. It lists the names of each area.

Mitigation Monitoring Overview Plan (Print using Landscape)



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Section 1 continued

By November 2017, we celebrated the installation of our wetland boardwalk and connector into the 100 Acre Wood's network of trails. Finally, the ***Abandoned Trail in Wetland & Buffer*** zones were planted by volunteers to replace the muddy path that was in place. The total area was 11,330.5 Square Feet of mitigation with 286 native plants (+ 200 slough sedges) surrounded by 1,640 feet of fencing for protection from wildlife and human traffic.

2018 - 2019 Recreation Northwest hosted volunteer work parties to eradicate invasive species and maintain acceptable survival rates for native plants in designated areas. Annual mitigation monitoring reports were submitted to the government permitting agencies. The ***Recognition Rock Bench*** was built by artist Chris Mellick, Run, Ride and Dig, to reflect those who participated in the project.

2020 Chuckanut 50K volunteers worked to remove blackberries in the most accessible mitigation monitoring site in the ***Upper Meadow Buffer*** area. It then evolved to become a ***Native Plant Garden*** with a public Park Bench and symbolic garden gate designed and built by Mike at McAuley Design Works were installed. This was an early milestone in the transformation of thinking about this area as a mitigation site to viewing it as a place to invite the public in to enjoy nature. Creating a space for the public tied into our Parkscriptions program- encouraging people to Get a Dose of Nature.

The Public Park bench was donated by Phillips 66 Ferndale Refinery to support our Stewardship work. The bench points due West to give a nod to our brothers and sisters across the Pacific Ocean who created the philosophy of [Shinrin-yoku](#) (森林浴) in Japan.

The ***Garden Gate*** reflects a Japanese Torii style. This style of a traditional [Japanese gate](#) is most commonly found at the entrance of or within a [Shinto shrine](#), where it symbolically marks the transition from the mundane to the sacred. Our intention is to reflect the heritage of [Shinrin-yoku](#) which originated in Japan in the early 1980s and may be regarded as a form of nature therapy.

2021 ***Wild Whatcom Explorers*** expanded public access beyond the ***Native Plant Garden*** area by removing smothering blackberries and planting additional native plants. This opened up the corridor between the garden and the ***Recognition Rock Bench***. During Spring, Phillips 66 Employee volunteers helped eradicate an area of invasive blackberries, clearing out a substantial portion of space at the intersection of our two trails. Also, with this group, we began composting on site- instead of hauling away the invasive plants. One pile in front of the garden gate is nicknamed Gomer Pyle. Our plans were to simply replant the area.

By November 2021, our mature plants were established enough to allow for the removal of all 1,640 feet of protective fencing and helped restore a wildlife corridor.

Section 1 continued

The AH HA moment! The next milestone in our thinking to create public access was as we were spreading mulch around the new clearing. Regular passersby were inquiring with such multiple questions as, “Are you putting in another bench?” and “Is that for a picnic table?” People were expressing their interest in the need for more space to just BE in nature.

This was the Tipping Point to begin exploring the concept of an **Outdoor Classroom** integrated into the park. In December, we hosted a Focus Group with fellow members of the Whatcom Coalition for Environmental Education (**WCEE**) who use Fairhaven Park. Led by Hannah Newell at WCEE, we received community input from representatives of Bellingham Parks, North Cascades Institute, and Wild Whatcom to help provide direction with planning. An independent volunteer, Coreen Schmidt, offered her services as a Landscape Architect to bring these visions to life.

This initial rendition by Coreen for our intended use of the space as an Outdoor Classroom was foundational to moving this project forward. In addition to the drawings, she provided examples of other projects and suggested elements for the use of the space.

NATURE PLAY SPACE

WHIMSY/SURPRISE ELEMENT



unique seating or gathering space



log scramble/adventure play

spiral or maze

interactive art element

GATEWAY/PORTAL



whimsical arch

INFORMAL PATHWAY



mulch/wood chips

serpentine

stump hop

log stepping "stones"

FAIRHAVEN PARK | initial concepts

INTERACTIVE TRAIL ELEMENTS



outdoor musical instruments



interactive educational/interpretive signs



storybook trail

Recreation Northwest

PREPARED BY COREEN SCHMIDT, KPG

FEBRUARY 7, 2021

Section 1 continued



Section 1 continued

OUTDOOR CLASSROOM

TERRACED CLASSROOM SEATING



log benches



individual log "desks"



wood-topped gabion baskets

OUTDOOR STAGE & PRESENTATION SPACE



outdoor blackboard or display board



mulch or wood chip "stage"



informal flagstone "stage"



compacted gravel path

ACCESSIBLE PATHWAY

WAYFINDING



trail directional sign



trail kiosk and informational sign



trail wayfinding bollard

LITTLE FREE LIBRARY



just because it's fun

FAIRHAVEN PARK | initial concepts

Recreation Northwest

PREPARED BY COREEN SCHMIDT, KPG

FEBRUARY 7, 2021

On June 14th, 2021, the City of Bellingham kicked off the Steering Committee meeting for the Master Planning process for the Chuckanut Community Forest (aka Hundred Acre Wood). Our Executive Director, Todd Elsworth, was invited to serve on the committee. He shared these Outdoor Classroom concepts with Parks staff and the committee.

2022

Throughout the course of the planning process and community engagement, the public interest and support for an outdoor learning space became evident. As a result of the wishes of the public, Recreation Northwest's concept for an Outdoor Classroom was included in the final draft Master Planning document prepared by Bellingham Parks staff. On Monday, September 12th, 2022, Bellingham City Council approved the plan unanimously 7-0.

Outdoor Classroom Pilot Project

Working with Bellingham Parks staff and local contractors, Recreation Northwest staff propose the following plans to transform this former blackberry patch into an Outdoor Classroom that displays Native Plant & Invasive Species identification signs in the current Native Plant Garden area. The more recent clearing will be used to host an Amphitheater with public benches, a stone stage, and covered pavilion with access trails to both sides of the open space from the main Fairhaven Park & 18th Street Trail Connection we built together in November 2015.

Section 2: Community Need

There are many formal groups that use Fairhaven Park trails and 100 Acre Wood urban forest for their outdoor activities and environmental education programs, including Recreation Northwest. There are also informal groups and individuals who utilize the available spaces to be outside. Having dedicated places for people to connect with one another and with nature is core to an outdoor education program approach. The use of our Rock Bench & Native Plant Garden area as meeting spaces demonstrate the community need and interest in dedicated space for small groups to gather in our parks.

The City of Bellingham's [Public Survey Results 09-16-2021 \(PDF\)](#) to inform the [Master Plan for Chuckanut Community Forest](#) and the surrounding trails, open space, and conservation areas shows that community members reflected the interest for having outdoor learning spaces. In the survey, respondents reflected their values for the planning area with a high rank for Educational and research opportunities, with the second highest response. For potential uses appropriate for the planning area: Benches, small multi-purpose outdoor seating area, informal outdoor learning spaces/outdoor classroom all scored more positively overall in the survey.

City Parks survey responses included public comments demonstrating the need, "I see this as a potential space for users of all ages (especially youth) to be able to recreate independently and develop a sense of place." Another asks for, "designated flexible unprogrammed spaces". This concern is valid, "I have huge concerns about how the forest appears to be dying...unattended kids who don't have any guidance about how to protect and care for the forest. Groups of children being taken into small clearings and they trample and destroy it then they move on the next day. It's devastating to see." We believe that creating an Outdoor Classroom with dedicated public spaces is part of the solution to this devastation.

For a deeper Community Needs assessment, we worked with Whatcom Coalition for Environmental Education (WCEE) staff. WCEE's Hannah Newell hosted a Focus Group with representatives from local organizations whose groups currently use Fairhaven Park and 100 Acre Wood for their youth programming. Representatives from Bellingham Parks, North Cascades Institute, Recreation Northwest, and Wild Whatcom provided insight into these opportunities in our parks and urban forests. Collectively, they peppered the expressed need for "Having a safe space for us to retreat to with all of our participants, especially students through a risk management lens. Accessibility is huge..where the participants wouldn't be too far off the trail. Along with already impacted places in the woods to not have a continued impact on vegetation off the trail." Recreation Northwest is planning to provide such a space with benches, a stone stage, and covered pavilion.

Section 3: Project Purpose & Goals

The primary **purpose** is to transform our trail and boardwalk mitigation planting site into a public outdoor classroom for active and passive use for our community. The primary goal is to create an outdoor classroom learning environment with dedicated spaces and interpretive signage to connect the community to nature that is open to the public.

Our secondary goal is to reflect our Parkscriptions philosophy of the public-health benefit of spending time in nature to help serve as a pilot model for creating similar Outdoor Classroom projects in Bellingham Parks and our region.

Section 4: Scope of Work

The project scope will result in a site development plan for the **Upper Meadow Buffer** plant mitigation zone and adjacent area, referred to as “the Amphitheater”, including all amenities- such as signage, benches, stage, and pavilion) to transform the area into a public Outdoor Classroom space. Recreation Northwest will manage the complete project. The tasks are outlined in stages below. We will be responsible for designs, construction, permitting, and financing the project.

SCOPE OF WORK

TASK 1: Clear Space

TASK 2: Native Plant & Invasive Species Signage

TASK 3: Amphitheater Landscaping & Access Trails

TASK 4: Design & build a stone stage

TASK 5: Design & build a covered pavilion

TASK 6: Install Benches

TASK 1: Clear Space - *Completed 2021*

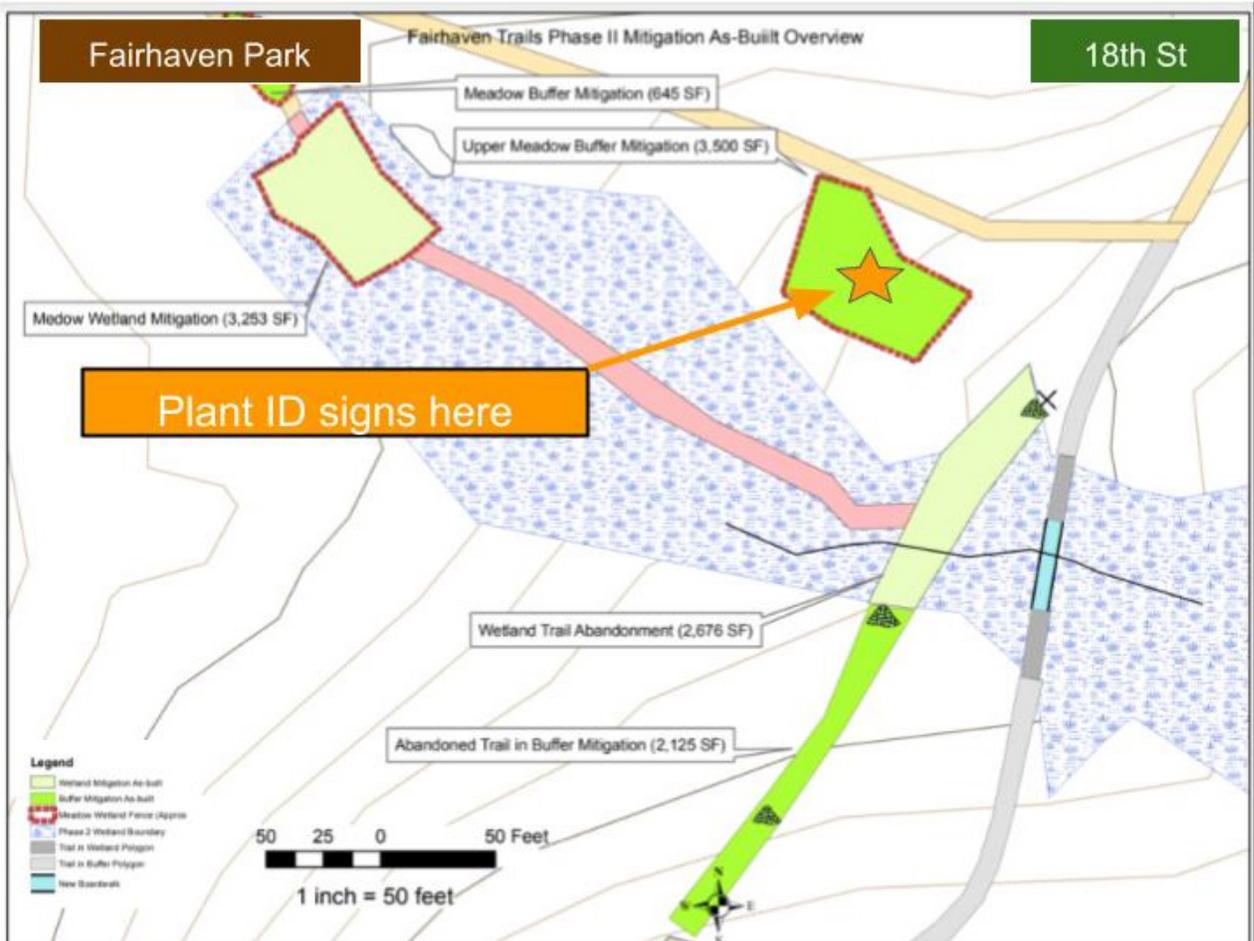
Remove invasive species, predominantly Himalayan Blackberry, to create space for the public. Work was performed by volunteers led by Recreation Northwest over the course of a couple of years.

TASK 2: Native Plant & Invasive Species Signage

Native plant and invasive species Identification signs will be installed in the project area in the designated Native Plant Garden area. The native plants planted in the area indicated below include: Western Red Cedar, Red Alder, Douglas Fir, Snowberry, Sword Fern, and Salmonberry. The invasive species signs will educate the public by providing: Identification (description); Impact (threat); and Control (management options) for Himalayan Blackberry, English Ivy, and English Holly.

Content for the Native Plant signs was culled by Recreation Northwest staff using [Plants of the Pacific Northwest](#), Pojar & MacKinnon as a guide. Our editors were Leslie Bryson for grammatical errors and fellow former Bellingham Parks staff Rae Edwards with a keen eye for ecological accuracy.

Content for the Invasive Species signs was created by Ryan Robie, Bellingham Parks working with Public Works staff. This also includes the introduction of utilizing composting as a new approach to stewardship in our parks.



Katrina Lyon created the graphic design and layout for all signs creating a consistent look and approach to the materials. The signs will be metal 7" W X 10" H with full color graphics. Here is the [Recreation Northwest's Native Plant & Invasive Species ID signs folder](#) with all of the signs for approval by Parks and the COB Parks and Recreation Advisory Board.

Sample Native Plant ID sign



Western Red Cedar *Thuja plicata*

CHARACTERISTICS

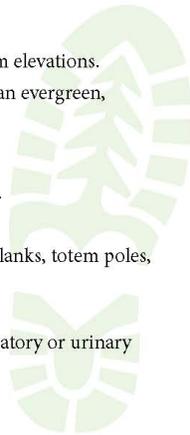
- May grow to 200-feet in height, and live for over 1,000 years.
- Bark is grey to reddish brown, in long, fibrous strips.
- Leaves are yellowish-green, flat, scale-like and strongly aromatic.
- Tiny cones, at the tips of the leaves, are green to yellow-green ripening in the fall to brown, woody, flower-like structures around 1/8-inch long.

HABITAT ECOLOGY

- Moist to wet soils in shaded forests at low to medium elevations.
- Western Red Cedar, a native western North American evergreen, is part of the Cypress Family (Cupressaceae).

ETHNOBOTANY

- Known as the "Tree of Life" by Coast Salish Nations.
- Regarded to have healing and spiritual powers.
- Rot-resistant wood used for dugout canoes, house planks, totem poles, paddles, harpoon shafts.
- Bark used for baskets and clothing.
- Dry needles used as a tea or tincture for acute respiratory or urinary tract infections.



The steel bases for the signs will be fabricated by Dan Remsen as a donation to Recreation Northwest. The proposed posts are Powder Coated steel 2" X 2" tubing with 1/8" walls. Bases will be secured by sockets in ground and will allow for replacements if needed. Signs will be displayed at a 30 degree angle with the sign face being 36" high at center- allowing for the more vertically challenged to read or look at the photos. The size of the signs, bases, and other measurements are custom to this space to consider a relative relationship to the size of the flora we are interpreting. These may not be as big as other standard signs, but will create a less intrusive and more blended experience in the natural environment setting.

TASK 3: Amphitheater Landscaping & Access Trails

The Amphitheater area will be landscaped to allow for benches to be installed for seating for 24 people- the standard size of an elementary school classroom and offered from Wendy Scherrer as a recommendation.



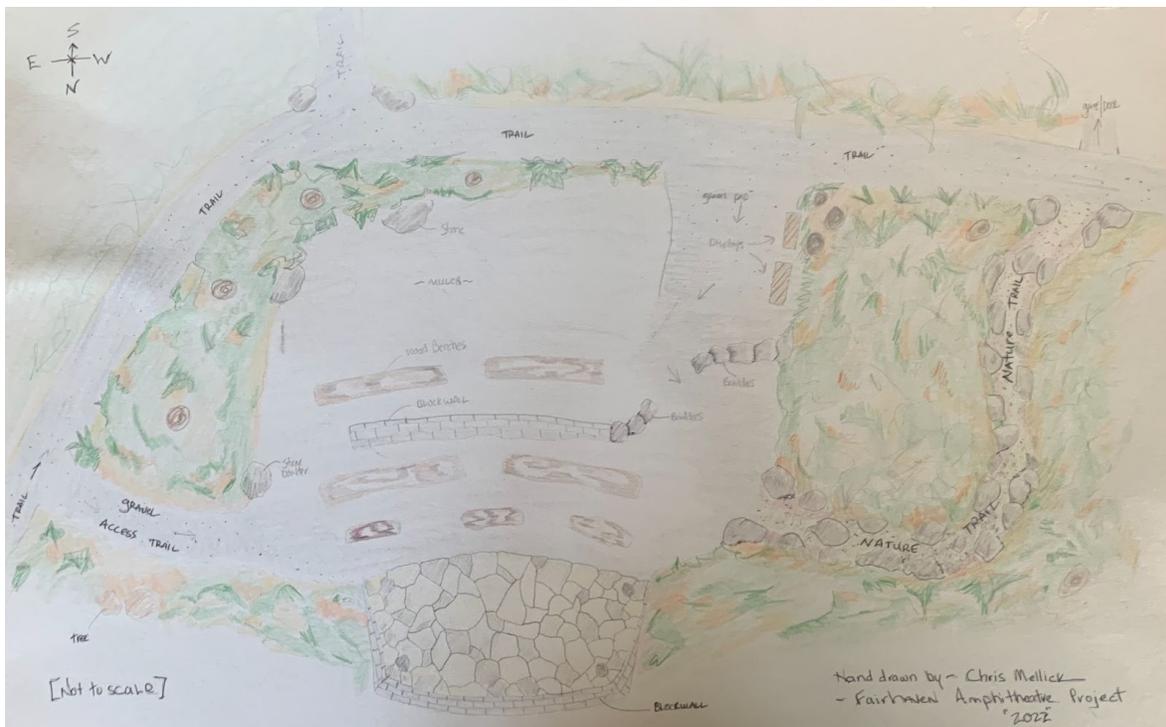
Section 4 continued

Terraced landscaping will provide areas for wooden benches to be placed for seating. A block retaining wall will be installed to create a terrace and provide an additional area for seating. Two trails will be built to provide access into the space. Chris Mellick, Ride, Run, and Dig, created the design and will be performing the landscaping construction work on contract. His hand drawn layout will be the approach that we are taking with the landscape. Other details shown on McAuley Design Works drawings on page 12.

An ADA accessible gravel trail will access the amphitheater from the 18th Street trail entrance, referred to as gravel access trail in the image. The trail will bring people to an area at the ground level of the rock stage. We believe that it is important to provide this approach for all to be able to access the stage.

The Nature Trail. As a unique feature in our Outdoor Classroom concept, we would like to integrate a short connector trail from our Native Plant garden gate to our new Amphitheater area. The trail winds through the landscape adjacent to the main trail and provides a kinetic physical experience for children. This will be an accessible area with challenging obstacles for “beginners in the outdoors”. Imagine a dry creek bed with rocks and boulders to navigate through, over, and around.

The trail will be built with stepping stones with varied sizes and shapes that are very important to engaging and challenging young kids. Varying the size and enabling ease of movement from one space to another at different locations ensures that there is something for everyone and for a progression of difficulty. The design will include a route where someone with limited ability or interest could pick their way through it. It means that Grandma can follow the youngsters!



Section 4 continued

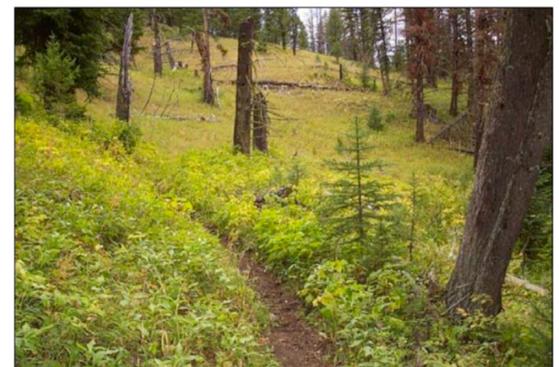
This concept and photographic examples below were provided by master trail builder, Gerry Wilbour, NW Trails. Gerry's crew was responsible for our Fairhaven Park Trail and Wetland Boardwalk project. He is acting in an advisory capacity for this project with Recreation Northwest. The samples directly below are examples of his work and creating these spaces for the public to enjoy.



Using cobble, round boulders, and pea gravel to vary the texture of the trail gives it the sense of a dry streambed that would be found in nature. This is an artistic approach to trail building with a “season to taste” approach that works best. Using the irregularity of the natural minor landforms around you as inspiration while keeping in mind the patterns in the chaos of a natural streambed. “You will know it’s done, when you feel it, and when you see it,” describes Gerry Wilbur.

We will be using the [USFS Trail Class Matrix](#) as a guideline for this class of trail. It will be a Class 2 style trail, giving the sense of being in the backcountry as shown below.

Trail Class 2



TC2 – Tread: Tread continuous and discernible, but narrow and rough.

Source: USFS Trail Fundamentals and Trail Management Objectives, Training Reference Package, updated May 1, 2011.

Image source: ...
StewardshipPlan_ChuckanutCF_20220630.pdf - Herrerra 2022.

Section 4 continued

TASK 4: Design and build a stone stage

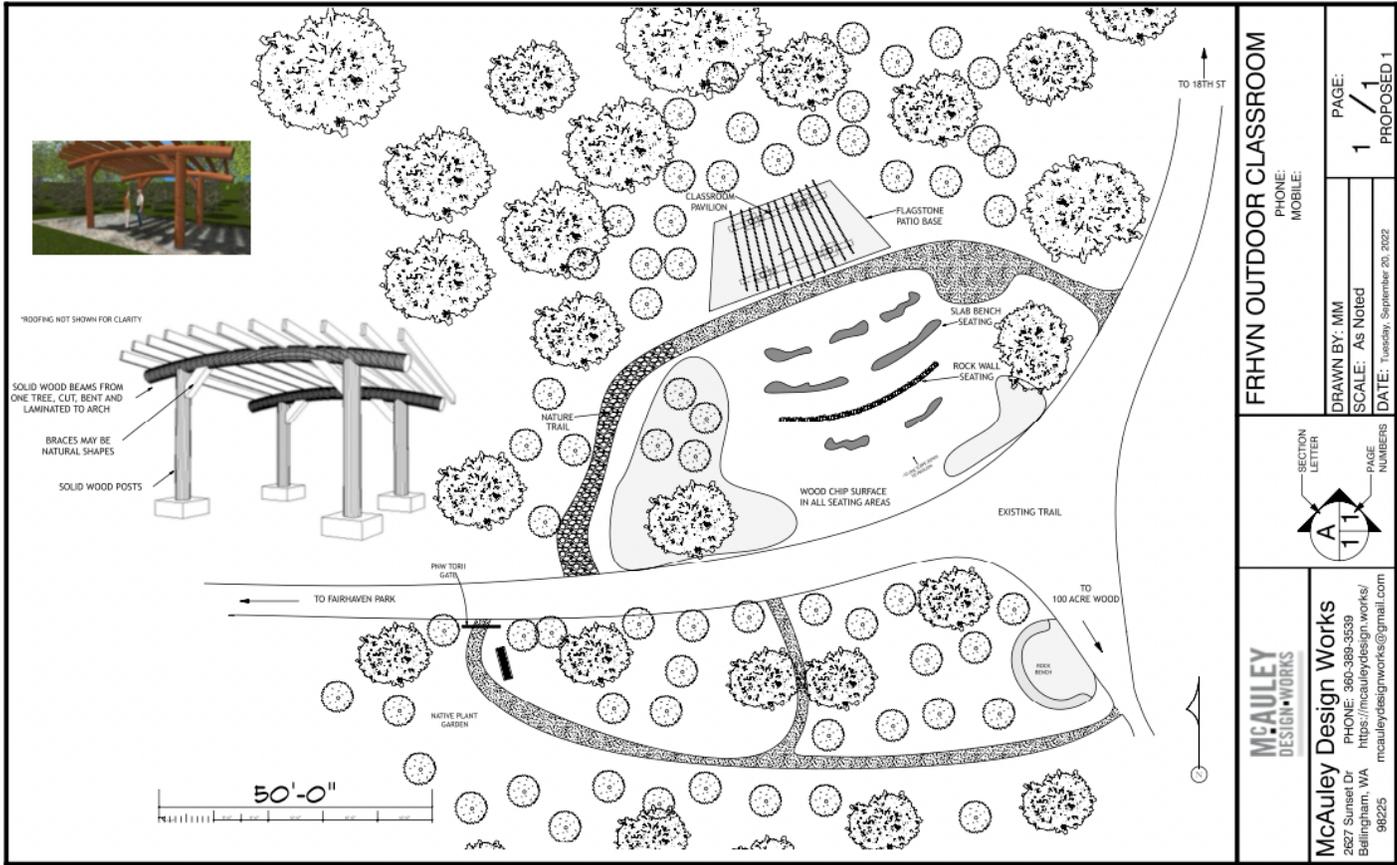
As part of the overall design and layout, Mellick will be building a stone stage at the bottom of the Amphitheater. We are choosing these materials because they are the most durable, provide a natural appearance, and will complement our Recognition Rock Bench that Mellick built nearby. Mellick is an artist as a stone mason!

TASK 5: Design and build a covered pavilion

In our Whatcom Coalition for Environmental Education Focus Group, the need for covered spaces ranked high on the list. We enlisted Mike at McAuley Design Works to be our contractor for this element of the project. Our design approach is to use natural materials

and creative engineering to create a solid and inviting structure that blends into our Pacific Northwestern outdoors setting. The materials will be locally sourced and sustainability harvested by Dean Zender. The focal cross beams will be handmade bent Douglas Fir using an innovative approach with local shipwright Jeffrey Carson in Fairhaven. The solid wood beams will be cut from one tree, cut into slices, bent with steam, and laminated into the arch. Braces may be natural shapes and solid wood posts. The Pavilion plans will be reviewed and approved by Jason Bourne, Engineer.

McAuley Design Works rendition of the Proposed Amphitheater and Pavilion is shown below. [Click for PDF.](#)



Section 4 continued

TASK 6: Install Benches

We have 7 wooden benches that will be mounted on steel frames to accommodate an outdoor classroom of 24 people. The wood, Black Locust, was sourced and milled locally by River Mitchell, *Skagit Wood Network*. The benches were sanded and prepared by Pete Nygren, Treecovery. The steel frames were modeled after existing park bench structures by Bellingham Parks staff Trevor, Parks Structures. Carlson Steel fabricated a sample with Trevor's direction for us to model the rest after.

These photos are of Pete and Mike laying out the pieces of wood to see how they would fit in the space.

The posts staked in the ground represent where the posts for the covered stage will be below.



Section 4 continued

Below is a more complete layout of the benches and imagine the stone retaining walls where the log now lays across the slope.

TASK 7: Ribbon Cutting

Everyone likes to celebrate. We will host a Ribbon Cutting ceremony to celebrate the project and “open the doors” for our community.



Sections 5 & 6

Section 5: Budget & Funding

BUDGET AND FUNDING SOURCES

The 2022 project budget is approximately \$97,414 for the design and construction of the site improvements and all associated amenities.

Budget

We have put most of the pieces together for the budget. There are still some line items to fill in as we get closer to the final details. We appreciate our team and Parks staff for working with us to put all this together for our community.

Funding Sources

Recreation Northwest has a reserve account for work in the Fairhaven Park Trail and Wetland Boardwalk project to account for mitigation costs. Our mitigation work will be completed this year and the remaining money will go towards this project. This reserve was supplemented substantially by an anonymous donor for this project to enable the completeness of the project to be achieved in a timely fashion as a pilot for future projects with the city and other potential partners.

Budget	
Design	Cost
Amphitheater	\$500
Benches	Donation
Native Plant ID Signs	\$520
Pavilion	\$2,100
Permitting	TBD
Staff	\$2961
Construction Materials	
Amphitheater	\$4,700
Benches	\$1,100
Benches	\$46.25
Benches	\$2,684.50
Native Plant ID Signs	TBD
Native Plant ID Signs	TBD
Pavilion	\$19,072
Labor	
Amphitheater	\$12,500
Benches	\$720
Native Plant ID Signs	Donated
Native Plant ID Signs	\$148
Pavilion	\$41,201
Pavilion	\$1,200
Staff	\$2,961
Permits	
Contingency	\$5,000
Total	\$97,413.75

Section 6: Milestones & Project Schedule

Task	2021	4Q2022	1Q2023
TASK 1: Clear Space			
TASK 2: Native Plant & Invasive Species Signage			
TASK 3: Landscaping & Access Trails			
TASK 4: Design and build a stone stage			
TASK 5: Design and build a covered pavilion			
TASK 6: Install Benches			
TASK 7: Ribbon Cutting			

Sections 7, 8 & 9

Section 7: Stakeholder Outreach / Community Engagement

Focus Group Workshop: Summary of the main takeaways from our collaborating session with our partners that have helped form ideas in creating the Outdoor Classroom.

- WCEE (Whatcom Coalition of Environmental Education)
- Wild Whatcom
- North Cascades Institute
- Recreation Northwest
- Bellingham Parks & Recreation

Participants

- Wild Whatcom (Stormie Romero)
- North Cascades Institute (Evan Holmstrom)
- Bellingham Parks & Recreation (Ryan Robie)
- Recreation Northwest (Caleb Savage & Todd Elsworth)
- Whatcom Coalition of Environmental Education (Hannah Newell)

Section 8: Project Team & Parks Staff

Project Lead:

Todd Elsworth, Recreation Northwest. May delegate tasks to members of the Project Team, as needed to carry out the scope of work.

Project Coordinator:

Elizabeth Nelson, Recreation Northwest. Will assist the director with coordination of project team, consultants and deliverables as needed.

Project Team:

Michael McAuley, McAuley Design Works. Conceptual drawings and pavilion structure design. (Jason Bourne, Engineer; Dean Zender, and Jeffrey Carson)

Chris Mellick, Ride-Run-Dig. Conceptual design drawings for landscaping and stone stage. Mellick will also be performing the landscaping construction.

Pete Nygren, Treecoverly. Sourced and prepared the bench wood.

River Mitchell, Skagit Wood Network. Bench wood source. Black Locust from Captain Tim's mom's house!

Gerry Wilbour, Northwest Trails. Advisor

Bellingham Parks Staff: Nicole Oliver, Parks & Recreation Director

Laine Potter, Parks Development Manager

Josh Neyman, Parks Project Specialist

Phil Evans, Trails Specialist

Trevor, Park Structures

Section 9: Permits

City of Bellingham permits TBD