

Green Living in the Valley: Conservation in Fall City with King Conservation District

by Bill Swan

In our wonderful town of Fall City we have a rich history of settlers who worked very hard over years to make the land useable for farming, pastures, kitchen gardens and means necessary for living. Many land owners have been able to continue the care and traditions and we all enjoy the rural character it helps bring to our area. As time has passed, some properties have changed owners, and farming and kitchen gardens gave way for lawns and clear yards, moving the landscape through transformations. Much of the change has continued to add a great amount of beauty. What we have also brought are chemicals to lawns, which affect fish habitats. Some spaces have been neglected, allowing the non-native blackberry bush to flourish. And we've unknowingly allowed pasture practices to harm streams, and allowed incoming invasive species of plants that are not naturally part of this area.

Some residents of Fall City have been working really hard to remove the invasive species, restore stream habitats on their properties and bring healthier farming practices to the land. And there is an entity within King County that is helping land owners with this challenge, The King Conservation District.

The King Conservation District services the community, specializing in natural resources. The KCD has different types of programs promoting sustainable methods of using the natural resources. For instance, they provide free soil sample analysis on five samples of soil, which will provide results on Nitrogen, Phosphorus and Potassium, and a list of micronutrients. The results also include recommendations specific to planting needs on the property, pasture practices, farm practice consulting and even some labor and financial resources. Since the KCD works with the other King County agencies, they understand the rules and regulations, and can provide guidance to the land owner as to what is going to be acceptable and what will not. This sharing of knowledge can relieve a great deal of the work and ensuing headaches of trying to determine what is the acceptable and proper change to be made on the property.

Cory Huskinson, local Fall City US Post Office employee, is such a person who has discovered the great help that the King Conservation District can bring to a land owner. The property he lives on at the west end of SE 44th was settled in 1875 by the Baxter family from Ohio. The Baxters have a rich history in Fall City as one of the founding settlers in the area. Like their neighbors, the Baxters worked very hard to clear the landscape for farming and make a livelihood. Over time though, the property became overgrown with blackberries and other

invasive species, was neglected of more informed farming practices, and eventually became in need of a lot of work for someone to perform to bring back the property to a state of usefulness and protect the salmon-producing Patterson Creek. Cory Huskinson brought the dedication, focus and work needed to the property to give it new life, and what he has done in just a year is remarkable.



View of stream restored by KCD Old Baxter Barn in upper right.

When Cory obtained the property over a year ago, what he started with was a tremendously overgrown area. Historic structures dating back to the Baxters and other first settlers, found to still be usable on the property, were completely encircled by blackberries. Included on the property was a barn moved to the property 50 years ago, that once stood on adjacent property of Orin Baxter for years prior as a chicken coop. To get to them a person had to hack through the thorns. The stream through the property flowing into the Patterson Creek was completely covered with non-native plants and practices of residences in the area potentially brought harmful chemicals and runoff into the waterway. It was an area with a great deal of history and held tremendous opportunity for a project to make the land usable again and put back the plant species natural to the land.

Cory eventually was introduced to the King Conservation District. The KCD provided a plan, lots of advice, labor to remove invasive species of plants, and help understand and access financial assistance. The benefits of Cory's work are improved water quality, reduced mud and sediment runoff, restoration of native plantings, flora and fauna.

Cory's neighbors witnessed the changes taking place on Cory's property and have since also worked with them to bring changes to their own property.

Continued on page 12.

Continued from page 11- They too invited the King Conservation District onto their own property to help them reclaim land from blackberries and other invasive species, change lawn care practices, and help the stream flowing into Patterson Creek become healthier for fish and other aquatic life.

In all, 16 land owners in Fall City have been working with the KCD. Eight have had delivered plans, six more are being worked on and two have received technical assistance in the means of sharing information. All in all, this has been good for the natural resources of the property owners and good for Fall City.

For Cory, one of the greatest things about all the work he has done is to be connected to the settlers' sense of life and living by working the same land that they had over one hundred years ago. He has gotten to know so many of the last of the Baxters and McClymonts (another important settling family). These families are all excited that Cory is keeping its rural, farming heritage and for Cory these relationships are central to all he is doing. He's come across old pieces of farm machinery, implements and other pieces of history and really enjoyed bringing new life to the barn that holds stories of times past and hopefully give it decades more of use. Thankfully, for all of us in Fall City, Cory Huchinson has

been respectfully taking the responsibility for this land and its history so it can be passed on to others. Thank you, Cory.

To recognize what Cory has done on his own property, and the encouraging force he has been to his neighbors and the area, Cory is being recognized by the King Conservation District with the conservation Land Owner of the Year Award for 2008. See below. Congratulations, Cory, for the wonderful work you have done to continue to make Fall City a wonderful place to live. May we all consider the landscape as we manage our own properties and keep Fall City the beautiful place it is to live. Anyone interested in contacting the King Conservation District



Miscellaneous antique items turned into historical “art” by Cory on the property.

regarding Farm Management questions, can contact Josh Monaghan at 425- 277 5581, Joshua.monaghan@kingcd.org. General questions can be directed to Susan Wermus 425-277-5581, or susan.wermus@kingcd.org. Soil sampling instructions can be found at www.kingcd.org/pub_soil_soilsam.htm. Thank you Marcie Hagen of the KCD for her great input for this article, and she was important in the work on Cory's property.

Conservation Land Owner of the year – Cory Huskinson

“Given to a land owner, rural or urban who demonstrates leadership and initiative in implementing best management practices.

Cory Huskinson is nominated for the Conservation Land Owner Award to recognize his efforts to protect and enhance natural resources on his property on Patterson Creek near Fall City. Mr. Huskinson received a Small Farm Management Plan from the District in 2007 and has been actively implementing the practices detailed in the plan. In addition to recovering the infrastructure on his recently acquired property from a mountain of blackberry, he is implanting environmentally sensitive horse keeping practices to protect water quality, manage grazing, and collect and utilize manure, and with assistance from the District in Spring 2008, has installed a stream buffer enhancement project to protect and restore fish and wild life habitat on his property.

In addition to the natural resource management work undertaken on his own property, Mr. Huskinson has encouraged his neighbors to take advantage of the District's programs, service and expertise. The result of his positive recommendation is that two landowners immediately downstream from his property also with assistance from the District in Spring 2008 have implemented stream buffer enhancement projects to protect and restore fish and wildlife habitat on their property. In addition, an adjacent landowner is developing a farm plan for their property.”



Cory Huskinson next to Baxter's old hay swing.